

City of Wolverhampton Council

Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy



2021-22



Introduction

Wolverhampton Safe Accommodation Strategy

The Wolverhampton Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2022 sets out how Wolverhampton will implement the statutory duties associated with the provision of safe accommodation, as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It describes how safe accommodation and support for domestic abuse (DA) victims and survivors will be provided up until the end of March 2022 and will be updated over the next six months as part of the broader refresh of Wolverhampton's Interpersonal Violence Strategy.

This strategy complements existing work that is taking place across the city to address the health and wellbeing, community safety and housing needs of those who experience domestic abuse in Wolverhampton. Ultimately it aims to ensure that the right support is available and accessible to all DA victims/survivors and their children in safe accommodation, as they rebuild their lives after the trauma of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse support includes the expert help provided to all victims and their children by specialist staff in domestic abuse support services. In addition, whilst some support is directly provided within refuges and safe accommodation services, outreach support will also be provided to victims in other types of relevant accommodation, including their homes in the case of a sanctuary scheme.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

On 29 April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Bill passed both Houses of Parliament and has now been signed into law. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 will provide further protections to victims of domestic abuse and strengthen measures to tackle perpetrators.

The Act has four main objectives relating to domestic abuse; to **promote awareness, protect and support victims, transform the justice process and improve performance.**

The Safe Accommodation Duty

Part 4 of the act places a duty on relevant local authorities in England, including all those with social services responsibilities, to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within refuges and other forms of safe accommodation. This has been accompanied by government funding of £125m for local authorities to allow them to fulfil this duty.

The act also places a duty on each such authority to appoint a multi-agency domestic abuse local partnership board. The local authority will then need to consult with the board to assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support within their local area, develop and publish a strategy for the provision of this support, and then monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

Safe accommodation is specified in the Act as:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary Schemes
- Move-on and/or second stage accommodation

Needs Assessment

During June/July 2021, a needs assessment was carried out to understand what level and type of support needs exist across DA safe accommodation in Wolverhampton. This will form part of a wider strategic needs assessment which will be produced to inform the city's wider Interpersonal Violence Strategy over the next six months. Whilst there is no accurate measure of how widespread domestic abuse is in the population, it is known to be significantly and consistently underreported. It is estimated that only 16% of incidents of abuse are reported to the Police (British Crime Survey, 2010). In the year ending March 2020 (excluding the pandemic), according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW):

- An estimated 2.3 million adults (5.5%) aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse.
- An estimated 7.3% of women (1.6 million) and 3.6% of men (757,000) experienced domestic abuse

Applying these figures to the Wolverhampton population would see an estimated total number of 14,355 people experiencing domestic abuse aged 16-74 living in the city.

Key findings

- ·An estimated 14,355 Wolverhampton residents aged 16-74 have experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020
- ·In Wolverhampton, the number of victims of domestic abuse related crimes increased by 39.6% during the same period, whilst the number of repeat victims almost doubled, increasing by 94.8%
- ·Between April 2018 and March 2021, 1,000 children known to Wolverhampton's Children's Social Care had witnessed, or been involved in domestic abuse
- ·Homeless applications from domestic abuse victims to Wolverhampton Housing Options have increased by 72.5% between the year 2018-19 and 2020-21
- ·Only 30% of victims seeking refuge were able to access refuge accommodation within the past year

Needs Assessment

Domestic Abuse and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on domestic abuse. Measures put in place to limit infection have also reduced the time and space for victims to seek help, this has increased the risk of further abusive behaviours from perpetrators 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 changes to court proceedings which has lengthened the wait for civil and criminal hearings – have meant that different parts of the local system have experienced differing trends of victimisation and demand.

Demand on Local Commissioned Services

During Covid-19, Wolverhampton specialist domestic abuse organisations experienced increased demand. Calls to the Haven Wolverhampton community service increased by over 1,000 in comparison with 2019 and referrals for refuge increased by 41% in the same period. The increase in demand also included new forms of contact, such as a WhatsApp texting service and web chat.

Local Crime Data

The number of Domestic Abuse Crime and Non-Crimes recorded in Wolverhampton between April 2018 and March 2021 has increased across both domains.

A Non-Crime (incident) of Domestic Abuse is when the threshold of a crime is not reached, where no intervention is required, or injury has occurred. An example of a domestic abuse incident that does not amount to a crime is two family members having a loud argument, a third party calls the police, the police attend and calm the situation down, but no crime has taken place.

A Crime (incident) occurs when the threshold of crime has been reached, an intervention is required, or an injury has occurred. By March 2021, the number of Domestic Abuse Crimes had risen by 65.4% since April 2018, whilst the number of Domestic Abuse Non-Crimes had increased by 17.6% in the same period.

Key Priorities/Outcomes

1

Increase and enhance emotional, practical, and social support for all victims of domestic abuse within DA safe accommodation

Including:

- Emotional and practical wrap around support
- Support with legal, housing and welfare rights
- Support with parenting, child contact or maintaining relationships

2

Increase and enhance emotional, practical, educational, and therapeutic support for children within DA safe accommodation

Including:

- 1-2-1 and group activities to suit the child or young person's needs
- Emotional and practical support
- Support with educational opportunities and interaction with school

3

Increase and enhance emotional and practical support for victims of domestic abuse in DA safe accommodation with complex needs and those who face additional barriers such as people from the LGBT, BME, disabled and marginalised communities

Including:

- Inclusive provision that includes those who face social and economic barriers to accessing support.
- Inclusive provision that can cater to victims with complex cases, such as substance misuse, mental health, etc.

4

Increase and enhance the health and well-being of victims of domestic abuse within DA safe accommodation

Including:

- Support for emotional, psychological, and physical well-being
- Support with accessing courses/programmes to enhance social, practical, and physical well being
- Support with social integration and life skills
- Support with access to employment, education and/or training

Measuring Progress

Resources

The City of Wolverhampton Council has been allocated £650,902 from MHCLG for 2021-2022. This funding has been provided in order to further enhance the existing support services that are in place in safe accommodation across the city and to ensure that this support responds to the diverse needs that have been identified through the recent domestic abuse needs assessment. The outcomes outlined above will form the basis of our commissioning during this period. The outcomes were based on findings from the needs assessment which included consultation with a wide range of agencies, specialist providers and victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Governance

The DA Act 2021 requires Local Authorities to appoint a multi-agency DA Local Partnership Board. The Safer Wolverhampton Partnership is accountable for the implementation of the requirements of the Act and will receive regular updates on progress and the impact of local commissioned support services in DA accommodation. To support this work a local Interpersonal Violence Board has been established to oversee delivery and report into Safer Wolverhampton Partnership.

Monitoring and Evaluation

All commissioned services in DA support accommodation will be subject to robust performance monitoring and evaluation. This information will be used to inform and influence future service commissioning.