



# Title of report: Tackling Domestic Abuse Strategy Update

**Meeting: Health and Wellbeing Board**

**Meeting date: Monday 15 December 2025**

**Report by: Head of Resilient Communities**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards)

## **Purpose**

The report provides an update on the publication of Herefordshire's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-2028, outlining the governance arrangements and delivery mechanisms that underpin its implementation.

The report highlights how the strategy aligns with the Health and Wellbeing Board's strategic priorities, particularly the aims of ensuring a best start in life for children and promoting good mental wellbeing throughout life.

It demonstrates the council's commitment to a coordinated, multi-agency response to domestic abuse, ensuring that prevention, early intervention, and support services are embedded within wider public health and community resilience frameworks.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) The board receive and note the response to Domestic Abuse within Herefordshire; and**
- b) The board is asked to make any recommendations, or suggested actions, in connection to the report.**

## Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options.

## Key considerations

2. Domestic abuse is a significant matter of public health, has a huge impact on society and is one of the most pervasive of all social problems. It causes long term pain and suffering for those affected and their families, resulting in significant cost to public services and the local community. It is often a hidden crime that disproportionately affects women, with people experiencing domestic abuse often reluctant to report their situation.
3. This report and appendices refer to those who have experienced domestic abuse (DA) as “victims” as this is a widely understood term and is used in many publicly available reports. It is recognised that this terminology can be controversial, and different people may have preferences for other terms. The decision to use the term “victim” is purely for clarity and not an indication that other terms are not valid.
4. The Safe Lives prevalence tool uses data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales merged with local population and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) data to capture a true understanding of the prevalence of domestic abuse in a local area. The latest available data (year ending 2020 due to a period of suspended data collection during COVID-19) estimates that:
  - a. There are 25,000 adult victims in Herefordshire who have experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives since aged 16
  - b. Of the total estimated adult victims 19,000 (68%) are female
  - c. 8,000 victims have experienced domestic abuse in the last year, of these 68% were female
  - d. Only a third of female victims and a quarter of male victims in the past year were ‘visible’ (visible relates to the number of victims who told a support professional organisation).
  - e. 4,500 children were living in a household with domestic abuse present in the last year
  - f. 4,500 people were using abusive behaviours in their intimate partner relationships in the past year, of these 20% were estimated to be serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.
5. People who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse may be affected in a number of ways, including significant and lasting impact on their physical and mental health, homelessness, loss of income or work and isolation from families and friends. Children can experience both short and long-term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects as a result of witnessing or being victim to domestic abuse.
6. The strategy has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders through the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, using data obtained and analysed for the Needs Assessment and incorporating qualitative data gathered from practitioners and people with lived experience of domestic abuse in Herefordshire.
7. The strategy will be implemented and monitored via an action plan held by the Local Partnership Board.
8. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 addresses the impact of domestic abuse on children recognising that witnessing abuse can have long-term effects on their health and development.
9. The Domestic Abuse Strategy highlights the significant impact of domestic abuse on the mental health and well-being of victims. It emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to address the physical, psychological and emotional health consequences of domestic abuse.

10. The strategy outlines several priorities and actions aimed at improving the health outcomes of domestic abuse victims. These include investing in specialist domestic abuse roles, promoting healthy relationships education in schools, and developing social media campaigns to support wider understanding of domestic abuse.

### **Community impact**

11. By adopting and working in partnership to deliver the Domestic Abuse Strategy, the work is directly contributing to the Health and Wellbeing Board's core priorities as well as the Council Plan 2024-2028 priority area 1; People – We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.
12. More generally, this strategy positively impacts on priorities within the Council Plan including enabling people to access the housing they need, supporting people to feel safe in their communities and supporting all children to have the best start in life. As well as complementing the work of Talk Community in developing children and family community support.
13. The revised strategy is also directly relevant to the council's corporate parenting responsibilities, as nationally, incidence of domestic abuse is reported to be highest amongst 16 to 25 year olds. In addition, a significant proportion of care experienced children and young people are victims of domestic abuse.

### **Environmental impact**

14. 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.
15. Whilst the strategy will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy such as sustainable approach to the Local Partnership Board meetings etc.

### **Equality duty**

16. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
17. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this policy and it has been found to have high impact for equality.
18. Due to the scope of this policy and its potential impact on certain protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is attached as an appendix to this report.
19. In summary, this activity impacts on protected characteristics as follows:
  - a. *Age*. According to the needs assessment carried out in 2024, half of all victims of recorded domestic abuse offences were aged 25-44 years, with the median age of victims being 30. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 highlights the significant impact domestic abuse can have on children and young people, including their health, wellbeing, and development. The act also discusses the unique challenges faced by older victims of domestic abuse, such as dependency on the abuser for care and the potential for abuse to be overlooked or misinterpreted as age-related issues.
  - b. *Disability*. The needs assessment shows a significant number of domestic abuse victims are

disabled. Also, that 68% of disabled people referred to West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) had mental health issues. Additionally, over 50% of victims supported by the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service in 2022/23 were recorded as disabled. Data suggests that disabled people may be more vulnerable to domestic abuse due to factors such as communication barriers, social isolation, and dependency on the abuser for care.

c. *Marriage and Civil Partnerships*. The domestic abuse act defines "personally connected" individuals as those who are married to each other, civil partners of each other, have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated), have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated), are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other, have or have had a parental relationship in relation to the same child, or are relatives.

d. *Pregnancy and Maternity*. The needs assessment shows over three-quarters of the people accessing refuge were either pregnant (12%) or had children in the household (65%).

e. *Sex*. SafeLives, a leading domestic abuse charity, estimate that around 8,000 people a year in Herefordshire experience domestic abuse: 5,500 (68%) females and 2,500 (32%) males. The local needs assessment data confirms that the majority of domestic abuse victims are female.

f. *Others*. The local needs assessment shows a notable link between domestic abuse and deprivation, with over 40% of all domestic abuse offences and incidents recorded in the most deprived parts of Herefordshire. There are challenges in accessing support services, particularly for those in rural areas. Rural victims are half as likely to report their abuse and face significant barriers in accessing support services.

g. *Health Inequalities*. The Domestic Abuse act addresses the impact of domestic abuse on children recognising that witnessing abuse can have long-term effects on their health and development. The Domestic Abuse Strategy also highlights the significant impact of domestic abuse on the health and wellbeing of victims. It emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to address the physical, psychological, and emotional health consequences of domestic abuse.

20. The risks to equality impacts are mitigated through the Domestic Abuse Strategy. Decisions that inform the strategy are made by the council based upon its consultation with the Local Partnership Board, the needs assessment and further consultee responses. The Board takes a strategic and multi-agency approach to sharing knowledge and intelligence, identifying and, where possible, addressing gaps in support and prevention.
21. The council recognises the fact that domestic abuse has a huge impact on the lives of victims and is committed to listening and engaging with those with lived experience and supported by expert evidence base, to continuously learn and improve.
22. The council also acknowledges the gendered nature of domestic abuse but works to ensure our local response is accessible to all regardless of gender and other protected characteristics.

## Resource implications

23. There are no direct financial implications for the council arising from the strategy. However, the Domestic Abuse Strategy requires the council to take action in collaboration with partner organisations including those actions which are mandatory under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This has and will be achieved through the established services commissioned by the council and additional grant resources provided by the government.
24. Domestic abuse provision in Herefordshire is also supported by funding from other public bodies, notably the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). That funding supports

Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and the perpetrator intervention programmes, Drive and Men and Masculinity. The PCC commissions these services directly

### **Legal implications**

25. The Council is required to appoint a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board under Section 58 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This Board must be consulted during the production of the Domestic Abuse Strategy, as required by Section 57. There is a requirement to submit an annual report to the Secretary of State confirming that a local partnership board has been appointed, a local needs assessment has been undertaken and the strategy is in place and operating effectively.

### **Risk management**

26. The risks associated with the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025–2028 have been appropriately identified and will be monitored through the council's governance and partnership arrangements. The strategy will be supported by a clear action plan, and risks will be recorded and escalated through the relevant risk registers and partnership boards. The approach taken aligns with the council's Risk Management Strategy and provides assurance that delivery will be monitored and managed in a controlled and proportionate manner.

<p><u>Opportunity</u> Strategy priorities need to be embedded across all partner organisations and progress needs to be measurable.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> A clear action plan has been developed to deliver the priorities of the strategy. Partner organisations will be accountable through the Local Partnership Board.</p>
<p><u>Opportunity</u> The strategy provides a clear statement of the council's intention to, and a mechanism for, working together with partners to protect people from domestic abuse and prevent it from happening in the first place.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> A communication plan will be developed with the local partnership board to further enable a joint approach to prevention campaigns alongside a detailed action plan to develop the priorities within the strategy including enabling the right support at the right time for adults, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.</p>
<p><u>Risk</u> Lack of good quality data for needs assessment to inform strategy, action plan and subsequent commissioning of services remains a concern.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> The local partnership board will continue to work together to address gaps in data and seek new and efficient ways to capture and share data pertinent to demographics, prevalence and prevention activities.</p>
<p><u>Risk</u> Inconsistent commitment or resource allocation from partner organisations, although accountability is outlined through the partnership board there may be variability in capacity, funding or priorities across agencies.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> Formalise partner responsibilities through the partnership board in the action plan and monitor delivery via agreed performance measures. Encourage continued senior-level engagement across all partners.</p>
<p><u>Risk</u> External funding pressures or shifts in national policy priorities Changes in government policy or reductions in grant funding could limit the council or partners' ability to deliver the full scope of the strategy.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> Regular review of funding opportunities and strategic alignment with national policy. Contingency planning should be built into the strategy's delivery approach.</p>
<p><u>Risk</u> Lack of engagement with under-represented groups or hard-to-reach communities Some communities affected by domestic abuse may remain invisible to services if engagement methods are not inclusive.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> Incorporate specific actions within the delivery plan to improve engagement and trust with marginalised or seldom-heard groups. Co-produce elements of service design where possible.</p>
<p><u>Risk</u> Reputational risk if strategic outcomes are not delivered. Failure to demonstrate impact could reduce public confidence and risk future funding bids or scrutiny.</p>	<p><u>Mitigation</u> Ensure that progress is measurable, with transparent reporting and clear outcome indicators embedded in the action plan.</p>

## Consultees

27. Stakeholder consultation was carried out during 2024. A detailed coproduction process has been completed with people with lived experience of domestic abuse which has directly

informed the priorities and actions in the strategy. A public consultation was completed in February 2025.

28. Consultation took place with political groups on 19 June 2025. The strategy was supported by attendees. Discussion included the interconnectivity of domestic abuse with other issues such as drug and alcohol use and mental health, the ongoing need for appropriate housing for victims of domestic abuse and some suggestions for future invitations for the Local Partnership Board to include We Are Farming Minds and the NFU. Queries were raised in relation to the vision and the effective measurement of success, these were all resolved satisfactorily during the meeting.
29. At the full Council meeting on 10 October 2025 a question was raised relating to the title of the strategy and whether this should include 'prevention'. Whilst there are a number of compelling reasons to include this in the title it is felt that including this phrase alone may narrow the perceived scope of the strategy which has been developed to capture the prevalence and consequence as well as prevention objectives. In addition, given the emphasis of the strategy and the DA legislation on capturing the voices of those with lived experience there is a risk of unintentionally minimising those experiences by appearing to be only future focussed rather than acknowledging there continue to be urgent needs of victims and survivors today. It is felt overall that a broader title encompasses the full spectrum of the strategy and is inclusive of the activities of all partners who contribute to the delivery plan, however to ensure that our intentions are clear the title of the strategy has been updated to 'Tackling Domestic Abuse'.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Tackling Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025-2028  
Appendix 2 – Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire Final Needs Assessment 2024  
Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment  
Appendix 4 – Presentation slides

## **Background papers**

None identified.