

Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Draft Strategy 2019-24

October 2021

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Glossary

DA	Domestic Abuse
WMWA	West Mercia Women’s Aid
LPB	Local Partnership Board
HBV	Honour Based Violence
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
CSEW	Crime Survey of England and Wales
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advisors
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
BAME	Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
GP	General Practitioner
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

1. Forward

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

There are some 2.3 million victims of domestic abuse a year aged 16 to 74 (two-thirds of whom are women) with 10% of all children witnessed domestic abuse during 2018/19. More than one in ten of all offences recorded by the police are domestic abuse related.

People who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse may be affected in a number of ways, including significant and lasting impact on physical and mental health, homelessness, loss of income or work and isolation from families and friends. Children can experience both short and long term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects as a result of witnessing domestic abuse.

The breadth of the impact on individuals and families results in needs arising across a wide-range of public services, from police and health care through to education, housing support and criminal justice. We recognise that a collaborative approach to developing and delivering the priorities is fundamental to preventing and responding to domestic abuse in the most effective way.

Since the publication of our current strategy in 2019, the Government have given royal ascent to the Domestic Abuse Act in April 2021. In Herefordshire, we have considered the new act requirements, the evidence from our needs assessment and our existing strategy priorities and have outlined our future direction in this draft strategy. The publication of this document will form the start of the formal consultation with our communities and will allow the statutory guidance to be published, therefore ensuring our final strategy reflects and can give effect to the confirmed future requirements.

2. Our Shared Vision

Domestic abuse is unacceptable to residents and our wider communities. All victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their situation, are able to have equal access to help when they need it, including appropriate supply of safe accommodation and the wider specialist support services required.

The strategy, through its implementation will enable people and communities to;

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

The overall aim is to reduce the harm caused, and the number of incidents of domestic abuse in Herefordshire.

3. Progress against priorities 2019 - 2021

Since the publication of our current strategy in 2019, a number of the actions have been progressed, although the covid pandemic and associated lockdowns has impacted on delivery of some activities. The table below summarises some of the key areas of development to date.

Priority	Objectives	Progress
Prevention	Using data effectively	Enhanced data capture during covid pandemic. Created of domestic abuse hub for level 2 and 3 cases and now embedded in practice.
	Collaboration to support culture change across the population	All Domestic Abuse Strategic Group partners signed up and undertaking awareness raising and promotion, significant increased activity during lockdowns. Safelives work provided a review of approach.
	Universal services supporting early disclosure	West Mercia Women's Aid have created a community ambassador scheme with round 50 ambassadors recruited and trained to date.
	Supporting young people to recognise and understand harm of domestic abuse	The council and Police and Crime Commissioner commissions West Mercia Women's Aid to provide information, advice, tools and support to education professionals. Training for children and family workers within the council's Early Help team Operation Encompass ensures information about domestic abuse involving children is shared in a timely way with schools.
Provision of service	Easy to access and safe to contact specials services are available	Expansion of dispersed refuge accommodation to 7 units with associated support. During covid 19 lockdown in 2020, significant additional means for victims to access to support including covert means through various media.
	Work as a partnership to respond to funding bids.	Successful funding bids or additional from the council and partners to deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff capacity to support 7 units of dispersed refuge accommodation • Drive perpetrator programme • Increase 'chat' hours in the website • Additional capacity around messaging and accessing support • Healthy relationships project • Safelives review of Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire • Multiagency domestic violence training • Male and masculinity project
	Ensure housing advice, emergency and other housing solutions available	Sanctuary scheme to protect properties. Specialist knowledge in Housing Solutions team within the council. As above – 7 units of dispersed refuge accommodation

		Signposting and support to access support services when needs are identified.
Partnership working	Ensure strong leadership across organisations	Domestic Abuse Strategic group has strong leadership and wide ranging representation and commitment to the delivery of the strategy.
Pursuing perpetrators	Using criminal justice system to full effect	WMWA secured funding to deliver training to Magistrates.
	Evidence based programmes to change perpetrators behaviour where there is capacity to change	Drive Herefordshire and Worcestershire (for high risk perpetrators) mobilised in February 2021. Drive is an evidence-based and evaluated programme which has delivered encouraging results in other areas.

4. Domestic abuse act 2021

4.1 Overview

Building on previous government initiatives, including the violence against Women and Girls Strategy, in January 2019 the government introduced the Domestic Abuse Bill designed to promote awareness of domestic abuse; protect and support victims and their families; transform the justice process to prioritise victim safety and provide an effective response to perpetrators; and to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors.

On the 29th April, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was enacted and new duties on came into force, with the council required to:

1. Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions.
2. 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.
3. Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
4. Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions) including the provision of safe accommodation.
5. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy, reviewing every three years.

4.2 What is Domestic Abuse?

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 creates a statutory cross government definition of domestic abuse, based on the existing definition below;

- *‘Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if*
 - a. *A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected* to each other, and*
 - b. *The behaviour is abusive.*
- *Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:*
 - a. *Physical or sexual abuse.*

- b. *Violent or threatening behaviour*
- c. *Controlling or coercive behaviour.*
- d. *Economic abuse*
- e. *Psychological, emotional, or other abuse.*

And it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

- *“Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to*
 - a. *Acquire, use, or maintain money or other property, or*
 - b. *Obtain goods or services.*
- *For the purposes of this Part A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).*

*The statutory guidance defines that two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies:

- a. they are, or have been, married to each other;
- b. they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- c. they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- d. they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- e. they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- f. they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- g. they are relatives.

This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence (HBV), female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that domestic abuse is not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

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

In the new definition, both the person who is carrying out the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over and be personally connected. Abusive behaviour directed at a person under 16 would be dealt with as child abuse rather than domestic abuse.

The definition above lists the broad categories which capture a range of different abusive behaviours, including physical, emotional and economic abuse.

The Act also recognises that domestic abuse can impact on a child who sees or hears, or experiences the effects of the abuse and it treats such children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right where they are related to either the abuser or the abused.

Statutory guidance will be issued to provide further details and confirmation. The commencement schedule for the act can be viewed here: [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Commencement Schedule](#).

There is also further information on the new statutory definition of domestic abuse via a [factsheet](#) on the GOV.UK website and a summary in Appendix 1.

4.3 Safe Accommodation and homelessness

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on the council to deliver support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing with refuges and other safe accommodation and to assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who require highly specialist support and those who come from outside the area.

The government proposed that the following are classed as safe accommodation:

- refuge accommodation;
- specialist safe accommodation;
- dispersed accommodation;
- sanctuary schemes; and
- move-on or second stage accommodation.

From 5th July 2021, the Act amends existing homelessness legislation (the Housing Act 1996) by extending priority need to all eligible victims who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse. This change removes the requirement for victims of domestic abuse to demonstrate vulnerability in order to attain priority need and clarifies the remit of people affected by this change with the new statutory definition of domestic abuse.

5. Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire (Needs Assessment)

A domestic abuse needs assessment was carried out in June 2021 to refresh the needs assessment completed in 2018. The information below comes from this needs assessment and the whole report will be available on the Understanding Herefordshire website.

In Herefordshire between April 2020 and March 2021, the police recorded 1,354 domestic abuse incidents and 2,168 domestic abuse offences, which is roughly 4 incidents and 6 offences in the county each day. It is widely understood that domestic abuse is under reported and data from the Crime Survey of England and Wales indicates that there is actually likely to be an estimated 4,900 women and 2,400 men in Herefordshire who were victims of domestic abuse in 2019/20.

Police data provides just one insight into understanding domestic abuse in Herefordshire, so data has been analysed from other sources, including West Mercia Women's Aid, Primary Care and Social Services. The following boxes gives a brief overview of some of the findings regarding domestic abuse in Herefordshire.

An estimated 4,900 women and 2,400 men in Herefordshire experienced Domestic Abuse in 2019/20	Being disabled or LGBTQ+ puts you at higher risk of Domestic Abuse	West Mercia Police have recorded an increase in Domestic Abuse offences in Herefordshire each year since 2017 - there were 2168 offences recorded between 2020/21
Around 60% of Domestic Abuse offences in Herefordshire result in the victim not supporting police action	3 of the 4 domestic homicides in Herefordshire between 2017-2021 were matricide	Between a quarter to a third of referrals to refuge were unsuccessful/denied, over 50% came from out of area and the remaining 17-24% were successful referrals were for victims inside the area
Lack of room has been the most common reason for victims to be denied access to refuge year on year	1% of MARAC cases were LGBT 13% of MARAC cases were BAME <1% of MARAC cases were disabled 2% of MARAC cases were men	97% of victims supported by IDVA were women 90% of victims supported by IDVA were heterosexual/straight
143 victims were supported by Housing Solutions in 2020	There has been a decrease in Adult Social Care referrals where Domestic Abuse is a factor since 2018. There were 118 referrals in 2020/21, accounting for 7% of referrals to Adult Social Care	Most referrals to Children's Social Care per 1,000 population were from South West Hereford
GPs were most likely to flag Domestic Abuse on a patient's record if they were aged 25-44		

<p><u>Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) and estimated prevalence (2019/20)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An estimated 4,900 women and 2,400 men in Herefordshire experienced Domestic Abuse in 2019/20 4% of adults have experienced domestic abuse from a partner, and 1.9% of adults experience domestic abuse from family members Domestic abuse is most prevalent in 16-19 year olds and prevalence largely decreases through the age groups 	<p><u>West Mercia Police (2017/18 to 2020/21)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of domestic abuse offences recorded has increased year on year since 2017/18, with 1416 offences in 2017/18 to 2168 offences in 2020/21 Around 60% of Domestic Abuse offences in Herefordshire result in the victim not supporting police action ~71% of recorded victims were women 98% of recorded victims were "White North European" or "Unknown" ~50% of suspects and victims were aged 25-45
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic abuse is most prevalent in Mixed – White and Black Caribbean ethnic group • Somebody with a disability is more likely to be a victim of domestic abuse than somebody who is not disabled • Bisexuals are more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse than any other sexual orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The youngest victims was 0 years old, the oldest victim was 96 • The youngest suspect was 6 years old and the oldest suspects were 96 • ~66% of recorded victims were only seen by police on one occasion between 2017 and 2021, but one victim was seen 28 times during the same time period • Most domestic abuse incidences and offences were recorded in Hereford City, particularly in Centre, Courtyard and South Wye areas. Other areas with high levels were Kingstone, John Kyrle area of Ross-on-Wye and the Gateway area of Leominster • Four domestic homicides were recorded between 2017 and 2021. Three of these homicides were matricide
<p><u>West Mercia Women’s Aid (Refuge) (2018/19 to 2020/21)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per 1,000 population, most referrals were from the Colwall, Cradley and Wellington Heath area, but referrals were received from across the county and not concentrated in the city or market towns • Between a quarter to a third of referrals were unsuccessful/denied, over 50% came from out of area • Lack of room has been the most common reason for victims to be denied access to refuge year on year • 71% of referrals were for victims aged 25-34 • 16% of referrals were for BAME victims • Nearly 100% of referrals were for women, 1 referral was for a victim who identified as transgender 	<p><u>Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) (2018-2020)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71% of cases are referred by the police • 1% of MARAC cases were LGBT • 13% of MARAC cases were BAME • <1% of MARAC cases were disabled • 2% of MARAC cases were men • 240 cases in 2018, 214 in 2019 and 233 in 2020 • 18% of cases are repeat cases
<p><u>Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) (2018/19 to 2020/21)</u></p>	<p><u>Housing and Homelessness (2020)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 143 domestic abuse victims were supported by Housing Solutions team in 2020

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a nearly 30% increase of victims being supported by IDVAs in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20 • 72% of victims supported by IDVAs were aged 19-44 • 97% of victims supported by IDVA were female • 90% of victims supported by IDVA were heterosexual/straight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 99% of victims supported by Housing Solutions were women, only two men were supported • ~66% of victims supported by Housing Solutions were in touch with other agencies • Over 60% of victims supported had children or were pregnant • 66% of victims were aged 25-44
<p><u>Adult Social Care (2018/19 to 2020/21)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of referrals where Domestic Abuse is a recorded factor and the source of risk is a family member or partner has decreased each year between 2018/19 to 2020/21 • Referrals where domestic abuse is a factor and the source of risk is a family member of partner, makes up about 7% of all referrals received by Adult Social Care • Most referrals were for individuals aged 80-89 • Most referrals cite the source of risk as a partner, but this is not the case for those aged 80+ where it is family members who are recorded as the source of risk • 90% of referrals were for victims who are White • ~75% of referrals were for women 	<p><u>Children’s Social Care (2018/19 to 2020/21)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~12% of referrals were for BAME children • Per 1,000 population, the majority of referrals were from the South West Hereford MSOA • Nearly 50% of all referrals came from the police
<p><u>General Practice (2017/18 to 2020/21)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25-44 year olds are most frequently recorded with a domestic abuse code by their GPs • 89% of recorded domestic abuse codes were for female patients 	

The information above gives an insight into domestic abuse in Herefordshire, particularly regarding the demographics of the victims who are accessing services. The overall picture shows that victims who are using these services are primarily aged 25-44, predominately female, and where data is available, largely straight/heterosexual and nondisabled. It is worth noting that data on sexuality and disability are not routinely recorded by most of these sources, so knowledge is limited regarding the sexuality and disability of victims. In addition, recording of ethnicity is inconsistent, such as only recording victims as “White” or “White Northern European” and not differentiating between different White ethnic groups, which is especially important in

Herefordshire as the largest minority ethnic group in Herefordshire is “White: Other”. Where there is data on ethnicity, it appears that >10% of victims are recorded as BAME, which is higher than the county average which the 2011 census records only 6.4% of Herefordshire as BAME.

This suggests that there are groups of people who are not seldom accessing many services, including: under 25s, despite CSEW suggesting domestic abuse is most prevalent in 16-19 year olds; over 45s, despite Herefordshire having an aged population compared to national averages; genders other than women; people with a disability; LGBTQ+.

In addition to underlining potential disparity of accessing services, the needs assessment also highlighted that access to refuge is frequently denied due to lack of space and that victims rarely support police action when an offence has occurred. The domestic homicides data also calls attention to the danger of familial domestic abuse, which is also illustrated as a specific issue for over 80s in the Adult Social Care data.

There have been concerns nationally that Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns will have led to an increase in domestic abuse, however, based on the available data the only noticeable increase in demand in Herefordshire seems to be for IDVAS, which may suggest that whilst there has not been an increase in domestic abuse generally, we are seeing more victims who are assessed as being at high risk.

6. Strategic priorities

The priorities for the strategy are:

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

These priorities remain unchanged from the 2019 strategy with minor changes to the objectives in order to reflect the new act requirements. The vision, priorities and objectives were developed through ongoing work with, and gaining the views of professionals, stakeholders and groups from across Herefordshire, including those who have experienced domestic abuse.

6.1 Priority 1 – Prevention

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

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Collect and use data effectively to create a shared understanding of domestic abuse in Herefordshire.

- Work collaboratively across organisations to support culture change in the population to be one that recognises and rejects all forms of domestic abuse.
- Create an environment throughout universal services and others that supports early disclosure of domestic abuse by those affected and provides a high-quality and consistent initial response.
- Increase awareness amongst those who work with people with additional vulnerabilities and certain protected characteristics (see Appendix 1) to ensure domestic abuse is identified with an effective initial response.
- Support young people, children and families to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and understand the harm it causes as well as the positive impact of disclosing abuse.
- Ensure information, advice and support in relation to the above is accessible and appropriate for people from victims with certain protected characteristics and other vulnerabilities, with adequate support in place.

Outcomes for Priority 1:

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

6.2 Priority 2 - Provision of Service

The aim is that when domestic abuse is disclosed, identified or reported, those affected can access timely and effective information, safe accommodation, advice and support. This support should meet the needs of the affected individuals in a way which ensures equality for victims across our communities including any children, now recognised as victims in their own right.

Partner agencies will:

- Ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse can easily and safely contact, or be referred, and access specialist domestic abuse services and safe accommodation, including those with certain protected characteristics or vulnerability such as multiple complex needs, and children who are identified as victims in their own right.
- Ensure that children exposed to domestic abuse are supported in the best possible way.

- Ensure that housing advice, emergency and other appropriate housing solutions are available to those experiencing domestic abuse, and where appropriate support those affected by domestic abuse and their children to remain in their homes safely.

Outcomes for Priority 2:

- Those affected by domestic abuse and their families are supported to improve their resilience and to understand healthy relationships.
- Those affected by domestic abuse and their families are safe from harm.
- Children who are victims of domestic abuse are safe from harm as supported as victims in their own right.

6.3 Priority 3 - Partnership Working

Domestic abuse has impact across multiple agencies who play a key role. These include primary and secondary health care, police, early years, children's social services, adult social care, schools, courts and probation. There is no single place that a person might disclose domestic abuse and no single agency that can provide a full response.

Acknowledging that domestic abuse can be the cause of or underlying issue in relation to multiple health and social problems including substance use and mental health. Close partnership working is essential, with a shared vision, strong leadership and clear pathways. The aim is to work together across organisations and geographical areas in an efficient and effective way to prevent, and protect those experiencing, domestic abuse, ensuring that organisational barriers do not impact on those affected by domestic abuse.

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Ensure there is strong leadership across all organisations on domestic abuse.
- Work collaboratively across organisations to create clear pathways for supporting those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ensure data is collected and collated to provide a clear understanding of those effected by domestic abuse across Herefordshire. The data will support the on-going needs assessment and the development of future service provision to accurately reflect Herefordshire residents, including identifying those affected with certain protected characteristics.
- Ensure that front line staff (for example, staff who work in primary care, emergency department, children's centres, children's social care, adult social care, fire service);
 - i) have a good understanding of domestic abuse;
 - ii) are professionally curious in their investigation of underlying causes of a person's current circumstances
 - iii) have awareness and understanding of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and how the measures impact on their roles and responsibilities
 - iv) see it as their role and responsibility to reduce the harm of domestic abuse; and
 - v) understand the tools/resources available to them to do so.

Outcomes for Priority 3:

- Improved shared understanding of the whole system response to domestic abuse.
- Reduction in cross organisation barriers to an effective response to domestic abuse.
- Established pathways for joint working and planning of health and social interventions

6.4 Priority 4 – Pursuing perpetrators

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

Objectives:

Partner agencies will:

- Support those experiencing domestic abuse to use the various tools available to prevent further offending (e.g. Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, Clare's Law), Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Domestic Violence Protection Orders).
- Use the criminal justice system to its full effect to deter offending and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Make available effective, evidence-based programmes to help change perpetrator behaviour, where perpetrators have the capacity to change.

Outcomes for Priority 4:

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

7. Delivering the Domestic Abuse Act requirements and strategy implementation

7.1 Leadership and delivery

The existing Domestic Abuse Strategic and Delivery Group, acting as the Board under the Community Safety Partnership structure will be amended to provide a higher level executive group which will fulfil the duties in the new act in relation to the Local Partnership Board.

The Domestic Abuse Act requires the council to appoint a Local Partnership Board which will deliver a collaborative approach to domestic abuse where it can oversee and monitor progress of the needs assessment, the strategy and its implementation, the implementation of the Act across the council and report back to Government.

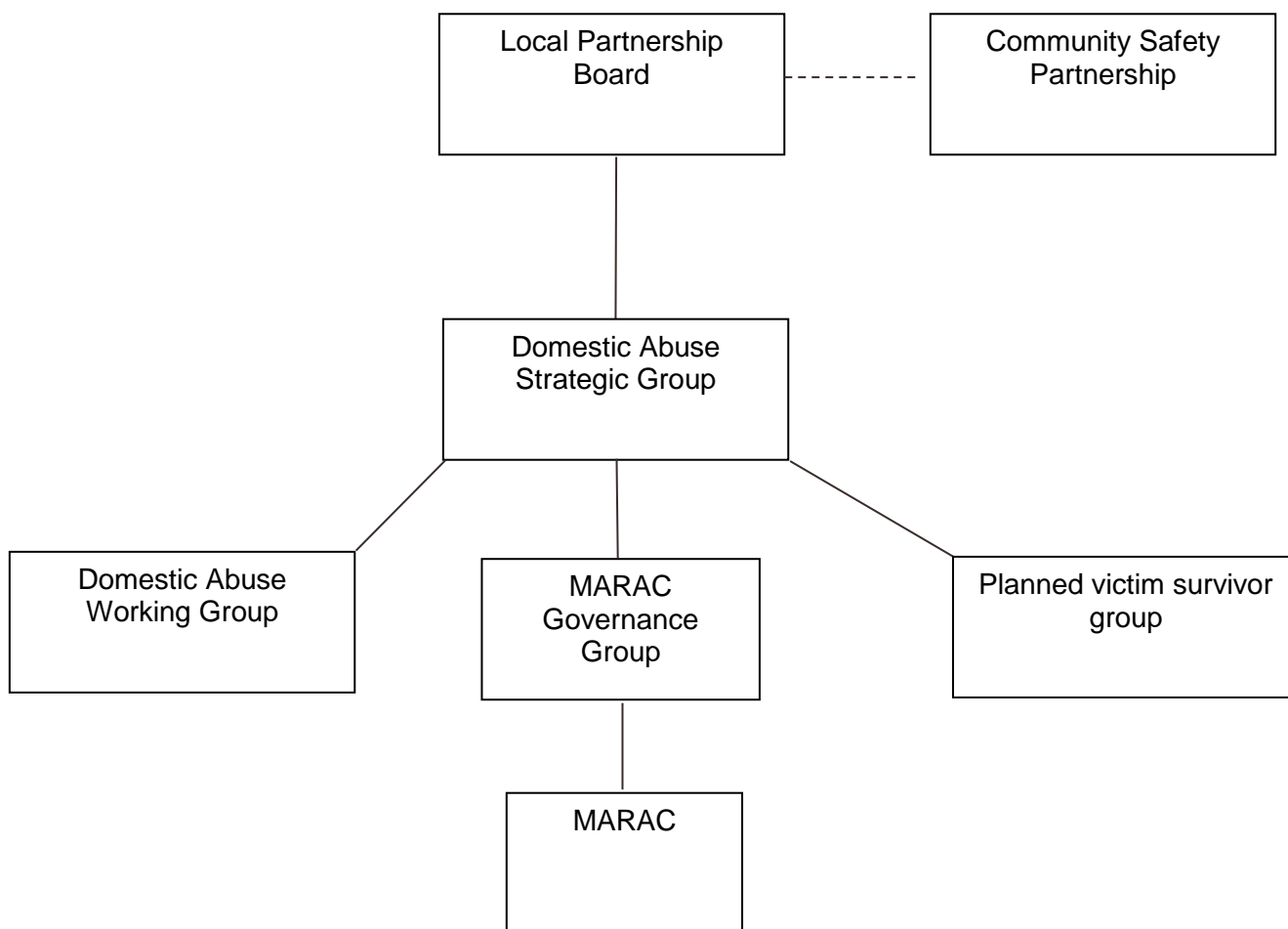
It will be responsible for providing advice to the council about the functions required under section 57 of the Act.

In line with the draft statutory guidance, it is proposed that the Local Partnership Board will be formed of the following members:

- a. Council representative
- b. Victim's representative
- c. Children's representative
- d. Voluntary sector representative linked to supporting victims
- e. Health representative
- f. Policing representative
- g. Housing representative
- h. Representative for those people with 'protected characteristics' identified within the statutory guidance

The Board is able to add to this membership where relevant for the furtherance of the aims set out in the act.

Proposed Governance Structure:



The existing work plan has been reviewed and is being updated to include the new requirements. Further details of the current action plan and progress since the existing strategy launched in 2019 are summarised under point 3 in this strategy.

The multi-agency Domestic Abuse Strategic Group will operationally hold the new action plan for the strategy, jointly identifying the most important objectives and actions for that year with the Local Partnership Board. This action plan will build upon the objectives and the further detail included in this strategy.

Action plans will take account of plans, opportunities and resources available within each partner organisation and wider funding opportunities.

The progress of the strategy will be regularly monitored and reviewed by the Local Partnership Board. This will include a range of partnership actions as well as reporting from the commissioned services.

7.2 Consultation and engagement

Working with the DA Strategic Group and the new board, a three month consultation exercise will be undertaken from November 2021 to January 2022.

This work will involve structured conversations, stakeholder events and public consultation to ensure the views of our key stakeholders and residents are sought on the draft strategy including feedback on how best to continue engagement activity throughout the lifetime of the strategy.

The information will be collated and used to update the strategy document and to inform the future commissioning activity alongside the confirmed statutory guidance which will then be in place. It is anticipated the final strategy will be published in Spring 2022.

7.3 Current commissioning activity

7.3.1 Council funded services

The council commissions a domestic abuse support service which delivers the following outcomes based services to support victims, and is in place until 2024. This represents an investment of around £1.3 million over a period of five years. The service includes;

- Online and telephone helpline
- Safe accommodation through housing support or refuge accommodation with associated support work in relation to information, advice and signposting
- Outreach support
- Group Work
- Information and advice
- Raising awareness
- Support for children
- Intelligence sharing

- Strategic influence

The support work is individualised, outcome focussed and using a strengths based approach with victims.

Previous Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) funding enabled short term investment in staffing capacity with the existing countywide service provider to support seven separate properties of refuge dispersed accommodation as well as resource supporting children and young people. The learning from this pilot work has influenced commissioning activity, specifically, the additional funding from MHCLG in 2021/22 is being used to sustain and enhance the safe accommodation and associated support offer to nine dispersed accommodation units.

7.3.2 Other local services

There are a number of other services supporting victims of domestic abuse in operation in Herefordshire funded from a range of sources such as the Police and Crime Commissioner and central government. These include;

- Independent Domestic Violence Advisors
- West Mercia Women's Aid Children and Young person's worker
- Building Better relationships – behaviour change programme
- Inspiring Families – support for families as victims and behaviour change for perpetrators
- Sexual Assault Referral Centre
- West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
- The Drive Programme – behaviour change programme for perpetrators
- Helping hands and Crush programmes – awareness and understanding in primary and secondary aged children
- Herefordshire substance use recovery service
- Sexual Health services – Solutions for Health
- Public Health nursing (Health Visitors and School nurses)

Service planning and commissioning activity is regularly considered collectively by key stakeholders and this will continue through the new Local Partnership Board and the existing partnership structure.

7.3.3 New service provision

With the funding available from central government in 2021, the council and the stakeholders for domestic abuse are taking forward new service provision to deliver a new but complimentary service which will focus on increasing the staff resource within the county to deliver the following:

- Connecting West Mercia Women's Aid with universal services, organisations, community groups (including Talk community Hubs) and individuals with expertise in working with and for people with certain protected characteristics.

- Training and awareness raising to upskill professionals across these services/organisations to recognise and respond to domestic abuse, raise awareness, create culture change and communicate services available.
- Increased communication and media activity.
- Continuation and expansion of a short term government funded project, developed during the Covid19 response, which will deliver the staffing support to:
 - 9 houses in Herefordshire used as dispersed safe accommodation for victims fleeing domestic abuse (in addition the main refuge).
 - Associated advice, advocacy and support for adults and children
- An experienced domestic abuse professional co-located virtually within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Domestic Abuse Hub for the purposes of developing and sharing intelligence and triage of cases. The role will also focus on enhancing the data captured around certain protected characteristics, which will in turn support the needs assessment.
- Specialist worker to focus on those people with multiple complex needs and facilitating access to counselling support.
- Enhanced data capture particularly around certain protected characteristics.

The general themes of support provided by the enhanced workforce through the new services includes;

- a. Advocacy support
- b. Domestic abuse prevention advice
- c. Specialist support for victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs
- d. Children's support
- e. Housing related support
- f. Counselling and therapy

The needs assessment confirms our approach by demonstrating that victims of some protected characteristics are currently seldom accessing services and that there is constant and often unmet demand for safe accommodation.

8. Challenges in addressing Domestic Abuse

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

There are fewer known cases of men reporting domestic abuse than women. 2% of high risk cases discussed by MARAC were male, whilst the expected proportion is 4-10%. There are very few men accessing the local domestic abuse support service provided by West Mercia Women's Aid.

Older people are less likely to make disclosures of domestic abuse, further exacerbated by health conditions such as dementia or physical disability. People in such circumstances are more likely

to be isolated and reliant upon their partner or family for their care, while the demands upon their carer can cause additional pressures and a shift in the dynamic of their relationship.

Similarly, people with physical or mental health illness or learning disabilities can be additionally vulnerable to domestic abuse due to isolation or a reliance upon their family or partner as their carer.

People from the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender or Queer (LGBTQ+) community are less likely to report domestic abuse. Local data provided by West Mercia Women's Aid shows low numbers of people in Lesbian, Gay or Bi-sexual relationships accessing the service and similarly lower than expected numbers of LGBTQ+ cases are considered in MARAC (<1% of all high risk cases) than would be expected (≥5%). The West Mercia and Warwickshire Police Draft Domestic Abuse Threat Assessment 2017 reports for couples in a same sex relationship, females accounted for 7% of reported offences and males for 8%. This would indicate that proportionately, those in same sex relationships are not accessing domestic abuse support services.

People from ethnic minority groups may be reluctant to report abuse due to fear of isolation or repercussions, or due to a lack of understanding about domestic abuse, UK law and the support available. Key communities to consider in Herefordshire include the Eastern European and Traveller populations. People affected by domestic abuse in both these communities might face additional challenges which make it harder to identify abuse for both the person affected and agencies, and more difficult to flee the abusive relationship. . For example, lack of trust in police and other professionals, being ostracised from their own community if women leave a marriage, traditional established roles for men and women and lack of culturally-appropriate refuge accommodation

People living in rural communities may face additional challenges to accessing services, or have concerns about their information being shared with others in their community should they make a disclosure. In 2019 The National Rural Crime Network launched the results of an 18 month intensive research project on domestic abuse in rural areas, '[Captive and Controlled](#)'. The report shows a picture of domestic abuse in rural Britain with hidden victims who feel isolated, unsupported and unprotected.

The report finds:

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

problem is not as serious as it actually is, which in turn leads to less resources being devoted to it).

Herefordshire is a rural county which brings additional barriers for those experiencing domestic abuse, including recognising abuse, asking for help, accessing support and fleeing the abusive relationship.¹ Domestic abuse in rural communities is no less prevalent but can be less visible. Women living in rural areas have been found to particularly value the importance of health practitioners, especially GPs, in providing confidential and safe services for women compared to women living in urban areas. Such women have been found to express concern about the confidential nature of services they received in their community, not echoed by women living in urban areas.²

Our new service will prioritise and provide enhanced support to those victims with certain protected characteristics or vulnerabilities such as complex needs, both as victims and through wider community engagement work. They must be enabled and encouraged to access services, and the system must be prepared to respond to their individual needs.

9. Preventing domestic abuse

Primary prevention of domestic abuse is key. This means preventing abuse before it happens. There are several broad categories of interventions that work at primary prevention level. These include³:

- Early childhood and family-based approaches: not only, as described above, does witnessing abuse have a direct impact on child development, but it is in early childhood that children learn a range of skills and attitudes. Skills such as problem-solving, emotional management, and social skills, alongside attitudes to gender roles, relationships and acceptability of aggression and violence, form the basis of future relationships. Children learn much of this from the behaviour of people around them. Positive parenting and safe and supportive home environments are therefore crucial to pro-social behaviour and healthy relationships.
- Public Health approach: provides a useful framework for prevention of domestic abuse through primary prevention programmes and policy interventions. This approach is aimed at entire populations and as such can address underlying causes of domestic abuse to prevent them from occurring or re-occurring. This approach is dependent on engagement and action from multiple organisations and agencies simultaneously for its success, acknowledging that there are multiple causes of health and social problems. Multiple agencies working in partnership is a key component of addressing both then underlying causes of domestic abuse and preventing the recurrence of incidents. Primary prevention should be targeted at both community and individual levels, addressing gender norms and

¹ SafeLives Herefordshire MARAC review, 2018

² McCarry M and Williamson E. Violence against women in rural and urban areas. https://www.thewi.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/49874/vawruralandurbanareas.pdf

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

healthy relationships and empowering individuals and communities in education, workplace and healthcare settings.

- School-based approaches: school based programmes to prevent abuse should be part of broader community based prevention strategies. Evidence suggests that most effective programmes are those that aim to change attitudes and norms, rather than provide information, and should address both boys and girls.
- Interventions to reduce alcohol and substance misuse: alcohol and drug use are a situational factor that contribute to the severity of abuse, or a coping mechanism for ongoing abuse, rather than being the primary cause. Alcohol harm reduction strategies, although not addressing the underlying cause, can still lead to improvements in preventing abuse.
- Public information and awareness campaigns: such campaigns are a common approach to preventing domestic abuse, to try to break the silence and influence attitudes and social norms. Communications strategies based on a social marketing framework are more likely to be effective in changing individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and social norms.
- Community-based approaches: such approaches include interventions targeted at subgroups of the population (such as group education for people at risk) and comprehensive community-wide mobilisation interventions. Comprehensive programmes are designed to effect social change by creating an enabling environment for changing individual attitudes and behaviour. This approach requires multiple components, often including participatory education or training, public awareness campaigns, and social marketing techniques. These approaches can be particularly challenging as they rely on long-term, participatory engagement with high-quality facilitation and are most effective where there is community ownership.
- Structural and policy approaches: working towards strengthening gender equality can have fundamental impact on domestic abuse whilst improving criminal justice system responses is a key part of a comprehensive approach.

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

10. Representing victims

As part of previous engagement work, views were sought from those who have experienced, or continue to experience domestic abuse to provide valuable insight into their journey. We also sought the views of parents with young children and various professionals working closely with those who have experienced domestic abuse.

The key themes that have emerged from our conversations include:

- Recognition of abuse: People understand that domestic abuse is not just violence, however people affected by domestic abuse found it difficult to identify whether things they were experiencing or witnessing constituted abuse or were just typical relationship issues. *“When should alarm bells ring and who do you talk to, to check it out?”*
- Fear of losing children: There was a deep fear of children’s social services or intervention into family matters. This was driven by the concern that children will be taken away or custody issues. Perpetrators often use children as leverage to exert power and control and persuade someone to stay in the abusive relationship.
- Crisis point: The majority of those affected waited until things reached crisis point and the police or social services became involved before they sought help.
- Cycle of domestic abuse: many (but not all) of those affected by domestic abuse reported coming from abusive families, and had experienced multiple abusive relationships.
- Feeling that no-one is on their side: those affected reported that as a parent, once you have been identified as a victim, you are continually seen as the bad guy by the authorities who are checking up on your parenting skills; by the police who don’t believe you unless there’s hard evidence (and perpetrators are usually very good persuaders); by their families who think you should keep the family together; and by the criminal justice system which fails victims with perpetrators who receive a conviction getting more lenient sentences for physically assaulting a member of their family than they would receive if they had attacked a stranger.
- Housing concerns: Property rights and tenancies are used as another manipulation tool.
- Impact on children: The impact of domestic abuse on children, whilst the parent affected by domestic abuse was with them, was not recognised – with the parent feeling they could protect the child(ren) from harm. People affected by domestic abuse reported concern about the impact on their children who remained living with their abuser.
- Organisations could work better together: reports of organisations continuing to work in a fragmented way, leading to confusion and conflicting information.

Whilst this work was extensive, we are committed to enabling the victim’s voices to be heard and represented. Therefore as well as representation at the Local Partnership Board, we are also proposing to develop a separate group to enable victims to collectively be engaged in the services and strategic direction on an ongoing basis.

11. Key policies and partners

11.1 Stakeholders

There are a wide range of partners instrumental to the delivery of this strategy across our whole community of Herefordshire, the key stakeholders are listed below;

- Herefordshire Council

- West Mercia Police
- Wye Valley Trust
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust
- NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Taurus Healthcare GP Federation
- West Mercia Women's Aid
- West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
- National Probation Service
- West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company
- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
- West Mercia Youth Justice Service
- Herefordshire Substance Use Recovery Service

11.2 Out of county support

Victims from out of county areas will receive the equivalent support to those from within the county. If the victim has been working with their current Local Authority, the support package will transfer over with them so they will be able to access the equivalent services in Herefordshire. This means that support will continue and the victim will still be in receipt of support from services they were receiving previously such as MARAC. Equally, the council can refer victims to other local authorities.

The safe accommodation available within the county is part of the national network for refuge accommodation. There is a mix between those accessing the accommodation support from within the county to those outside the county fluctuates continuously and is impacted by duration of stay.

Discussions are taking place with colleagues from Worcestershire regarding joint working and wider representation and engagement which are expected to develop further over the strategy period.

11.3 Wider policy and legislation

There are a large number of local and national policies that impact on the delivery of the strategy. Whilst the list below is not exhaustive it provides some of the key policies and legislation relevant to domestic abuse.

- Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) 2016-2020
- The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime 2021
- Housing Act 1985
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Care Act 2014
- Children's Act 2004
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Policing and Crime Act 2017
- Local Government Act 2000

- Herefordshire County Plan
- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner Safer West Mercia Plan
- Herefordshire Adults Safeguarding Policy
- Herefordshire Children and Young Peoples Policy
- Herefordshire Looked after children commissioning and sufficiency strategy

Appendix 1 - Domestic Abuse Act summary

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 29th April 2021. The Act delivers a number of significant changes to improve the protection of victims within the community and the criminal justice system. It has been designed to promote awareness of domestic abuse and drive consistency and better performance in response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors.

The statutory guidance is currently in draft form and this draft strategy will be updated according once the final guidance is published.

Summary of the Act:

Supporting victims:

- Create a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive, or controlling, and economic abuse. As part of this definition, children will be explicitly recognised as victims if they see, hear, or otherwise experience the effects of abuse;
- Create a new offence of no-fatal strangulation;
- Extend the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post separation abuse;
- Extend the ‘revenge porn’ offence to cover threat to disclose intimate images with the intention to cause distress;
- Clarify the law to further deter claims of “rough sex gone wrong” in cases involving death or serious injury;
- Create a statutory presumption that victims of domestic abuse are eligible for special measures in the criminal, civil and family courts (for example, to enable them to give evidence via a video link)
- Establish in law the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to stand up for victims and survivors, raise public awareness, monitor the response of authorities, the justice system and other statutory agencies and hold them to account in tackling domestic abuse
- Place a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation;

- Provide that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have ‘priority need’ for homelessness assistance;
- Place the guidance supporting the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (“Clare’s law”) on a statutory footing;
- Ensure that when local authorities rehouse victims of domestic abuse, they do not lose a secure lifetime or assured tenancy;
- Stop vexatious family proceedings that can further traumatise victims by clarifying the circumstances in which a court may make a barring order under section 91(14) of the Children Act 1989;
- Prohibit GPs and other health professionals from charging a victim of domestic abuse for a letter to support an application for legal aid

Strengthened measures to tackle perpetrators

- Prohibit perpetrators of abuse from cross-examining their victims in person in family and civil courts in England and Wales;
- Bring the case of R vs Brown into legislation, invalidating any courtroom defence of consent where a victim suffers serious harm or is killed;
- Enable domestic abuse offenders to be subject to polygraph testing as a condition of their licence following their release from custody;
- Extend the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the criminal courts in England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to further violent and sexual offences;
- Provide for a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Domestic Abuse Protection Order, which will prevent perpetrators from contacting their victims, as well as force them to take positive steps to change their behaviour, e.g., seeking mental health support;
- Extend the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the criminal courts in England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to further violent and sexual offences;
- Introduce a statutory duty on the Secretary of State to publish a domestic abuse perpetrator strategy (to be published as part of a holistic domestic abuse strategy)

Protected characteristics and other vulnerabilities requiring additional support:

- Black Asian and Minority Ethnic [Including Gypsy Roma and Traveller, with consideration to the Women and Equalities Committee report]
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and / or Transgender
- Disabled – including but not limited to, deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired, Autistic, wheelchair users and those with learning difficulties
- Male
- Young (aged 16-18 – including care leavers) and older victims (over 65)

- People with an offending history
- Those presenting with complex needs including those with mental health and/or substance misuse needs
- Those facing multiple forms of abuse within the family such as honourbased violence and forced marriage
- Religious and/or spiritual, particularly if facing barriers as a result
- Having insecure immigration status
- From isolated and/or marginalised communities, including where there is limited English proficiency.
- Victims who have no choice but to move away from their local areas, communities, and friends to escape their perpetrator to stay safe and receive the support they need.
- Children of victims (including adolescent male children) within safe accommodation.
- Victims with children, including large families and those with older adolescence boys (12+)
- Pregnant victims

