



Committee and Date

**Communities Overview
Committee**

20 October 2021

Item

Public

Shropshire's Domestic Abuse Services

Responsible officer

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1.0 Summary

1.1 This report:

- provides an overview of existing services to support victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- details the expanded Government definition of domestic abuse, as well as the new powers and duties provided to Shropshire Council through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- explains how Shropshire Council and its partners are working together to meet the duties in the Act.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that members of the Communities Overview Committee:

- notes the update provided to the committee and
- make recommendations to inform and support the development work of the domestic abuse partnership.

3.0 Opportunities and risks

3.1 This report is provided for information only. Any recommendations that the committee makes would be subject to an analysis of their risks and opportunities before being put into action.

4.0 Financial assessment

4.1 This report is provided for information only. Any recommendations that the committee makes would be subject to a financial assessment for consideration before they are agreed.

REPORT

5. Services to support victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse in Shropshire - Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS)

- 5.2 SDAS is a commissioned specialist Domestic Abuse service offering Refuge/Dispersed accommodation and outreach services to all victims of domestic abuse.

There are currently 15 bed spaces across the county, 2 of which are dedicated male victim spaces. SDAS are currently supporting 162 families on outreach with 38 attending a group programme and 58 new referrals to be processed. This contract ends 31 March 2022.

We have additional funding from Shropshire Council to support the voluntary perpetrator programme by providing the partner support role. Richmond Fellowship are delivering the perpetrator programme and we hope this will start November 2021. This contract ends 31 March 2023.

MoJ/PCC office fund us in Shropshire to have one Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) in addition to the IDVA service provided by West Mercia Women's Aid. The rationale behind this is to ensure the thread of support to all victims that come through SDAS service who have not been identified as high risk multi agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)) victims from other agencies at the point of referral. This funding has just been secured and the post is live from 1 November 2021; 18 months funding, ending 31 March 2023.

We have BBC Children in Need funding to support 5-18 year olds that have been identified through our Outreach/Accommodation services as needing specific targeted support. We are on year 5 of 6 years and this ends 31 August 2022.

All our support is specialist domestic abuse support, and the team are either fully trained and/or experienced as Domestic Abuse Prevention Advocates via Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE). We work in

a trauma informed way and look to engage and work alongside all other agencies as appropriate to meet the needs of our victim/survivor.

SDAS is an accredited Leading Lights service (national accreditation from Safe Lives, the national charity) and full members of WAFE. We sit within Connexus Homes as our parent company.

As we are part of Connexus we secured Homes England funding to refurbish an old Victorian Building to provide SDAS with 5 x one bed apartments to house 5 single women with multiple and complex needs. This project has guaranteed revenue funding until 31 March 2022 and should open later this month.

5.3 Services to support victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse in Shropshire - Shropshire Perpetrator Programme

The Home Office grant funded the Police and Crime Commissioner to support the adoption of a domestic abuse perpetrator focussed programme. Bids were welcomed from PCCs who wished to introduce innovative approaches to tackle domestic abuse by working with perpetrators in their area. Shropshire submitted a bid regarding the strand looking at 'Programmes that address known issues in relation to Domestic Abuse offending.'

Richmond Fellowship and Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service have been successful in being awarded the funding to provide the 'My Time' Perpetrator Programme.

This programme will provide a standard risk group perpetrator programme. It will also include a victim support provision and a provision for Children and Young People delivered by Richmond Fellowship to support those young people associated with those accessing the perpetrator programme. The programme will focus on interventions encouraging behaviour change to help stop perpetrators from committing domestic abuse, with the aim of preventing further crimes from being committed.

Richmond Fellowship will deliver an evidence-based 18-week Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme which has been formulated to achieve positive outcomes for perpetrators of Domestic Abuse, their victims, and families. The programme will be committed to increasing the safety of women and children and reducing recidivism. It will hold

perpetrators to account for their abusive behaviour whilst providing education and awareness of domestic abuse.

The Programme will engage with a total of 72 perpetrators of domestic abuse over the period and aims to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Reduction in harm to victims & children and police time.
- Additional needs & vulnerabilities of perpetrators addressed.
- Reduction in number of perpetrators of domestic abuse and new & repeat victims
- Systemic local change in the response to domestic abuse that focusses on prevention through multi agency working and behaviour change work with perpetrators.
- Reduction in the absolute levels of domestic abuse.
- Ensuring victims have the necessary support, reducing the costs and disadvantages associated with long term damage to physical or mental health.

6. Domestic Abuse Act 2021

6.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 strengthens both the powers and duties of the government, local authorities, and other statutory bodies to tackle domestic abuse. The act:

- creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse
- establishes the office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner
- prohibits offenders from cross-examining their victims in person in the family courts
- creates a domestic abuse protection notice (DAPN) and domestic abuse protection order (DAPO)
- provides a statutory basis for the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's law) guidance
- creates a new domestic abuse offence in Northern Ireland to criminalise controlling or coercive behaviour
- creates a statutory presumption that victims of domestic abuse are eligible for special measures in the criminal courts
- enables domestic abuse offenders to be subject to polygraph testing as a licence condition following release from custody
- places a duty on local authorities to give support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and safe accommodation

- requires local authorities to grant new secure tenancies to social tenants leaving existing secure tenancies for reasons connected with domestic abuse
- extends the extra-territorial jurisdiction of the criminal courts of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to further violent and sexual offences

6.2 The act creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse based on the existing cross-government definition. 'Abusive behaviour' is defined in the act as any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse
- For the definition to apply, both parties must be aged 16 or over and 'personally connected'.

'Personally connected' is defined in the act as parties who:

- are married to each other
- are 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 there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives

Children are victims of domestic abuse if they: see or hear, or experience the effect of the abuse; and are related (as a parent or relative) to the parties involved.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner

6.3 Under the Act, the Government must appoint and fund the office of Independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner responsible for:

- representing victims and survivors
- educating the public about domestic abuse
- monitoring the response of local authorities, the justice system and other statutory agencies
- holding statutory bodies to account in tackling domestic abuse

The commissioner would have the power to hold statutory bodies and government to account and recommend how they can improve the response to abuse.

The act places a duty on certain public bodies and government ministers to cooperate with the commissioner and to respond to each recommendation within 56 days.

6.4 ***Secure tenancies and housing***

The act requires local authorities to grant a new lifetime tenancy to a tenant or a member of their household when re-housing an existing lifetime social tenant or offering an existing lifetime social tenant a new sole tenancy in their home if it's satisfied that the:

- tenant or a member of their household has been a victim of domestic abuse
- the new tenancy is granted in connection with the abuse

6.5 ***Local authority support***

The act also places a duty on tier one local authorities in England which includes Shropshire Council to provide support victims of abuse and their children living in:

- a refuge
- specialist safe accommodation
- dispersed accommodation
- sanctuary schemes
- second stage accommodation

The duty does not apply to people who are not living in some form of refuge or have not been otherwise rehoused as a result of domestic abuse.

Under this duty, local authorities must:

- Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions.
- Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who come from outside the area.
- Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.

- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions).
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Report back to central government.
- Require other councils within the local authority area to co-operate with the lead local authority, so far as is reasonably practicable. In the case of Shropshire Council the duty will apply to town and parish councils within the local authority area.
- Require the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance, having consulted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, local authorities and such as other persons as considered appropriate.
- Require local authorities to have regard to the statutory guidance in exercising their functions.

6.6 Although the legislation does not directly specify the nature of the support to be provided, accompanying Government guidance suggests such support should include:

- 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 relevant 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.

7.0 Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board

7.1 The Act states that the purpose of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board should be to provide advice to the Local Authority about the exercise of its statutory functions and the provision of other local authority non-statutory support in the local area.

The Board is expected to include a broad range of representative partners. And must include persons representing :

- local authorities,

- victims and their children,
- domestic abuse charities or voluntary organisations,
- health care providers
- police or other criminal justice agencies.

In Shropshire, work to establish the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board has already begun. In order to ensure an overarching and collaborative partnership approach to tackle domestic abuse in Shropshire; the Board also acts as the Domestic Abuse Group for the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership and the strategic group for the Shropshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process.

List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

None

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Local Member

All

Appendices

None