

Cabinet

16 November 2021

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities – Councillor A S Khan

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan

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**Is this a key decision?**

Yes - the proposals are likely to have a significant impact on residents or businesses in two or more electoral wards in the City

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**Executive Summary:**

Domestic abuse is a manifestation of one-person (or persons) exerting power and control over another with whom they share a personal connection. Domestic abuse can take many forms including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, economic and emotional abuse. It also includes honour-based violence, forced marriage, other culturally recognised forms of abuse and a range of controlling and coercive behaviours. Preventing harm from Domestic Abuse is a priority within Coventry and is a key measure within the One Coventry Plan. Coventry's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018 – 2023 outlines the city's approach to addressing domestic abuse, including honour-based violence and forced marriage.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. The Act provides, for the first time, a statutory definition of domestic abuse and delivers a number of significant changes to improve the protection of victims within the community and the criminal justice system. Cabinet received a report in June 2021 outlining the new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Work on the new duties has commenced. A new statutory board, the "Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board" has been established. A needs assessment has been carried out, including extensive consultation with survivors, domestic abuse service providers and stakeholders. Recommendations have been reviewed within the context of the current Coventry Domestic Abuse strategy and an action plan has been developed. New services for victims and their children have been commissioned.

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) Note the findings and recommendations of the needs assessment.
- 2) Acknowledge the findings of the needs assessment, strategy refresh and action plan under the duties set out by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- 3) Approve the strategy refresh and action plan which includes provision of support for victims and their children in line with the duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- 4) Approve the extension of the current overarching Coventry Domestic Abuse Strategy to 2025
- 5) Note progress in commissioning support services for victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation to fulfil the functions of the Act using the grant of £849,930 in 2021/2022 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1 – Needs assessment – executive summary, key findings and recommendations  
Appendix 2 – Action Plan  
Appendix 3 - Coventry Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018-2023: Addendum and Extension to 2025

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

Coventry Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018 – 2023  
[https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/27376/domestic\\_abuse\\_strategy\\_2018-2023](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/27376/domestic_abuse_strategy_2018-2023)

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

## Report title: Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan

### 1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Domestic abuse is a manifestation of one-person (or persons) exerting power and control over another with whom they share a personal connection.
- 1.2 Preventing harm from domestic abuse is a priority within Coventry and is a key measure within the One Coventry Plan. The Coventry Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018- 2023 outlines Coventry's approach to addressing domestic abuse which includes honour-based violence, forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- 1.3 In 2019/20, there were 29.7 domestic abuse related incidents and crimes in the West Midlands Police area per 1,000 population (source: Office for National Statistics). This has risen by 26% since 2015/16 and is above the national average of 28 incidents and crimes per 1,000 population. The under-reporting of domestic abuse is well documented and the actual level of victimisation in the city will be higher.
- 1.4 The COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on domestic abuse victimisation. Control measures put in place to limit infection have also reduced the time and space for victims to seek help, has been used as a tool for further abusive behaviours and placed a number of additional pressures on families and individuals. Other measures – such as legislation to protect people from being evicted from their homes under the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the impact of Coronavirus on Court proceedings, including changes to how some proceedings are conducted and a delay in cases being heard in Court, in both criminal and civil proceedings has meant that different parts of the local system have experienced differing trends of victimisation and demand. Domestic abuse is also an issue in relation to adult safeguarding and is one of the categories of abuse identified under the care act 2014.

Overall, levels of reported domestic abuse increased significantly during the first lockdown in May and June 2020 and have remained broadly stable at this higher level. Police, commissioned services and Children's Services all reflect higher levels of demand and an increase in the level of case complexity and risk.

- 1.5 During 2018/19 the average number of monthly reports involving domestic abuse to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was 326. Between April 2020 and March 2021 this rose to a monthly average of 415 reports per month, a 27% increase on the two previous years as shown in the table below:

Average per month	Apr 18 – Mar 19	Apr 19 – Mar 20	Apr 20 – Mar 21
DA referrals	326	327	415
Total referrals	1263	1551	1748
% of referrals that are DA	26%	21%	24%

- 1.6 Police report that while acquisitive and other crimes are falling, domestic abuse continues to show increased reporting – data up to the beginning of December 2020 showed that reporting increased by 45% compared to the previous year. Measuring accurate levels of domestic abuse is complex. The recent CREST report commissioned by West Midlands Police to explain the increased reporting states that the risk is likely to be due to an increased awareness of domestic abuse, as well as better police recording practices following the Home Office Crime Data Integrity Inspections together with changes in legislation. The trajectory of increase in the rate of domestic abuse-related crimes

recorded by police in the West Midlands Police is in line with its MSF (Most Similar Force) areas. During the pandemic the West Midlands saw a significant increase in domestic abuse which was not seen nationally but echoed in at least five other PFAs (Police Force Area's). Initial findings from London City University and the University of Durham suggest that the pandemic 'exposed, rather than created the domestic abuse crisis' i.e. it may be that these areas were particularly good at encouraging reporting during this time.

- 1.7 Calls to the local Safe to Talk helpline have fluctuated significantly throughout the year, reflecting the changes in freedom and ability for victims to seek help and concerns from professionals and other third parties like neighbours during the various periods of heightened restrictions over the course of the pandemic. On average, calls to the helpline are about 20 – 25%% higher than in the period prior to the pandemic.
- 1.8 Similarly, since the end of the initial UK lockdown in June 2020, demand on specialist domestic abuse services has fluctuated, reflecting victims' ability to access support, but has remained at levels significantly greater than those recorded pre-COVID. Average monthly referrals to Coventry Haven's community outreach support (providing safety planning and other community-based support for people not involved in civil or criminal court proceedings) numbered 113 between April 2020 and June 2021, twice the average monthly referrals than the previous 6 months (56).
- 1.9 During the pandemic, the City Council invested additional resources in schemes to protect victims, including:
  - creating 7 additional temporary units of specialist accommodation for 12 months from July 2020
  - safeguarding 35 units of accommodation within the voluntary and community sector
  - temporarily continuing 13 further units of accommodation previously funded using short term government grant otherwise due to close in March 2021
  - employing 3 additional domestic abuse specialists to be co-located with the police and provide an immediate response to victims for a 2-year pilot
  - employing a 0.5FTE worker to create and support a new network of domestic abuse leads within frontline services.
  - Additional funding for counselling for victims of sexual violence to tackle the waiting list backlog
- 1.10 The Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. The aims of the Act are to:
  - Raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.
  - Further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.
  - Strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies
  - The Act also specifically makes provision for, amongst other things, the establishment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner. It seeks to specifically make provision about certain offences and abusive behaviour, committed even outside the United Kingdom. .
- 1.11 Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 the duties of the Local Authority include
  - assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based support in its area,
  - prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and
  - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
  - a duty to appoint the multi-agency The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.
  - a duty to provide accommodation-based support to victims and their children in refuges and safe accommodation,

- and report back to central government, and a duty to give effect to the strategy.
- 1.12 Cabinet received a paper detailing the requirements of the Act in June 2021 with recommendations to:
- approve the creation of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board as a statutory board of the local authority, in line with the duty upon the Local Authority to do so within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;
  - approve acceptance of the grant of £849,930 in 2021/2022 for to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation;
  - note the Council's new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

## **2. Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board**

- 2.1 Local authorities are required to establish a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board as a statutory board of the Council. The purpose of this new statutory board is to provide advice to the local authority in relation to domestic abuse - as a minimum to provide advice on its duties to:
- assess the need for domestic abuse support in its area
  - prepare and publish a strategy to provide support
  - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
  - consider the local authority's annual report to the new national Domestic Abuse Commissioner.
- 2.2 The Coventry Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board has been established and is chaired Cllr P Akhtar, Deputy Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities and meets bimonthly. The Act sets out statutory membership of the Board which includes people representing local authorities, victims and their children, domestic abuse charities or voluntary organisations, health care providers and the police or other criminal justice agencies. A head-teacher representative on the Board is currently being arranged.
- 2.3 A Task and Finish group (Our Voices) has been set up to look at how the voices of children and victims of domestic abuse are represented on the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. Members of the group represent Public Health, Children's Services Early Help, CCC Children's Champion, Panahghar, Relate, Valley House and Coventry Women's Aid.

## **3. Needs Assessment**

- 3.1 The Act places a duty upon local authorities to conduct a needs assessment for accommodation-based support each year and to publish a strategy to direct commissioning and decommissioning decisions for safe accommodation. The needs assessment was commissioned from S2 Analytics who worked closely with Local Authority officers, providers and other stakeholders.
- 3.2 The needs assessment incorporated a comprehensive engagement exercise which included surveys completed by 71 survivors and 51 practitioners, multiple focus groups and more than 30 interviews with stakeholders. The intelligence from this was supplemented with data from multiple sources and a literature review. While the initial focus of the needs assessment was on accommodation-based support, the information gathered enabled analysis of current needs across the wider agenda of domestic abuse. The full needs assessment can be found at:
- [https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/5118/domestic\\_abuse\\_strategy\\_2018-2023](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/5118/domestic_abuse_strategy_2018-2023)

3.3 The Executive Summary (appendix 1) contains the key findings and 23 recommendations across a number of areas:

- Criminal and civil justice system
- Perpetrators
- Health services
- Safe accommodation for victims and families
- Support for victims and their children
- Housing
- Individuals with no recourse to public funds or language challenges

3.4 These recommendations have been reviewed by a steering group of the Local Partnership Board and by the Board itself. A series of actions have been developed in response to the needs identified (included in Appendix 2) with lead agencies nominated to take the work forwards. Delivery of the action plan will be monitored by the Local Partnership Board, including full evaluation of commissioned services.

3.5 The needs assessment and action plan presented here are in response to the requirement of the new DA Act 2021 and sits alongside a broader action plan that encompasses other areas of business including prevention and early intervention, work within schools, training and additional wider work that is ongoing and sits under the DA Local Partnership Board

#### **4. Domestic Abuse Strategy Extension to 2025**

- 4.1 The Coventry Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018-2023 uses the 4P framework of Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue to support a systematic multi-agency approach to tackling Domestic Abuse.
- 4.2 This framework has been reviewed in light of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and a strategy addendum has been produced (appendix 3). The measures detailed in the Act fit within our current 4P framework. In addition, the recommendations and actions from the needs assessment all contribute to delivering one or more of the 4Ps as shown in the action plan in appendix 3.
- 4.3 It is proposed that the current Coventry Domestic Abuse Strategy is extended through to 2025, with the new action plan. This will allow officer and partner resource to be focused on delivering the actions from the needs assessment and initial evaluation of the impact of these. This will then feed into a full strategy refresh for 2025.

#### **5. Newly commissioned services**

- 5.1 The Act places a duty upon local authorities to provide safe accommodation for victims and their children, who are also defined as victims under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, dedicated specialist accommodation which meets specific domestic abuse quality standards and a range of specialist support for victims in safe accommodation. 'Sanctuary schemes', whereby victims are helped to remain in their own home by providing extra domestic security and support, are included within the definition of safe accommodation.
- 5.2 The Act requires that all victims in safe accommodation should have access to and places a duty upon the Local Authority to provide this support, which includes:
- advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers);

- domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation;
  - specialist support for victims with protected characteristics and/or complex needs, for example, interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice;
  - children’s support – including play therapy and child advocacy;
  - housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently; and
  - counselling and therapy for both adults and children.
- 5.3 The Government provided Coventry City Council with a grant of £849,930 in 2021/22 to “fulfil the functions of the new statutory duty on Tier 1 Local Authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within safe accommodation”. The funding for future years is dependent on the new burden assessment.
- 5.4 The report to Cabinet on 15 June 2021 set out initial proposals for commissioning services with this funding which have been further developed. The following additional provision has been commissioned using the grant:
- Continuation of funding of 13 units of accommodation previously funded by a limited-term MHCLG grant to 30 September 2022. This will maintain the number of commissioned units at 67
  - Introduction of a discretionary grant scheme to support victim/survivors in safe accommodation with a broader range of help including, for example, translation services and support to access move-on accommodation.
  - Widened eligibility of the current WISH service providing emotional and therapeutic support to children experiencing domestic abuse to all children in safe accommodation
  - Introduction of specialist legal support for all victims in safe accommodation with insecure immigration status in safe accommodation
  - Introduction of family support workers to provide a range of interventions with parents and children in specialist supported accommodation, including support in relation to parenting and encouraging good school attendance
  - Introduction of a specialist counselling and mental health support service for adult victims in safe accommodation
- 5.5 The above services have been commissioned for delivery up to September 2022 from existing City Council commissioned domestic abuse services including Haven, Valley House, Panahghar and Relate; the only exception to this is the procurement of specialist counselling for adult victims from Coventry and Warwickshire Mind. When there is clarity on future funding from the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review, a longer-term investment plan will be developed to ensure the duties of the Act are met. Full evaluation of services to measure delivery of quality outcomes will be part of the commissioning process.

## **6. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 6.1 The option to retain the current strategy end date of 2023 was considered. This would mean that work on the new strategy would have to start early in 2022. The needs assessment for the Act has been comprehensive, and both the requirements of the Act and the actions from the needs assessment all fit within the current 4Ps framework. Developing a new strategy is a significant project and it was felt that extending the current one would allow more time to implement the actions.

- 6.2 The option to spend the entire grant on commissioned services only through to the end of this financial year was considered. This option was rejected as future funding is still uncertain and it would not have been possible to commission the level of services needed on such a short contract. The grant has been used to commission services initially for 12 months. A small contingency fund has been established to mitigate any cost pressures this year, particularly in relation to the discretionary grant scheme. Funding plans will be reviewed once funding for future years has been clarified following the Government's comprehensive spending review.

## **7. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 7.1 The needs assessment includes significant consultation work with survivors, service providers and stakeholder. Consultation was undertaken through questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Detailed findings from the consultation are included in the full needs assessment. The results from the consultation were used along with the data and the evidence base to generate the key findings and recommendations.
- 7.2 The Domestic Abuse Act requires that the Local Partnership Board is consulted on the strategy for the provision of accommodation-based support in its area. Members of the Local Partnership Board were involved in the needs assessment. Initial findings were presented at the July Board meeting. A sub-group was convened to review the findings and recommendations, and to agree the action plan. The proposed Domestic Abuse strategy extension to 2025, the key findings from the needs assessment and the action plan were discussed and agreed at the September meeting of the Local Partnership Board.

## **8. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 8.1 The Strategy extension to 2025 and action plan will be implemented with immediate effect.

## **9. Comments from the Director of Finance and the Director of Law and Governance**

### **9.1 Financial implications**

The Government has provided Coventry City Council with a grant of £849,930 in 2021/22 for the purpose of and the expectation that the Council start to prepare and fulfil the relevant functions under the duty.

No funding has been provided beyond 2021/22 and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government state that any further funding would be confirmed as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Grant terms do not include a requirement for spend to be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, and as per paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5 above, the plan is to commit the grant over the period up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 to reflect time for the needs assessment to be used to drive the relevant commissioning activity as funding is confirmed in the longer term.

### **9.2 Legal implications**

The Domestic Abuse Act places a number of duties on the Local Authority as detailed within this report.



The establishment of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, which is a statutory board of the Council, has previously been approved and this has now been set up. The Board has a number of statutory functions as detailed within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and must be consulted with in respect of the strategy Cabinet is being asked to approve.

Before approving the strategy, Cabinet must be satisfied that the following have been consulted in accordance with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;

- (a) the domestic abuse local partnership board appointed by the relevant local authority under section 58,
- (b) any local authority for an area within the relevant local authority's area, and
- (c) such other persons as the relevant local authority considers appropriate.

Cabinet will note that the body of this report details that (a) above has been completed as the Domestic Local Partnership Board were consulted in respect of the strategy on the 15th June 2021 , and the requirement to consult in accordance with (b) above is not applicable as there is no other local authority within the area of Coventry City Council. (c) is detailed in 2.2 of this report.

## **10. Other implications**

### **10.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

The services support the One Coventry Plan vision to help to make communities safer, improve the health and wellbeing of local residents and protect our most vulnerable people by keeping children and adults safe from harm and improving services for people experiencing domestic abuse.

### **10.2 How is risk being managed?**

Key risks are:

- **Absence of future funding:** No 'additional burden' funding has been confirmed beyond 2021/22. The needs assessment in consultation with the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, will determine commissioning arrangements from 2022/23 onwards.
- **Increase in demand:** It is anticipated that the Act will increase and widen reporting of domestic abuse and increase demand on a range of services including specialist accommodation-based and community-based domestic abuse services, criminal justice agencies, social care, safeguarding and homelessness provision. The broader statutory definition of domestic abuse may increase the nature of victims who approach agencies for support; again, the impact of this will be monitored through existing forums and the new Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.

### **10.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

Domestic abuse is a significant issue for many functions of the City Council, including Adult's and Children's Services, Safeguarding, Housing, Health and Wellbeing and Community Safety. Domestic abuse is priority for the Council and is featured within the One Coventry Plan.

Delivery of the action plan will require working across these different functions and teams at both a strategic and an operational level.

#### **10.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this work. The needs assessment considered the needs of groups with protected characteristics. This will be considered further in the evaluation of services and the annual refresh of the needs assessment and strategy.

#### **10.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

There are no implications.

#### **10.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

Delivery of the strategy will require partnership working. Lead organisations have been identified in the action plan. The work will be overseen by the Local Partnership Board where partners are represented.

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