



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23 November 2021

REPORT TITLE:	DOMESTIC ABUSE ANNUAL REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an account of progress made by Wirral's Domestic Abuse Alliance in delivering the *Domestic Abuse- No Excuse* strategy and presents the Annual Report, a narrative from the frontline, on the positive impact the strategy is having.

Domestic abuse is a priority issue for all public services, with far-reaching implications and high cost to both the public purse and life chances. This report seeks to demonstrate how effective collaboration between residents, public services and community services in Wirral is leading to positive improvements in service delivery and outcomes.

The report details the organisational, structural and partnership activity undertaken over the previous 12 months. It explains how the Domestic Abuse Alliance's strategic approach is improving and increasing the partnership offer, is reaching more people and has maintained co-production. The Annual Report provides an alternative view of progress made, an impact statement from those who deliver and engage in domestic abuse support.

As with the *Domestic Abuse- No Excuse* strategy, the Annual Report is written directly to people affected by domestic abuse, in simple language and capturing experiences they may recognise and draw strength from.

The report and strategy are aligned to priorities of Wirral Council's Plan 2025:

- Working for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes and raising the aspirations of every child in Wirral
- Working for safe and pleasant communities where our residents feel safe, and where they want to live and raise their families

This matter affects residents across the borough.

This report does not relate to a key decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. Note and endorse the progress made by Wirral's Domestic Abuse Alliance in the first of its 5-year strategy.
2. Note and endorse the Domestic Abuse Annual Report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Bill received Royal Assent. The Domestic Abuse Act explicitly recognises children as victims if they see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse and includes a legal definition of domestic abuse which incorporates a range of abuses beyond physical violence including emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse. The Act seeks to provide protection to millions of people who experience domestic abuse and strengthens measures to tackle perpetrators. This report seeks to provide the Children, Young People and Education Committee that residents affected by domestic abuse are appropriately supported.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options have been considered.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In November 2020, Wirral's Domestic Abuse Alliance, a multi-agency partnership, launched its 5-year strategy, *Domestic Abuse-No Excuse*. The strategy set 5 priorities:

1. Be there when we are needed
2. Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma
3. Reduce opportunities for perpetrators to abuse
4. Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs
5. A better, kinder future of the next generation

- 3.2 Accompanying the strategy, a partnership delivery plan outlined 3 phases of activity:

- Phase 1 (Years 1 and 2)- Transformation phase
- Phase 2 (Year 3)- Adjustment phase
- Phase 3 (Years 4 and 5)- Embedding phase

As part of the transformation phase, year 1 has focused on making it easier for people to access support, ensuring there is help for anyone who needs it and improving their experience of services.

- 3.3 Following publication of the strategy and partnership delivery plan, the format, structure and purpose of the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Alliance was reviewed. The large steering group, with over-representation by Council Officers, was replaced by a streamlined Change Board, chaired by a third sector leader, and including membership of people affected by domestic abuse. Four subgroups, each with lay person membership, were established to report to the Change Board on the following areas:

1. *What We Do*- overseeing and co-ordinating the partnership support offer

2. *How Well We Do It (for people)*- providing direct feedback and advice from those using, or having previously used, services
3. *How Well We Do It (for professionals)*- co-ordinating workforce development and workforce support
4. *What Difference It Makes*- overseeing performance and quality assurance

- 3.3.1 The Change Board and its subgroups benefit from the support of a Practice Development Officer who co-ordinates activity across all groups, and a budget of £60k per year (for the period 2021-2025) allocated from the Supporting Families Service Transformation Grant. This provides the Domestic Abuse Alliance with the structure, resource, and capacity needed to operate effectively.
- 3.3.2 The #ItsNeverOk website, owned and managed by Wirral Council, has been updated and refreshed as part of the Domestic Abuse Alliance review. The website will be integral to the strategy, enabling communication between the subgroups, supporters, and people affected by domestic abuse.
- 3.4 A Voice Group has met regularly, providing peer support, and actively contributing to development and improvement, including: input to practitioner training programmes, advising on use of language, contributing to learning events, and submitting a response to the national consultation on Domestic Abuse Guidance. The Voice Group are scheduled to meet with Police Crime Commissioner, Emily Spurrell, to share their experience of being part of Wirral's Domestic Abuse Alliance.
- 3.5 Needs analysis conducted in 2019-2020 to inform the strategy identified a significant lack of domestic abuse perpetrator programmes. Whilst Wirral's offer to both male and female victims and survivors was strong, there was a gap in our local approach in taking action to prevent harm occurring in the first place. This has been addressed through successful applications to deliver evidenced-based interventions.
 - 3.5.1 In collaboration with the Drive Partnership, Wirral's Safer Communities Partnership and the National Lottery, a Drive programme for high-harm, high-risk perpetrators launched in the spring of 2021. This programme is part of the Phase 3 national roll-out and is the first to operate in Merseyside. Up to 125 domestic abuse perpetrators will participate over a 2.5-year period in Wirral.
 - 3.5.2 The aim of the Drive programme is to increase safety for victims and children by reducing abuse, specifically repeat and serial perpetration. Drive co-ordinates a multi-agency approach, with significant input from Police and Probation Services, to provide one-to-one support from a case manager intended to challenge, disrupt, and change behaviour.
 - 3.5.3 Wirral's Drive programme is part of a national evaluation, with support and access to a central team which provides oversight and performance monitoring.
 - 3.5.4 With Drive providing interventions for high-harm, high-risk perpetrators, the Domestic Abuse Alliance have collaborated to develop a pathway for early intervention. In summer 2021, the Domestic Abuse Alliance were successful in bidding for £200k from the Home Office, via the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner, from the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Fund.

- 3.5.5 The local collaboration includes: The Paul Lavelle Foundation, Involve Northwest, Tomorrow's Women Wirral, The Open Door Charity, Journey Men Wirral CIC, WEB Merseyside, Next Chapter, the Youth Justice Service, and Family Safety Unit. Together, the collaboration will:
- Train 12 workers in the *Caring Dads* programme and deliver 11 courses
 - Train 12 workers in the *Who's in Charge* programme and deliver 6 courses
 - Deliver *Fair Play* to young people across a wide range of further education and youth settings
 - Pilot the *Bridgeway* programme for 1 group in North Birkenhead
 - Provide wrap around support to 120 victims and their children
 - Provide access to peer support through *Leaf* operating at the Bloom Building
 - Produce guidance materials for professionals on working with male perpetrators who have parenting responsibilities
- 3.5.6 Learning from these courses will be used to inform future early intervention for domestic abuse perpetrators and is building capacity within the multi-agency partnership. Feedback from funders noted that the collaboration between organisations was very positive. Activity has commenced and will continue to 31st August 2022.
- 3.6 Co-production activity undertaken in 2019-20 highlighted the difficulties faced, in the main, by female parents who were involved in statutory child protection processes. The *Domestic Abuse-No Excuse* strategy captured their voice and experience of feeling 'blamed', 'judged', 'abandoned' and 'revictimised' by professionals, who were working to protect their children from risk and harm.
- 3.6.1 In direct response to this, a successful bid was made to *What Works for Children's Social Care* for £350k to pilot a new approach to delivering statutory interventions. In spring of 2021 the *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse* project was initiated, introducing 3.0 FTE Domestic Abuse Practice Professionals, 3.0 FTE Domestic Abuse Family Advocates, 1.0 FTE Team Manager and 1.0 FTE Project Officer. The project is working in collaboration with Social Workers to support the families of 216 children.
- 3.6.2 It is the intention of *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse* project to improve the experience of statutory social care processes for those parents and children affected by domestic abuse so that they feel believed, supported and empowered, whilst being appropriately safeguarded.
- 3.6.3 The project is being evaluated by Manchester Metropolitan University, with an evaluation report expected in March 2022. Performance against the contract is on track, with quarterly case audits completed, learning reports published, and multi-agency learning events held. To date, almost 400 practitioners have accessed events and reports to enhance their understanding of domestic abuse and improve practice. Guest speakers have included Rebecca Pierre, from the British Association of Social Workers, Zoe Dronfield, from Paladin and Rachel Williams, from Stand Up to Domestic Abuse.

- 3.7 *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse* has received interest from several local authorities and was featured in an article in the *Leadership in Social Care* journal. This signals the growing network Wirral's Domestic Abuse Alliance is forming. Links across Merseyside have been strengthened by consistent representation at the Strategic Domestic Violence Action Group, Combined Local Authority Domestic Abuse Group, Strategic Sexual Violence Group, Sexual Violence in the Night-Time Economy Group, and Strategic MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) Group. On 15th September 2021, Wirral's Lighthouse Centre, the new hub for domestic abuse, hosted a visit from Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs. Representatives of the Domestic Abuse Alliance provided the Commissioner with a very positive account of the local partnership, its strategy, and achievements.
- 3.8 Partnerships within Wirral have strengthened over the first year of strategic delivery, particularly in securing improved engagement with under-represented groups. The Change Board and its subgroups are benefiting from membership of a wider range of organisations and charities, such as Age UK Wirral. The Change Board recently received a report and case study focused on the experiences of older victims of abuse and is working to consider and address the particular barriers faced by such groups in speaking out and/or accessing help.
- 3.8.1 The 25th of November is *White Ribbon Day* (challenging Violence Against Women and Girls) and launches the national *16 Days of Action* campaign. Throughout the campaign the Domestic Abuse Alliance will be hosting events, putting a *Spotlight* on under-represented groups including LGBTQ+, those with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD), male victims and survivors, and professional women.
- 3.8.2 Professional women, and their frequent hesitance to speak out for fear of negative impact of their career, is an area which Wirral Council, as a large employer, is taking positive action to improve. The Council's own policy, procedures and guidance were updated in accordance with the *Domestic Abuse- No Excuse* strategy, a Human Resources Officer is named as Domestic Abuse Ambassador and has benefitted from specialist training. Where an employee is the victim of domestic abuse, normal processes are followed to protect and prevent harm, however these can be delivered in a 'closed' format or support sought from neighbouring authorities if required. Supporting professionals affected by domestic abuse remains a priority for the Council and its partners.
- 3.9 In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Bill received Royal Assent. The Domestic Abuse Act explicitly recognises children as victims if they see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse and includes a legal definition of domestic abuse which incorporates a range of abuses beyond physical violence including emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse. The Act intends to provide protection to millions of people affected by domestic abuse and strengthens measures to tackle perpetrators.
- 3.9.1 The Domestic Abuse Act places new duties on the Local Authority, Police and Criminal Justice Services. The Local Authority duties for safe accommodation have changed and thus, Wirral Council must accordingly update its strategy and offer, and undertake a needs assessment to be finalised by January 2022. These tasks will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse Alliance.

- 3.10 As the Annual Report states, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Wirral residents is yet to be fully understood. Whilst several key performance indicators suggest improvement, it is recommended that these statistics are considered with some caution. The *Domestic Abuse- No Excuse* strategy was intentionally planned for a five-year period, as long-term effort and focus is required to make significant impact on the prevalence of domestic abuse as recorded in 2019-20. As residents in the borough return to 'normal' life and the country moves into a post-pandemic phase, it is not unlikely that there will be reports of historic harm, harm which has been hidden because of lockdown, or a sudden spike in abuse as circumstances and relationships change.
- 3.10.1 Throughout the pandemic, domestic abuse data was reviewed on a fortnightly basis to monitor need and manage capacity. As the Annual Report demonstrates, the efforts, commitment, and creativity of the Domestic Abuse Alliance member organisations to support local people were commendable. Wherever possible face-to-face contact continued, services remained open, new methods of outreach and online contact were initiated, and delivering food parcels and sanitary products was a means by which to maintain contact and reassure communities that services and support remained available for them.
- 3.10.2 For the first time, the Domestic Abuse Alliance has an overview of activity to support people affected by domestic abuse by third sector partners. A snapshot of activity from Quarter 1 of 2021 (April to June) shows that community organisations were delivering recovery programmes to 702 adults, 317 children and young people, had 112 trained volunteers/mentors and 516 people were benefitting from peer support. The contribution made by these organisations to tackle domestic abuse is tremendous and is both recognised and valued by the Domestic Abuse Alliance. Wirral Council has worked with local agencies to support their access to external funding streams, co-ordinating bids which have resulted in almost £400k of additional grants, sourced from funds such as the Critical Support Fund and Covid Fund.
- 3.11 The *Domestic Abuse- No Excuse* Annual Report seeks to demonstrate how the activity detailed in this report is having a positive impact on a wide-range of people across Wirral. Whilst a cautionary approach is being taken towards performance data, the case studies, voice, and feedback from people accessing support captured in the annual report show great improvement in both people's experiences and getting help to move on positively with their lives.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The funding for domestic abuse is provided by the Domestic Abuse Alliance of which the Council is a partner and has allocated core funding. In addition, funding is provided from the Council's Supporting Families Service Transformation Grant of £60,000 for the Domestic Abuse Alliance Change Board.
- 4.2 In addition to core funding, additional successful bids have been made by the Alliance for the following:
- £200,000 from the Home Officer Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Fund

- £350,000 from What Works for Childrens Social Care for a new approach to delivering statutory interventions

4.3 8 FTEs are employed as part of the We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse project which is being funded from What Works for Childrens Social Care grant and as this is temporary funding, these staff have been employed on fixed term contracts that will come to an end on the expiry of the funding. There will not be any further revenue implications of this project once completed, unless an evidence based invest to save case can be made. This will be the subject of a further decision.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

6.1 Sustainability of programmes is a resource implication for the Domestic Abuse Alliance and its partner organisations. Whilst some programmes, such as those provided through the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Fund, will train staff and build capacity within the partnership for future delivery, others such as *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse* and *Drive* will require further investment to continue. Evaluations of these programmes will provide an evidence base and invest to save case, if successful, which will need to be considered in future budget setting and joint commissioning approaches.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There are no relevant risks arising from this report. Each of the contracts, projects and programmes detailed in this report are subject to robust contract monitoring and oversight from the relevant Assistant Director and Governance Groups.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 As detailed in Section 3 of this report, the Change Board and its subgroups have lay member representation, and a Voice Group provides ongoing communication with people affected by domestic abuse.

8.2 The Domestic Abuse- No Excuse Annual Report is a collaboration between partners and people using services to capture their experiences over the past 12 months, and demonstrates ongoing engagement.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 It is recognised that a disproportionate number of victims of domestic abuse have protected characteristics of the nine groups protected under the Equality Act 2010. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the strategy and delivery plan.

9.2 The Domestic Abuse- No Excuse Partnership Delivery Plan recognises the need to further exploration of the prevalence of domestic abuse in underrepresented groups such as those with special educational needs and disabilities, elderly residents, those in LGBTQ groups, and those living in more affluent areas. The Domestic Abuse Alliance and its Change Board have worked with intention to secure representation of specialist agencies, professionals and people with experience on its groups.

10.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environmental and climate implications arising from this report. It is anticipated that the domestic abuse strategy will have no impact on the emission of greenhouse gases.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 As detailed in Section 3, the Domestic Abuse Alliance works with many community partners, supporting them to develop their capacity, secure external funding, and provide opportunity for work experience, volunteering and employment for local people.

11.2 In May 2021, Involve Northwest opened its *Lighthouse Centre* at the *Community Village* (formerly known as Royal Standard House). In September 2021, Wirral Council relocated its domestic abuse services for victims and survivors to the *Community Village*, working together to provide a comprehensive support offer. The *Community Village* is situated in a community where need for services and support is high.

11.3 The *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse* project purposefully sought to recruit *Domestic Abuse Family Advocates* who had personal experience of either domestic abuse or involvement with statutory Social Care interventions. These posts provided an opportunity for people with volunteering/mentoring experience to obtain a professional role with appropriate training and support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – *Domestic abuse– No Excuse* Annual Report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Domestic Abuse- No Excuse Strategy [Wirral Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020](#)

Domestic Abuse- No Excuse Partnership Delivery Plan
[Domestic_Abuse_Strategy_2020_PartnershipDeliveryPlan.pdf \(wirral.gov.uk\)](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Adult Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee	November 2019
Adult Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee	February 2020
Adult Social Care and Health Committee	October 2020