

Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2025 to 2028

1. Introduction

This strategy has been developed by the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board in line with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board is a group of organisations that are working together to improve outcomes for people experiencing domestic. This is achieved through a strategic approach to sharing knowledge and intelligence, identifying and, where possible, addressing gaps in support. This strategy sets out the priorities and actions for the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board for the next 3 years.

The Board recognise the fact that domestic abuse has a huge impact on the lives of the people that experience it and are committed to listening and engaging with those with lived experience and supported by expert evidence base, to continuously learn and improve.

We also acknowledge the gendered nature of domestic abuse but work to ensure our local response to domestic abuse is accessible to all regardless of gender and other protected characteristics.

2. Herefordshire Vision for Domestic Abuse

For Herefordshire to be a county where domestic abuse is not tolerated and everybody can live free from abuse and harm, where healthy relationships are the norm and where people with lived experience of domestic abuse including children have access to the right support at the right time.

For domestic abuse to be everybody's business, taking a collaborative approach that creates lasting change across our systems and communities and where the voices of the people with lived experience of domestic abuse are at the heart of our response.

3. What is domestic Abuse?

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides the following definition:

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

'Abusive behaviour' is defined as any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

'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

The national domestic abuse charity, Women's Aid provide an alternative definition of domestic abuse:

Domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuseⁱ

This definition recognises that domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour, whereas the full legal definition indicates that domestic abuse can be a one-off incident.

4. Key Achievements over the last 3 years

- Recommissioned domestic abuse services in Herefordshire, to extend their reach and increase the amount of safe accommodation available in the county.
- Commissioned the co-ordination of a lived experience advisory network to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of domestic abuse are at the heart of what we do.
- Secured additional investment for the Sanctuary Scheme (installation of target hardening equipment) in Herefordshire, giving people experiencing domestic abuse the option to stay at home where it is deemed safe to do so.
- Co-located domestic abuse specialists in Early Help and Edge of Care/Home teams at Herefordshire Council to ensure a robust understanding and response to domestic abuse
- Reviewed, updated and secured funding for domestic abuse training for professionals and volunteers across Herefordshire.
- Secured funding to pilot the IRIS programme.
- Developed our relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner and domestic abuse commissioners across West Mercia to share best practise and maximise service provision.

- Increased our understanding of domestic abuse in Herefordshire through needs assessments.

5. Understanding Domestic Abuse in Herefordshire

A needs assessment of domestic abuse in Herefordshire was carried out in 2024. Below are some of the key findings: *(info graphic format to be added)*

- SafeLives, a leading charity, estimate that around 8,000 people a year in Herefordshire experience it: 5,500 (68%) females and 2,500 (32%) males.
- Half of all victims of recorded DA offences were aged 25-44 years. The median age of victims was 30.
- West Mercia Police recorded 2,100 DA offences (recorded crimes) in Herefordshire in 2022/23.
- Fewer than 10% of offences proceed to a criminal charge or summons; with the most common reasons being the victim not supporting police action (57% in 2022/23) or difficulties with evidence (25%).
- There were 163 approaches to housing where DA was recorded in 2022/23. Of these, 163 instances (91%) were from females and 14 (9%) were from males.
- In 2022/23, 74% of suspects were male, 25% were female and 1% were recorded as unknown.
- There appears to also be a link between DA offences and deprivation, with over 40% of all DA offences and incidents being recorded in the most deprived parts of Herefordshire.
- There were 231 DA cases discussed at Multi agency risk assessment conference meetings (MARAC's) between April 2022 and March 2023.
- There were 96 referrals for refuge in 2022/23 with 41 referrals coming from Herefordshire residents and 55 referrals coming from out of county
- West Mercia Women's Aid received 1,785 calls to their Herefordshire helpline in 2022/23.
- West Mercia Women's Aid received 1,530 referrals in total for 2022/23 with 88% (1,345) of referrals being for adult services.

The full 2024 needs assessment is available on the Herefordshire Council website (link to be added).

6. Lived Experience Engagement

The lived experience advisory network was established in 2023 and since then people with lived experience of domestic abuse have been asked to give the Local Partnership Boards in Herefordshire and Worcestershire feedback about their experiences of the domestic abuse system via surveys, focus groups and working groups.

Five focus groups were held (four face to face and one virtual) specifically to inform the priorities and actions in this strategy. Three with women, one with young people and one with men, all of

whom have lived experience of domestic abuse. Below is a summary of some of the feedback received through these sessions and through surveys that have been completed over the last 18 months. (quotes to be displayed in info graphic format)

'(There is) Still so much stigma and shame attached to domestic abuse.'

'School is safer than home.'

'You worry that no one will believe you and then when you finally find the courage to talk it is used against you.'

'Having to repeat what happened over and over again was hard. I was like I've already told the Police this but I had to tell everyone again. It was exhausting.'

'It is hard to make someone see why you made certain choices when they don't understand what you were going through. They couldn't see that the choices I made were to protect myself and my children.'

'He played the system and manipulated professionals and made me feel more isolated and controlled even though I had left the relationship'

'He has used the CAF process to continue the abuse.'

'They just couldn't see what he was doing and made me feel like I was the problem for not wanting to cooperate with the person making our lives a living hell.'

'I thought it would get better once I left, but it didn't.'

'You are never free of your perpetrator if you have children.'

'The abused always seems to have to flee - there just isn't the available housing stock to house families in an emergency.'

'Coming out of refuge there is no help to move in. The kids had no furniture and we were told to make it fun and camp out on the floor. No help to decorate an empty shell when suffering PTSD, SEN kids, sorting finances, alone with zero support and family court and criminal proceedings.'

'(The) system lacks positive responses.'

'CPS / Social workers need more specialist training to educate them about domestic abuse.'

'Guidance isn't clear / system is not clear. So many pit falls. The end goal is just to be safe!'

'(Need) Better promotion of services and support available.'

'Onus is all on the women to protect themselves'

'Professionals need training to understand what coercive control is.'

'Professionals need to name the behaviours and acknowledge them. Onus is all on the woman.'

'Need to improve signposting and improved co-ordination.'

'When all the people involved on my case started working together that's when it got better.'

'Professionals need to work more closely with each other; I feel invisible.'

'(Need) Support with mental health, promote what people deserve e.g. the chance to rebuild your life.'

'Education and training and understanding (are needed).'

'A single person can save your life.'

7. Priorities and Actions

Priority One - Improve awareness and prevention

- a) Seeking funding for the continuation of the IRIS programme; domestic abuse training for GP practices with a clear referral and support pathway. This programme was initially funded for 12 months by the Home Office.
- b) Review impact of healthy relationships education in schools and invest in what works.
- c) Work with partners to develop a social media campaign for Herefordshire that supports wider understanding of domestic abuse and promotes services.
- d) Continue to invest in specialist domestic abuse roles in preventive services.
- e) Further integrate prevention in any recommissioning activity.
- f) Continue to promote Claire Law and Sarah's Law to communities, volunteers and professionals.

Priority Two - Improving understanding of domestic abuse and support services

- a) Work with partners and council teams to improve / increase data collection for future domestic abuse needs assessment to support the ongoing growth of our understanding of need.
- b) Continue to invest in and review a domestic abuse training programme for community, volunteers and professionals. Focus needs to be on coercive control and its impact and the importance of language e.g. using non victim blaming language.
- c) Work to ensure that domestic abuse training is mandatory for all social care teams.
- d) Actively challenge victim blaming and placing all the responsibility on the person experiencing domestic abuse across all services.
- e) Continue to work with people that have experienced domestic abuse to place them at the heart of the process and empower them to be part of the solution.
- f) Work to influence domestic abuse training for wider professionals e.g. police, magistrates etc.
- g) Work with Adult Social Care colleagues to gain greater insight into the prevalence of elder abuse in Herefordshire.
- h) Ensure that all recommendations from domestic abuse homicide reports are routinely shared with the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board so that learning can be incorporated into future working.
- i) Work to secure ongoing investment and improve access to Sanctuary Scheme (target hardening) measures in Herefordshire, enabling people experiencing domestic abuse to stay in their own homes, where it is deemed safe to do so.
- j) Work to further understand the relationship between domestic abuse and the increased risk of suicide for people experiencing domestic abuse. [Research on intimate partner violence, suicidality and self-harm](#) showed that past-year suicide attempts were 2 to 3

times more common in victims of intimate partner violence than non-victims. Tackling domestic abuse and identifying victims, including children who witness abuse, is key to preventing related suicides.

Priority Three - Improve joint working and coordination across services

- a) Implement recommendations of the Safe Lives Review.
- b) Continue to actively participate in the Family Courts working group established by colleagues in Worcestershire.
- c) Work with partners to address the perceived lack of support for low-medium risk clients and the waiting lists for commissioned services.
- d) Continue to work with partners to ensure consistent attendance at and a clearer focus on addressing the behaviours of those who harm within Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC).
- e) Continue to run and develop domestic abuse professionals' network to foster professional relationships and understanding of who does what across the domestic abuse system.
- f) Work with domestic abuse commissioner to explore the use of 'tell me once' models for domestic abuse.
- g) Explore systems that involve people experiencing domestic abuse from the start, empowering them to be part of the solution.
- h) Continue to improve access to safe accommodation with support and move on.
- i) Work with commissioned partners and registered providers to increase the number of accessible units of safe accommodation.
- j) Increase the number of housing staff who have a specialist knowledge of domestic abuse and can build a strong rapport with relevant services.
- k) Promote the use of the 'special circumstances' clause in section 106 agreements to enable more flexibility around affordable and social housing that requires a local connection.
- l) Work with the domestic abuse commissioner to influence greater flexibility around section 106 agreements and domestic abuse.
- m) Work with domestic abuse specialist services to promote their services to social care teams to increase referrals, particularly for children and young people.

Priority Four - Hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour

- a) Work to inform and influence the use and enforcement of protective orders e.g. domestic violence prevention notice, domestic violence prevention orders, restraining orders etc. Feedback from people with lived experience of domestic abuse has indicated that inconsistent enforcement leads to a lack of trust in these measures.
- b) Continue to develop training opportunities for professionals to empower them to work with perpetrators so that they can be held accountable for their behaviours.
- c) Continue to work closely with the Police and Crime Commissioner around the effectiveness of, and investment in, perpetrator programmes in Herefordshire.
- d) Work with Police colleagues to further explore ways to increase the number of incidents where victims support police action.
- e) Further consider the provision of housing for perpetrators (where the person experiencing domestic abuse wishes to remain in their own home).

8. Accountability and Governance

This strategy is designed to be flexible to adapt to changing needs and national guidance.

The Domestic Abuse Board is responsible for the implementation of this strategy. It will oversee its effectiveness, delivery plans and direct funding commitments, monitoring progress and deploy working groups as needed.

The strategy is underpinned by an action plan that will be championed by each partner within the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. The actions set out above will be further developed and will be directly linked to agencies to ensure that they have effective mechanisms in place that contribute to its delivery.

Feedback from people with lived experience will continue to form a vital part of reviewing progress and commissioning of services. We will work to ensure that the voice of survivors, of families affected by domestic abuse and of perpetrators who have interacted with our services, informs and continually improves our provision.

The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board will provide quarterly briefings to Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership and provide regular update to the Safeguarding Boards so we can work in partnership to tackle domestic abuse in Herefordshire.

9. Measuring Progress

- A multi-agency domestic abuse dashboard will be further developed allowing tracking of numbers of people accessing services and trends.
- Feedback from the Lived Experience Advisory Network – to ensure we maintain an understanding of people’s perceptions, views, and experiences, and use them to inform future service design and delivery.
- Workforce data, for example progress on domestic abuse training.
- Grant and contract monitoring data, that ensures funding assigned to projects and initiatives (in-house or commissioned) is delivering against stated aims and objectives.
- Learning and insight from Domestic Homicide Reviews and other safeguarding reviews where domestic abuse was an aspect of the case.

10. References

ⁱ [What is domestic abuse? - Women’s Aid](#)