
West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	19 September 2024
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Patrick Clark
Report Author:	Jade Wilder
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4546

1 Purpose of the Report

This report has been produced for Executive to approve West Berkshire Council's (the 'Council') Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27 ('Strategy'). The Strategy has been produced because it's existing Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-23 and Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23 are subject to review. A Strategy is a statutory requirement under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the 'Act').

2 Recommendation

It is recommended that Executive approve the Strategy, as set out in Appendix B.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The financial implications relate to costs associated with commissioning services to address gaps in service provision identified through our local needs assessment. The Council receive an annual non-ring-fenced grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government ('MHCLG') to implement Part 4 of the Act.</p> <p>This funding covers two combined aspects; support costs ie commissioning services and increased administration. Monies have been allocated to administration support and the remaining budget will be used to meet the gaps in service provision.</p>

	<p>In 2024/25 the Council received £260,636. The Council also has £255,810 held in Reserves from its allocation in 2023/24 to be used toward this Duty.</p> <p>It is possible that funding could decrease or cease in future years which may cause financial implications for any services commissioned. Funding will be closely monitored by the Domestic Abuse Board ('the Board') and any services commissioned are likely to be short term, in view of the uncertainty regarding government support. MHCLG have only confirmed one more year of funding for 2025/26. Any future funding will be agreed at the next Spending Review.</p> <p>Financial Officer: Lisa Potts</p> <p>Date: 30/07/24</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>No HR implications.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>The Council are under a legal duty to meet requirements as set out in Part 4 of the Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based support in its area, (b) prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support in its area, and (c) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. <p>The Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports) Regulations 2021 and the Domestic Abuse Support (Relevant Accommodation and Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Sanctuary Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 set out further details in relation to the operation of functions.</p> <p>Strategies must be reviewed every 3 years. Strategies should be informed by local needs assessments which are required to be completed in full every 3 years, with a refresh being undertaken on an annual basis to ensure any change in demand or support requirements are adequately captured.</p> <p>The Act at Part 4 generally and section 58 specifically, requires a "relevant local authority" (which includes the Council) to appoint a domestic abuse local partnership board for the purposes of providing advice to the authority about certain functions and aspects of domestic abuse. The West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Board (the 'Board') has been constituted as</p>

	<p>the Council's domestic abuse local partnership board for this purpose.</p> <p>The Act also amends the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Code of Guidance, expanding the scope of the Council's housing duties to strengthen support available to victims of domestic abuse.</p> <p>There is Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance issued by the Home Office in July 2022 which the Council must have regard to in performing its duties and functions.</p> <p>Legal Officer: Laura Knowles & Beth Varcoe</p> <p>Date: 13.08.2024</p>			
Risk Management:	<p>The main risk identified is in respect of resources to adequately address the support required (as set out in our Strategy) to meet the needs of all victims of domestic abuse given the funding available and risk that this may decrease or cease in the future. This will be managed by the Board who will monitor funding and decide how best the funding should be allocated.</p>			
Property:	<p>The Council are required to ensure a variety of safe accommodation options are available for victims of domestic abuse.</p>			
Policy:	<p>The proposal relates to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and its Statutory guidance issued under the Act.</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
<p>A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p>	X			<p>Please refer to Appendix A, EqIA assessment.</p>

B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			The Strategy will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics and/or complex needs. The Act requires the Council to meet the needs of all victims when providing support and safe accommodation, therefore more victims will be able to access support when they need it.
Environmental Impact:		X		
Health Impact:	X			The Strategy will have a positive impact on health as victims and their children will be able to flee unhealthy, abusive relationships and seek accommodation somewhere safe. Families will be better supported and have more support options available to them.
ICT Impact:		X		
Digital Services Impact:		X		
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes. The proposal will support this priority because it will ensure all victims of domestic abuse have access to the right support within safe accommodation when they need it so they are not at further risk or harm.
Core Business:		X		
Data Impact:		X		

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Patrick Clark (Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health), Heather Codling (Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services), April Peberdy (Service Director, Communities and Wellbeing), Paul Coe (Executive Director, People), Nick Caprara (Housing Service Manger), Alex O'Connor (BCT Team Manager), Lisa Potts (Finance Manager),), Beth Varcoe (Principal Solicitor – Regulatory and Litigation), Rebecca Wiltshire (Service Director Children's Social Care) and Laura Knowles (Principal Solicitor – People Team, Legal and Democratic Services).</p> <p>Members of the public as part of a six-week public consultation, interviews with victims of domestic abuse, members of the Domestic Abuse Board and Davis and Associates (external consultant).</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Strategy has been produced because the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-23 and Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23 is due a review, and following that review a new Strategy is to be developed. It has been developed in line with Part 4 of the Act which requires the Council to:
- a) conduct (or make arrangements for) a local needs assessment to determine the level of need for support within relevant safe accommodation in their area; and
 - b) prepare and publish a local Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy based on a robust needs assessment.
- 4.2 The Strategy will enable the Council to meet the statutory requirements under Part 4 of the Act and ensure support in safe accommodation is commissioned to meet the needs of victims including their children in line with the local Strategy.
- 4.3 The Council carried out a local needs assessment to inform our draft Strategy during 2023. This involved gathering a range of data from various data providers, both internal and external, as well as victim engagement and interviews. A needs assessment survey went live from 10 May 2023 to 13 June 2023. A total of 56 responses were received to our online survey.
- 4.4 Once the needs assessment had concluded, a findings report was written and presented to the Board. After which, work began on drafting the Strategy and delivery plan which involved workshop sessions with key partners.
- 4.5 The Council furthermore carried out a public consultation on the draft Strategy from 5 April 2024 to 19 May 2024. This was for a period of six weeks which complies with the requirements of the Council's Consultation Policy and statutory requirements to consult. A total of 65 responses were received as part of our consultation and used to inform the Strategy.

- 4.6 It is being proposed that Executive approve the Strategy.
- 4.7 The recommendation to adopt and approve the Strategy should be agreed as it has been developed to meet all legislative requirements and is in response to our local needs assessment which was undertaken. It has also been subjected to extensive engagement with relevant stakeholders and victims of domestic abuse in West Berkshire to ensure it is fit for purpose. The Board have formally signed this off and although it is a Council Strategy, it is not Council-led.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 This report seeks approval to adopt the Strategy.
- 5.2 A draft delivery plan has also been produced which sets out how the Domestic Abuse Board will work with stakeholders to deliver possible activities that will help address the gaps identified and support the identified themes within the Strategy. The Domestic Abuse Board will be agreeing and re-defining what activities are carried forward from this.

Background

- 5.3 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. Various duties were included under the Act, but Part 4 refers to the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse, including children, within safe accommodation. Thus, the Council is required to assess the need for support, and prepare strategies to provide support for, victims and their children, who need to reside, in safe accommodation.
- 5.4 Domestic abuse is defined as any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse.
- 5.5 Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following: physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; or psychological, emotional or other abuse. This includes incidences where the abusive party directs their behaviour at another person (e.g. a child). Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services. This incorporates harmful traditional practices for example but not limited to 'honour' killings, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 5.6 The Council must adhere to all aspects listed below defined as safe accommodation when fulfilling this duty. All support must be provided to victims of domestic abuse, or their children, who reside in safe accommodation and should meet the MHCLG Quality Standards.
- Refuge accommodation;

- Specialist safe accommodation (i.e. dedicated specialist support to victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs);
- Dispersed accommodation (i.e. safe self-contained accommodation and self-contained 'semi-independent' accommodation);
- Sanctuary Schemes;
- Move-on and / or second stage accommodation;
- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation.

5.7 Domestic abuse support includes the expert help provided to victims and their children by the specialist staff in domestic abuse support services. The Council must ensure support is provided within safe accommodation which includes the following:

- Overall management of services within relevant accommodation;
- Support with the day-to-day running of the service;
- Advocacy support;
- Domestic abuse prevention advice;
- Specialist support for victims (i.e. designed specifically for victims with relevant protected as well as unique and / or complex needs);
- Children's support;
- Housing-related support;
- Advice service (i.e. financial and legal support);
- Counselling and therapy.

5.8 The Council receive an annual non-ring-fenced grant from MHCLG since the duty came into force to assist the Council in meeting the requirements under Part 4 of the Act. A clear breakdown of how allocated funding has been spent is reported back annually to the Secretary of State. Funding covers two combined aspects: support costs i.e. commissioning services and increased administration. In 2023/24 the Council received £250,810 which is held in Reserves and has been allocated for future spending. In 2024/25, the Council received £260,686 which will be used towards the duty.

5.9 Since the Act came into force in 2021 the Council appointed a local Domestic Abuse Board which is responsible for complying with the requirements of the Act.

5.10 A local needs assessment was undertaken in May 2023 to help determine the level of need locally and identify what has changed since our last needs assessment in 2021. This involved engaging with a wide range of key stakeholders and victims themselves via interviews and surveys. The overall provision in West Berkshire is very comprehensive but there are clear gaps in some services which is likely to be as a result of being a small local authority area. The findings have been used to produce our Strategy.

5.11 A victim survey was launched from 10 May 2023 to 13 June 2023. A total of 56 responses was received to our online survey. People felt that there were barriers to getting support for domestic abuse, with 32% of victims/survivors not disclosing the abuse to a professional and 42% not disclosing to anyone in their community. We also heard about the positive impact of local specialist support services, with victims/survivors commending the emotional and practical support provided to them. The main message was that more must be done to break the stigma of domestic abuse.

A coordinated community response has to involve the wider community in helping to create societal change and ending domestic abuse.

- 5.12 Once the needs assessment had concluded, a findings report was written, and an initial draft was presented to the Board on 17 July 2023. An exceptional workshop was organised on 22 November 2023 as an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss different sections of the report and give an opportunity as a collective to consider any additional learning or recommendations that the group may want to consider in the final version. The final version of the needs assessment was circulated to the Board during December 2023.
- 5.13 On 18 January 2024, the Board received an options paper which had taken the learning from the needs assessment to develop three options to how the Strategy could be structured. The Board agreed for the Strategy to have an ecological and prevention focus. On 26 March 2024, the Board received the draft Strategy and feedback was provided.
- 5.14 A public consultation went live from 5 April 2024 to 19 May 2024 for the Strategy. This was for a period of six weeks and looked to explore if people felt were planning on focussing on the right areas, if there is anything we have missed and if it is clear, and easy to understand. A total of 65 responses were received as part of our consultation and used to inform the Strategy. Key feedback to come out of the consultation was people felt that the strategy was a positive step in the right direction for West Berkshire, although it felt quite ambitious.
- 5.15 Responses have been considered and feedback reflected (where appropriate) into the finalised Strategy.
- 5.16 An exceptional workshop was organised for 24 May 2024 with partners of the Board, to review the draft delivery plan accompanying our Strategy.
- 5.17 On 20 June 2024, the Board approved the Strategy and delivery plan. The Board will be responsible for monitoring and implementing the delivery plan that accompanies the strategy to ensure any gaps in service provision are being met and funding is utilised effectively. This will be a live working document.

Proposals

To approve the Strategy.

6 Other options considered

Do nothing. This is not recommended because both existing domestic abuse strategies are due for review. It would also result in the Council not meeting statutory requirements of having an effective Strategy in place.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Strategy has been developed following an in-depth local needs assessment and public consultation. It meets all legislative requirements under Part 4 of the Act and will support the Council in meeting the needs of all victims, including children.

- 7.2 Whilst it is a Council Strategy, it is not Council led as it involves a variety of partners and has been completed in partnership with the Board.
- 7.3 This report seeks approval to adopt the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B – West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27
- 8.3 Appendix C - West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27 Delivery Plan
- 8.4 Appendix D – Summary of consultation responses

Background Papers:

[Delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse in domestic abuse safe accommodation services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/delivery_of_support_to_victims_of_domestic_abuse_in_domestic_abuse_safe_accommodation_services_-_gov.uk)

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

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West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

March 2023

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	People Directorate, Communities and Wellbeing Service
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	New Strategy part of existing statutory requirements under Part 4 of Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	<p>Part 4 of the Act requires the Council to assess the need for support and prepare strategies to provide support for victims and their children in safe accommodation.</p> <p>Specifically, under this part of the Act it requires the Council to (a) produce a robust needs assessment regarding accommodation-based support for the victims of domestic abuse, and (b) prepare and publish a local domestic abuse strategy for the provision of such support.</p> <p>The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27 meets our statutory requirements and has been developed because our existing Strategies are required to be reviewed. This has been developed following a robust needs assessment and public consultation.</p> <p>This will have a positive impact for all victims of domestic abuse in West Berkshire, ensuring we are providing support and access to services to allow them to live free from harm regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background.</p>
Completed By	Jade Wilder
Authorised By	
Date of Assessment	29/07/2024

Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p>Context / Background</p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>The Strategy has been produced because the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-23 and Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23 have expired, requiring a new Strategy to be developed. It has been developed specifically in line with Part 4 of the Act which requires the Council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) conduct (or make arrangements for) a local needs assessment to determine the level of need for support within relevant safe accommodation in their area; and b) prepare and publish a local Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy based on a robust needs assessment. <p>The Strategy will enable the Council to meet the statutory requirements under Part 4 of the Act and ensure support in safe accommodation is commissioned to meet the needs of victims including their children in line with the local Strategy.</p>
<p>Proposals</p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>It is being proposed that Executive approve the Strategy. This is the best course of action because the Strategy has been informed by an in-depth local needs assessment which included extensive victim engagement to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of victims in the area. It is a multi-agency Strategy and has been signed off by the Board which consist of partners from a range of internal and external agencies.</p>
<p>Evidence / Intelligence</p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to</p>	<p>The Council carried out a local needs assessment to inform our draft Strategy during 2023. This involved gathering a range of data from various data providers, both internal and external, as well as victim engagement and interviews. A needs assessment survey went live from 10 May 2023 to 13 June 2023. A total of 56 responses was received to our online survey.</p> <p>Once the needs assessment had concluded, a findings report was written and presented to the Domestic Abuse Board for sign off by all partner agencies.</p>

<p>inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<p>The Council furthermore carried out a public consultation for the draft Strategy from 5 April 2024 to 19 May 2024. A total of 65 responses were received as part of our consultation and used to inform the Strategy.</p> <p>The final Strategy was subject to approval by the Domestic Abuse Board on 20 June 2024.</p>
<p>Alternatives considered / rejected</p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.</p>	<p>No further alternatives have been considered. The Strategy is a statutory requirement under Part 4 of the Act and has been developed following a robust needs assessments and public consultation. It is felt the Strategy accurately reflects the needs of victims of domestic abuse in West Berkshire to help us achieve our overall vision where “West Berkshire will be a place where every individual, family, and community lives unrestrained by domestic abuse, cultivating a haven of safety and well-being by preventing harm as early as possible.”</p>

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>All victims with protected characteristics as per the Equality Act 2010 must be able to access the support that they need under Part 4 of the Act. The Council will ensure sufficient appropriate support is available within safe accommodation to meet the needs of all victims including those with relevant protected characteristics, additional and / or multiple complex needs, or whose support needs cannot be properly met within non-specialist domestic abuse safe accommodation. Where gaps in such support have been identified, the Council will utilise the funding available address such gaps.</p>	N/A	N/A	N/A
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Gender Reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion or Belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any victims residing in these communities will be able to access support within safe accommodation should they require it.	N/A	N/A	N/A
Areas of deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Displaced communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
Care experienced people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A
The Armed Forces Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A	N/A	N/A

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	N/A
Person Responsible for Review	N/A
Authorised By	N/A

EDI employee related EQiA's should now be sent to Human Resources hrenquiries@westberks.gov.uk