

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE BOARD 19 NOVEMBER 2020

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PREPAREDNESS FOR THE DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL 2021

Summary

1. At its meeting on 22 July 2020, the Board received an Interim report on the Council's response to COVID-19 in respect of Community Safety. During the discussion, it was noted that the Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through the House of Commons would place new duties on the Council. Accordingly, the Council's preparedness for the Domestic Abuse Bill was added to the Board's Work Programme.
2. This Report sets out the requirements for the new Domestic Abuse Bill and ways in which Worcestershire County Council (the Council) is preparing to be ready to implement the required statutory duties with its key partners.
3. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Health and Wellbeing, the Director of Public Health and the Senior Public Health Practitioner have been invited to the Meeting.

Background

4. The Domestic Abuse Bill is currently passing through the House of Lords. The first reading was on 7 July 2020. The second reading is yet to be scheduled. The expectation is that Royal Assent will be given later in 2020 for the Bill to become Law in April 2021 and statutory duties to commence. The new national Domestic Abuse Commissioner designate is Nicole Jacobs.
5. The duties require Tier 1 local authorities to take leadership responsibilities for delivering the duties in partnership with Tier 2 local authorities to ensure safety and support for the whole family affected by domestic abuse. This includes provision of accommodation and support for survivors of domestic abuse, work with perpetrators to help prevent domestic abuse and establishment of community champions to ensure that support is maintained in the community. The duties will be informed by the growing evidence base of effectiveness and best practice to improve quality standards and national reporting to be implemented across England.
6. Statutory duties for Tier 1 local authorities require them to convene a multi-agency Local Partnership Board (LPB) to support performing certain specified functions. These will be to:
 - Assess the need and demand for accommodation-based support for all victims and their children, including those who require cross-border support.
 - Develop and publish strategies for the provision of support to cover the locality and diverse groups of victims.

- Give effect to strategies by making commissioning / de-commissioning decisions
- Meet the support needs of victims and their children
- Monitor and evaluate local delivery
- Report back to central Government

7. Statutory duties for district, borough and city councils and London Boroughs require them to co-operate with Tier 1 authorities.

8. Statutory duties for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) require them to produce the statutory guidance for local authorities to adhere to in exercising their functions in implementing the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Bill.

9. The total budget allocation for each Local Authority will be determined in the Autumn Spending Review to implement the requirements of the Act. Following consultation on guidance, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government will publish final allocations subject to the Domestic Abuse Bill receiving Royal Assent. An interim award has been made to Local Authorities to support the development of processes to ensure readiness for delivery of the statutory duty in April 2021.

Issues for the Board to consider

Development of a Local Partnership Board

10. Current strategic management of domestic abuse delivery is governed through the Domestic Abuse Forum, which meets twice a year, chaired by the Director of Public Health. The Forum is accountable to the Safer Communities Board. Representation includes senior members from local authorities, Worcestershire Children First, Clinical Commissioning Group, Police, Probation and key voluntary sector organisations involved in delivering services. A review is currently being undertaken to ensure the development of this strategic group will be able to meet statutory requirements post 2021 for monitoring and reporting information. Existing local governance can be adapted for this purpose and a shadow board can become operational in this intervening period. This will include appropriate representation from people with lived experience and their children to inform this process and ensure their views are considered in order to improve quality and outcomes.

Current services for domestic abuse prevention and support in Worcestershire

11. Current services for Domestic Abuse in Worcestershire include emergency and safe house provision commissioned by the Council and support services provided by West Mercia Women's Aid. These support services include 24- hour help line, group work and 1:1 support to improve safety and outcomes for survivors of domestic abuse and their children.

12. This provision has recently been enhanced by development of community capacity via the Domestic Abuse Working Network (DAWN) pilot project delivered by Worcester Community Trust in Worcester City and South Worcestershire funded by the District Councils and an additional grant from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. This has facilitated additional outreach

support to individuals affected by domestic abuse who may wish to leave the family home and provide training for housing officers in domestic abuse to help improve outcomes.

13. Specialist services for families affected by domestic abuse (Independent Violence Advisors (IDVAS)) are commissioned by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). They work closely with the NHS and Worcestershire Children First to reduce the risk and harm for children and families affected by domestic abuse. Worcestershire is also a national pilot site for a perpetrator programme providing evidence-based interventions to help reduce the incidence of domestic abuse, commissioned jointly by the Council and the PCC.

14. Worcester Children First have recently launched a pilot programme working with children and families, which includes delivery of interventions to reduce harms associated with domestic abuse affecting children and family safeguarding.

15. The impact of COVID-19 on domestic abuse has indicated increasing referrals and raised risk levels for all Worcestershire domestic abuse support provision, particularly the phone line. Interventions have been delivered using virtual and digital platforms as well as face to face when appropriate. Refuges and safe house provision have been able to meet isolation requirements, but this has led to consideration of the need for more separate units of accommodation in the future. This is shortly to be reviewed by local authorities, and housing providers in partnership with West Mercia Women's Aid.

Development of a Needs Assessment to inform future Domestic Abuse Strategy

16. The MHCLG are shortly to publish a Needs Assessment template to ensure standardised collection of data and information for all local authorities in England. This process will include information from partners, stakeholders and people with lived experience in addition to drawing on evidence of best practice to inform the development of a future commissioning strategy in line with statutory requirements.

17. Work has already commenced to collect appropriate data and information for Worcestershire in partnership with district housing officers, domestic abuse services and public health to complete this needs assessment. The PCC has also recently completed a needs assessment to inform the West Mercia Domestic Abuse Strategy, which includes Worcestershire. The aim will be to align this information to co-ordinate an approach in the future to ensure the needs of individuals and children affected by domestic abuse are being met, pooling resources where this is appropriate and sharing best practice.

Future commissioning arrangements

18. New commissioning arrangements for domestic abuse services are being discussed between the Council, Police and Clinical Commissioning Group representatives in Worcestershire and West Mercia to ensure that the accommodation and support needs will be met in line with statutory duties. Current contracts have been extended for this process to take place. Future delivery will include the continuation of sustainable accommodation, specialist and community support services for survivors, and their children following completion of the review

and needs assessment and alignment with the domestic abuse strategic objectives. There is a need to meet specialist requirements for vulnerable groups with more complex needs and cross border issues between local authorities to ensure safe accommodation provision for survivors and children.

Next steps

19. A sub-group of the Domestic Abuse Forum has been set up to consider the requirements set out above and will continue to meet monthly to ensure the Council is ready to implement its new statutory duties. The Domestic Forum, Safer Communities Board, Clinical Commissioning Group and Strategic Housing Partnership have all been briefed on the Bill and its requirements.

20. The Council has well developed partnerships in place to inform strategic decision making and commissioning arrangements for the future to continue to ensure high quality, appropriate support and sustainable accommodation is available to families and children affected by domestic abuse.

Purpose of the Meeting

21. The Board is asked to:

- consider the information in this report:
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a topic is required; and
- agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – presentation slides

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[The Domestic Abuse Bill](#)

[Agenda and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board 22 July 2020](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)
