

Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Domestic Abuse

29 September 2021

Recommendation(s)

1. Recommendation 1: Adult Overview and Scrutiny Committee note Warwickshire's position and response to Domestic Abuse as outlined in the report.
2. Recommendation 2: Adult Overview and Scrutiny Committee support the future plans of the partnership outlined in section 8.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of our Domestic Abuse position and response in Warwickshire. Partnership working is central to an effective response and characterises Warwickshire's approach and recognised good practice.
- 1.2 This report covers the following:
 - What is domestic abuse?
 - Warwickshire's Domestic Abuse Service
 - Demand, need and performance in Warwickshire
 - Warwickshire's partnership response to domestic abuse
 - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
 - Improvement activity underway and planned
 - Future plans
- 1.3 Appendix A provides details of how domestic abuse can be reported and support services available for anyone that is a victim of abuse or has concerns about family, friends or colleagues that are / or may be a victim of domestic abuse.

2. What is Domestic Abuse?

- 2.1 Domestic abuse (DA) causes significant harm to individuals, children, families, and communities. The scale and impact is vast. In Warwickshire, in 2020/21 almost 11,500 DA incidents were reported to the Police. Warwickshire's commissioned Domestic Abuse Service supported 915 victims-survivors in the community and 79 victim-survivors in refuge accommodation. 30 - 40% of victims experienced DA multiple times. DA has a lasting impact on physical and mental health, as well as resulting in financial and housing insecurity.

2.2 Warwickshire County Council and its partners recognise the government definition of domestic abuse which is outlined in the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act¹. The new definition emphasises that domestic abuse is not only physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse. Behaviour is classed as “domestic abuse” if:

- Both individuals are each over 16 years of age
- Both individuals are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

2.3 Furthermore, behaviour is considered abusive when it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse

3. The Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Service

3.1 Warwickshire County Council, in partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire (OPCC) and Coventry and Warwickshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), commissions a Domestic Abuse Service which is provided by Refuge and includes the following support for victim-survivors:

- 24 units of refuge accommodation and re-settlement support
- Domestic Abuse Community Support Services:
 - A Single Point of Contact / Helpline – to provide victim-survivors, concerned family and friends and professionals advice and information. This includes risk assessments and immediate safety planning for victim-survivors.
 - 1:1 support for victim-survivors either via Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) or outreach workers
 - Outreach / floating support – drop-in sessions and recovery group programmes
 - Health advocate educators – 1:1 support to victim-survivors who make disclosures to health care staff and training and awareness raising for health care staff
 - Sanctuary Scheme (home security and target hardening)
 - Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference Coordination – a meeting where agencies agree actions to reduce harm and increase safety of high-risk victims and implement actions to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour.
 - Training and awareness raising for professionals on domestic abuse.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/section/1/enacted>

3.2 Following a re-commissioning process, Refuge have been awarded the contract to deliver Domestic Abuse Services from 1st October 2021. The new contract includes continuation of the above services and enhancements to the outreach offer and domestic abuse worker support across primary and secondary care health settings.

4. Demand, need and performance

4.1 The scale and impact of domestic abuse on adult and child victim-survivors, family member and friends is extensive. This has been evidenced by Warwickshire's Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and Warwickshire's Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. These were undertaken to improve the Council's understanding of the current position in Warwickshire and to inform plans for reducing the harmful impact of domestic abuse on adult and child victim-survivors and their families.

4.2 Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2021 and the Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment 2021 found:

- There were an estimated 23,500 cases of Domestic Abuse (DA) in 2019 in adults aged between 16-74 years in Warwickshire. Out of the estimated 23,500 cases, this is made up of approximately 15,600 females and 7,800 males.
- Nuneaton and Bedworth have a higher rate of DA offences (13.29 per 1,000 people) compared to the other four district / boroughs, whilst Stratford-on-Avon has the lowest rate (7.36 per 1,000 people).
- Between 30-40% of victims in Warwickshire in 2019 have experienced DA multiple times.
- For the vast majority of DA offences no action is taken despite having evidence and a named suspect because the victim didn't want to pursue it. This suggests that two thirds of DA perpetrators in Warwickshire are not being brought to justice.
- The Police refer the largest proportion of people to the Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Service, with the second highest proportion being self-referrals.
- In 2020/21, 420 households presented to Warwickshire District and Borough housing teams as homeless due to domestic abuse. Almost one third of all children in families presenting as homeless as a result of DA, were under 5 years old highlighting how frequently young families are affected by DA.
- Victim-survivors had varied experiences of accessing safe accommodation, temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation within the county.

- There needs to be more of a focus on the victim-survivor's experience and empowering them to make decisions for themselves and greater consideration of the child(ren)'s needs and perspectives.

The needs assessments have revealed what Warwickshire partners must do to improve the offer for victim-survivors and their families.

5. Warwickshire's partnership response to Domestic Abuse

5.1 Warwickshire's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Board and Sub-Groups

Warwickshire's strategic response to Domestic Abuse sits under the remit of the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Board which is accountable to the Safer Warwickshire Partnership Board (SWPB). The multi-agency Board's focus is on the following areas of violence:

- Domestic Abuse
- Sexual Violence
- Sexual Exploitation
- Harmful Practices (including Forced marriage, 'Honour' based violence, Female genital mutilation and Faith based abuse)

The VAWG Board has several multi-agency sub-groups which are responsible for delivering actions to improve Warwickshire's response to domestic abuse as well as the broader VAWG agenda. This will include responding to the findings of the domestic abuse needs assessments, where relevant. The sub-groups are:

- Emerging Trends – Multi-agency monthly meeting to review domestic abuse trends using partnership performance data. This is used to inform agency responses to best support victims and hold perpetrators to account, inform resourcing decisions and inform communications campaigns that increase the awareness and understanding of domestic abuse.
- Domestic Abuse Partnership Communications Group – The group has developed and is overseeing the implementation of an annual plan delivering awareness messages around domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, Harmful Practices (Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Honour and Faith Based Abuse). The communications plan also includes raising awareness and understanding of the new Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the impact it will have on victims, perpetrators and agencies in Warwickshire.
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Steering Group – Oversees the effectiveness of the MARAC process which is a multi-

agency approach to reviewing high risk cases of domestic abuse, identifying and agreeing actions to increase victim safety and reduce the threat of the perpetrator.

- Domestic Homicide Review Sub-Group – Oversees the implementation of the recommendations from completed Warwickshire Domestic Homicide Reviews.
- Safe Accommodation Working Group – The Group’s purpose is to successfully identify, develop and implement plans to meet the Safe Accommodation Duty associated with the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).
- Domestic Abuse Partnership Commissioning Group – The Group’s purpose is to identify, develop and undertake commissioning and service development opportunities to prevent and reduce domestic abuse in Warwickshire
- Harmful Practices Group – The group works to prevent and tackle specific forms of violence including but not limited to: Forced marriage, ‘Honour’ based abuse, Female genital mutilation, and faith-based abuse.
- Coventry and Warwickshire Sexual Violence Partnership Board – The group leads the implementation of the national Sexual Assault and Abuse Strategy (SAAS) in Warwickshire. The group is representative of providers from both statutory and voluntary/community sector working together on the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of all services within this remit.
- Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Group (RASSO) – A police led group that oversees and coordinates partnership work around the prevention, investigation and prosecution of rape and serious sexual offences in Warwickshire, and the support provided to victims, witnesses and suspects throughout.

5.2 COVID impact

In March 2020, the UK went into a national lockdown in response to the COVID pandemic. WCC and its partners recognised that restrictions posed a significant risk to victim-survivors in terms of:

- A reduction in opportunities for victim-survivors to reach out for support,
- A need to ensure that victim-survivors at risk of harm knew that the “stay at home” order did not apply to them,
- Restrictions being used as a means of control by perpetrators,

From a service perspective there was a need to understand what was happening (in relation to the volume of domestic abuse and level of unmet need) and a need to ensure that services had the capacity to respond and maintain service delivery.

5.3 COVID response

A collective understanding of performance, emerging trends and service capacity was identified as a priority to inform decisions about how to respond effectively.

- **WCC introduced a Key Business Measure: “No. of DA offences and crimed incidents reported to the Police”.** A target was set to increase this year on year, in recognition of the significant under-reporting of DA that our needs assessments revealed.
- **A partnership monthly emerging trend performance report** was established which pulled together Police DA reported incidents, referrals and capacity of our DA service provider, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference data, housing data (homelessness presentations as a result of DA) and criminal justice data.
- **An ‘Emerging Trends’ meeting was established** – This consisted of Warwickshire Police, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Warwickshire, Criminal Justice, Warwickshire’s Domestic Abuse Service, health partners and district and county council representatives. The purpose of the group was to share information and agree responses initially on a weekly, then a fortnightly basis.
- **A COVID communications plan was delivered** to increase awareness and referrals from professionals and the public, this included campaigns such as #youarenotalone.
- **Responding to issues and risks** – Collective responses were agreed to a range of issues including, but not limited to: maximising referrals to the DA Service from professionals through awareness raising webinars, addressing move-on challenges (from refuge accommodation), clarifying and communicating that the Police would still arrest perpetrators who stated that they had COVID and ensuring sufficient capacity in the DA service when restrictions eased in preparation for the expected increase in referrals.
- **Funding** – Partners collaborated and maximised funding opportunities via WCC and Warwickshire OPCC to fund additional capacity within the Domestic Abuse service to ensure that demand for support could be met and the resilience of the service maintained.

5.4 2020-21 Performance during COVID restrictions

For 2020-21, the target of increasing the number of DA incidents and crimed offences that were reported to Warwickshire police has been achieved. 11,222 DA incidents and crime offences were reported in 2019/20 in comparison to 11,357 in 2020/21².

5.5 Alongside an increase in the number of incidents reported to the Police, our commissioned Domestic Abuse Service supported an increased number of victim-survivors:

- In 2019/20, 786 victim-survivors were supported in the community and 73 victim-survivors were supported in refuge accommodation
- In 2020/21, 915 victim-survivors were supported in the community and 79 victim-survivors were supported in refuge accommodation

5.6 In the context of the significant restrictions placed on victim-survivors and services, the Emerging Trends partnership group believe that the sustained communications and awareness raising approach, has resulted in these increases. Warwickshire's Domestic Abuse Service was able to respond to this increase in referrals, due to the increases in service capacity funded by WCC and grants available via Warwickshire OPCC.

5.7 As of August 2021, in line with seasonal trends and easing of pandemic restrictions, recorded DA offences and crimed incidents continue to be reported in high volumes across the county. This is likely to continue over the next month. The majority of these reports were medium risk, with reductions in high-risk incidents compared to last year. The Emerging Trends group continues to monitor and respond to changing trends.

6. The Domestic Abuse Act

6.1 Introduction

On 29th April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act received royal assent. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced tools and powers³ that positively impact on Warwickshire's victims-survivors, their children and perpetrators. According to Victoria Atkins MP, Minister for Safeguarding:

*"This landmark Bill will help transform the response to domestic abuse, helping to prevent offending, protect victims and ensure they have the support they need."*⁴

The Act seeks to:

1. Raise the awareness and understanding of the devastating impact of domestic violence and abuse on victims and their families.

² Multiple incidents of DA can be reported for a single victim.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-overarching-factsheet>

⁴ *ibid*

2. Improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic violence and abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.
3. Strengthen the support available to victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

The Act introduces specific new duties for all tier 1 local authorities to provide “Safe Accommodation and Support”.

6.2 Tier 1 Local Authorities – New Safe Accommodation Duty

The Act places a duty on up upper-tier local authorities to convene a multi-agency Local Partnership Board (LPB) to:

- **Assess the need and demand for accommodation-based support** for all victims and their children, including those who require cross-border support (via a Safe Accommodations specific Needs Assessment)
- **Develop and publish strategies for the provision of support** to cover the locality and diverse groups of victims (a Safe Accommodation Strategy **must** be in place by October 2021).
- **Give effect to strategies by making commissioning decisions**
- **Meet the support needs of victim – survivors and their children**
- **Monitor and evaluate local delivery**, reporting back to central Government
- **Maintain compliance between Tier one and Tier two Local Authorities**

6.3 Safe Accommodation Funding

Under new burdens finding, the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued a section 31 grant to WCC which provided additional funding to deliver the Safe Accommodation duty – this will be allocated towards the delivery of the Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Strategy. WCC has been allocated £1.04m. Between them, Warwickshire Districts and Borough Councils have been allocated approximately £170k.

6.4 Progress to date – Capacity Building Fund

The MHCLG allocated £50,000 of ‘*Capacity Building*’ funding to local authorities to support preparatory work for implementing the Act. This funding has been used to conduct the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment, provide additional training and awareness raising on the Act for partners, practitioners, and Elected Members and communication of the Act to partner agencies and the public.

6.5 Progress to date – meeting new Tier 1 Safe Accommodation and Support duties

- In December 2020, the Warwickshire Violence Against Women and Girls Board (VAWG) Board approved incorporating the above requirements for

a Local Partnership Board within its current functions. The VAWG Board is therefore now operating as the Local Partnership Board.

- A Safe Accommodation Working Group (SAWG) has been established which consists of multi-agency partners. The group has met monthly to provide input and insight into work to meet the new Safe Accommodation Duty. This includes delivering:
 - A Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment – This has highlighted demand, gaps and improvements required to ensure Warwickshire has good Safe Accommodation and Support options in place for victim-survivors.
 - A Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Strategy. WCC has a statutory duty to have a Safe Accommodation Strategy in place by October 2021. The Strategy has been considered by and received support from:
 - Warwickshire Violence Against Women and Girls Board
 - Safer Warwickshire Partnership Board
 - WCC Corporate BoardThe strategy was agreed by WCC Cabinet on 9th September 2021.

6.6 Warwickshire's Safe Accommodation Strategy

The objectives of the Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024 are:

1. Early intervention and prevention: victim-survivors (adults and children) are supported at an early stage and provided with options to remain safe at home to prevent homelessness. Includes holding perpetrators to account for their behaviour.
2. Accessible services: victim-survivors and professionals know how to access safe accommodation options, both within and outside of Warwickshire
3. Appropriate safe accommodation: accommodation options and appropriate support is in place for all victim-survivors who need it.
4. Multiagency delivery: victim-survivors needs will be met by effective, collaborative multi-agency support.
5. Support to return home or move on: victim-survivors are supported to return home safely and/or move into alternative permanent accommodation.

Options for using the Safe Accommodation new burdens funding, to meet gaps identified in the Safe Accommodation Strategy are in development. This includes:

- Enhancing the current Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support contract to improve support for child victim-survivors living in our refuge accommodation and adult and child victim-survivors in temporary accommodation,
- Developing a new model of dispersed Safe Accommodation and Support (dispersed self-contained safe accommodation and support across the county),
- Increasing specialist DA counselling and therapeutic support for adult and child victim-survivors.

Market engagement events are planned for September with Domestic Abuse providers, housing providers, developers and counselling and therapy providers. The purpose will be to gain input and feedback on the Warwickshire Safe Accommodation Strategy and how gaps in provision can be addressed.

The Council's approach has and continues to be shaped by meetings held with neighbouring local authorities, MHCLG representatives, the LGA and the new National Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office.

7. Delivering improvement – Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan

7.1 In 2019, Warwickshire commissioned an independent review of partnership responses to Domestic Abuse. Since then, the partnership has focused on delivering a range of work to address the areas identified as needing improvement. This work has been delivered during COVID 19 in the context of significant operational challenges of providing safe and responsive services. It is testament to the commitment of the partnership to improve the lives of victim-survivors in Warwickshire.

7.2 Successes include:

- Implementation of the Caring Dads programme within Children's Services
- Expanding the Domestic Abuse Team in Children's Social Care to enhance the offer for children and families
- Expanding the number of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates within the commissioned Domestic Violence Service to bring it in line with Safelives⁵ recommended best practice.
- Establishing:
 - The Domestic Abuse Communication Group to deliver communications campaigns to increase awareness of DA and services available during restrictions.
 - The Domestic Abuse partnership commissioning group to oversee the recommissioning of Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Services

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- Warwickshire has commissioned and participated in two independent reviews which are nearing completion, next steps will be to implement the recommendations. The reviews are:
 - Independent Review of the Warwickshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference.
 - Independent Review of Warwickshire’s response to Perpetrators.

8. Future plans

8.1 Warwickshire partners are committed to listening to victim-survivors and using their experience and feedback to continue to improve the way services are commissioned and delivered. The priorities to be delivered over the next 12 months include:

- Mobilising the new Warwickshire Domestic Violence Service contract and enhancements planned for new the service.
- Delivering the priorities identified within the Safe Accommodation Strategy including:
 - Increased safe accommodation and support provision
 - Increased specialist domestic abuse counselling and therapy for adults and children
- Implementing the recommendations from the independent review of the MARAC and the independent review of Warwickshire’s response to perpetrators.
- Enhancing the provision for male victim-survivors of domestic abuse
- Continuing to deliver the communications plan including targeted campaigns at specific groups / communities to increase awareness and referrals for support.
- Developing a partnership Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- Delivering the remaining activity within the Warwickshire Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan including a Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy for WCC.

9. Summary position

Through our discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the LGA, the national DA Commissioners Office and other local authorities, we have been assured that WCC is making good progress to meet the new duties of the Domestic Abuse Act and make improvements to the support offer for adult and child victim-survivors in Warwickshire.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1 – Support Available for Victim-Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Background Papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): None

Other members: Councillors Bell, Crump, Drew, Golby, Holland and Rolfe