

Title of report: Promoting Safety: Herefordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 26 May 2022

Report by: Cabinet member health and adult wellbeing;

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 final draft of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2021-2024, in accordance with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The final draft of Promoting Safety: Herefordshire's Strategy for Addressing Domestic Abuse 2021 – 2024 be approved for implementation;**
- b) **The responses to the recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee in appendix 4 of this report are approved.**
- c) **Approval of updates to the strategy and the associated needs assessment, be delegated to the 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 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 families, 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.
3. The Crime Survey for England and Wales suggests that:
 - a. An estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in 2019/20.
 - b. There is an estimated 4,900 women and 2,400 men in Herefordshire who were victims of domestic abuse in 2019/20.
 - c. More than one in ten of all offences recorded by the police are domestic abuse related
4. West Mercia Police recorded 2168 domestic abuse offences in Herefordshire during 2020/21.
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 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 in the implementation of the new 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.

- 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.
8. The first draft of this strategy, along with the needs assessment that informed the strategy, was approved for consultation by the Leader of the Council in a [decision](#) taken on 22 October 2021. The draft strategy went to Scrutiny Committee in November 2021.
 9. An online stakeholder consultation was carried out during December 2021. This was followed up with a stakeholder workshop in March 2022. West Mercia Women's Aid were commissioned to carry out a more detailed consultation process with service users and people with lived experience of domestic abuse during March 2022. The feedback from this process is outlined in the consultees section of this report and has been used to update the strategy.
 10. The strategy will be implemented and monitored via a work plan held by the Local Partnership Board. The Board includes representatives from the following organisations / groups:
 - a. Herefordshire Council including Public Health
 - b. West Mercia Women's Aid
 - c. Local NHS organisations, including the Integrated Care System (ICS)
 - d. West Mercia Police
 - e. Registered Landlords of Social Housing
 - f. People with lived experience of domestic abuse
 - g. The perspective of people with "protected characteristics", who are often under represented among people seeking support.
 11. In addition to the work plan, the community commissioning team are required to complete an annual monitoring report for DLUHC. The first of these will be submitted in June 2022.

Community impact

12. By adopting and working in partnership to deliver the Domestic Abuse Strategy, the work is directly contributing to the County Plan's ambition of 'strengthening communities to ensure that everyone lives well and safely together
13. More generally, this strategy positively impacts on priorities within the County Plan including the provision of affordable housing, the use of technology and supporting local children and young people, particularly those most vulnerable and disadvantaged. There are also links to the Talk Community approach and network of hubs as part of the wider prevention work and awareness raising.
14. The council's Children's and Young People's Plan (2019-24) reported that professionals in Herefordshire who work with children and young people highlighted safety in the home environment as an area for attention. They have consistently emphasised the need for a stronger approach to early identification and early help, including better intervention around domestic abuse.
15. 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.

Care experienced young people not infrequently experience domestic abuse and may also have witnessed it in their childhood.

16. 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.
17. West Mercia Women's Aid are the commissioned specialist provider of domestic abuse support services in Herefordshire and work with a wide range of partners to deliver this work, including registered housing providers to offer safe accommodation. West Mercia Women's Aid support female and male victim-survivors of domestic abuse.
18. Whilst there is some potential cross over, it is useful to clarify that West Midlands Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre offer a support service to victims (female and male) of rape and sexual abuse.

Environmental Impact

19. 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.
20. Whilst this decision will have minimal direct environmental impact, 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

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. 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, and they are a particular focus of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
23. The statutory guidance for the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires that all Local Authorities have to ensure the following:
 - a) Dedicated support to victims with relevant protected characteristics
 - b) Views are represented at the Local Partnership Board

- c) Local needs assessment should take into account support and services for all victims regardless of protected characteristics
 - d) The partnership board must take steps to understand the barriers that prevent victims from certain relevant protected characteristics or multiple complex needs from accessing and using support
 - e) Commissioned support must reflect the support needs of victims with particular protected characteristics
 - f) Provide relevant safe accommodation for victims and their children with relevant protected characteristics
24. Research for the strategy, reflected in the domestic abuse needs assessment undertaken in 2021, included specific demographic data around those affected by domestic abuse and perpetrators of abuse, including those with protected characteristics. Services have been commissioned to increase investment in those groups that are under-represented.
25. The strategy considers how all partner organisations can respond to the needs of those affected by domestic abuse with protected characteristics based upon the specific demography of Herefordshire.
26. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the strategy.

Resource implications

27. 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 service commissioned by the council and additional grant resources provided by the Government.

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2021/22	2022/23	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Cost of existing commissioned service – Refuge and support (R). Runs until 2024 – Total value is £1.295m	259	259	259	777
DA Co-ordinator (R) – 2021/22 only.	50	0	0	50
Additional commissioned activities related to new duties in Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (R)	361	362	0	723
TOTAL	670	621	259	1,550m

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2021/22	2022/23	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Base Budget</i>	259	259	259	777
<i>One off grant from MHCLG for implementation of Domestic Abuse Act 2021</i>	50	0	0	50
<i>Annual Grant from DLUHC for implementation of Domestic Abuse Act 2021 additional duties – not confirmed beyond current financial year</i>	361	362	0	723
TOTAL	670	621	259	1,550m

Revenue budget implications	2021/22	2022/23	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>There are no immediate implications on the revenue budget. Activity commissioned using the annual grant is only commissioned for one year. If not further grant is made available, no activity would be commissioned.</i>	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	0	0

28. Domestic abuse provision in Herefordshire is 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

29. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a number of legal and statutory duties which must be complied with. Tier one local authorities (which Herefordshire as a Unitary Authority falls within) are required to convene a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, assess the need for and prepare and publish strategies, and commission support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation services in their areas. Local Authorities also are required to report back to central government that they have met these obligations.

Risk management

30. There are few risks associated with the decision to approve the final draft of the strategy:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Strategy priorities need to be embedded across all partner organisations and progress needs to be measurable.	A clear work plan is needed to deliver the priorities of the strategy. This will be developed using information from the needs assessment, the strategy and feedback from people with lived experience of domestic abuse. Partner organisations will be accountable through the Local Partnership Board.
Lack of good quality data for needs assessment to inform strategy, action plan and subsequent commissioning of services.	The recent needs assessment has revealed some gaps in the complete picture of domestic abuse across Herefordshire. A clearer picture of need will be developed over the life time of this strategy with a particular emphasis on the experiences of hard to reach groups. This will be achieved through a collaborative approach and improved data sharing across the Local Partnership Board agencies.
Whilst the additional funding from DLUHC is hugely welcome, the annual funding cycle makes it challenging to deploy it to its greatest benefit and to maintain meaningful change.	The community commissioning team will feed this concern back to DLUHC and are part of a Domestic Abuse LGA group that also provides regular feedback to DLUHC. Due regard to the sustainability of any commissioned projects will be given consideration.

Consultees

31. A stakeholder engagement process was undertaken via an online survey in December 2021, 15 responses were received through this process. A stakeholder focus group was convened in March 2022 to follow this up. The following feedback was received from a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations; please also see corresponding responses:
- a. Need to embed quality standards; this has already started through the commissioning and improved partnership working e.g. co-location with MASH. This will be further developed by the Local Partnership Board via their work plan.
 - b. How can we help people to understand what domestic abuse is e.g. much more than physical violence? This will be achieved through training and education. WMWA and WMRSASC deliver training to a wide range of partners and in local schools to help professionals and young people to develop an understanding of positive relationships and behaviours that are abusive.

- c. Ensure that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is addressed in the strategy; the impact of the pandemic has been highlighted in the strategy. Data suggests that there was not a significant increase in the prevalence of domestic abuse during the pandemic. There was however, an increase in demand for IDVAS, which may indicate that survivors of domestic abuse were being assessed as being higher risk during this period.
 - d. How can the VCS add value to existing commissioned services? By increasing awareness of domestic abuse within their organisations and customer, by attending training events, by identifying gaps in service provision and by sign posting to services.
 - e. How can we identify gaps in service provision? The domestic abuse needs assessment will be updated annually. Feedback from service users, people with lived experience and wider VCS / statutory service providers will help us identify gaps and shape future service provision.
 - f. The definition of domestic abuse is welcomed, but it does not strongly underline the power and control element of domestic abuse; this has been acknowledged in the strategy.
32. West Mercia Women's Aid were commissioned to undertake detailed engagement work with service users and people with lived experience of Domestic Abuse in March 2022. The main themes arising from this engagement process were:
- a. There should be more education around domestic abuse available to young people.
 - b. Need to improve access to services, remove barriers to coming forward to sharing experience of domestic abuse,
 - c. A need for greater understanding of the signs, symptoms of, and response to, domestic abuse amongst professionals.
 - d. Partnership working is fundamental to supporting people with lived experience of domestic abuse.
 - e. More tools are needed for the Police and Court systems to deter perpetrators of domestic abuse.

These key themes are picked up in the strategy under the priorities of prevention, provision, partnership and perpetrators. The feedback from this process has led to some minor changes in the strategy including removing the reference to improving the resilience of survivors. This has been replaced with a more empowering statement about enabling survivors to rebuild their lives. Survivors also emphasised the need for improved education around domestic abuse for young people and the need for improved partnership working.

33. The draft strategy was taken to Scrutiny Committee in November 2021. The recommendations from this and associated responses are set out in appendix 4. A members briefing was held in February 2022 and a political group consultation has also been completed. Feedback from the political group consultation was supportive of the strategy.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Promoting Safety: Herefordshire's Strategy for Addressing Domestic Abuse 2021 - 2024

Appendix 2 – Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment for Herefordshire June 2021

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4 – Recommendations from Scrutiny Committee and associated responses.

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Sarah Buffrey	Date 25/04/2022
Finance	Kim Wratten	Date 25/04/2022
Legal	Samantha Evans	Date 13/04/2022
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 12/04/2022
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 14/04/2022
Procurement	Mark Cage	Date 14/04/2022
Risk	Paul Harris	Date 12/04/2022
Approved by	Paul Smith	Date 09/05/2022

[Note: Please remember to overwrite or delete the guidance highlighted in grey]

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