

# CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

**3 NOVEMBER 2022**

## DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHILDREN

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### Summary

1. The Panel has requested an update on developments relating to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and the specific support offered to children and families as part of this work.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well Being, the Interim Director of Public Health, the Head of Safer Communities (Public Health), the Assistant Director for Permanency, Care Proceedings, Fostering and Adoption, Worcestershire Children First and an Advanced Public Health Practitioner with responsibility for Domestic Abuse, have been invited to the meeting.

### Background

3. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a number of changes as part of the Government's ambition to tackle the significant harms that are caused to people because of domestic abuse. These include introducing a broader definition of Domestic Abuse (DA), improvements to the criminal justice processes and a range of new duties (Part iv), for Tier 1 Local Authorities, in particular, requiring the Authority to provide safe accommodation and support services for victims of Domestic Abuse and their families.
4. Under Part iv of the Act, the Council also had to set up a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (DAPB), to oversee the responsibilities under the Act and which it has to consult in relation to various specified functions. These functions include developing a Needs Assessment around safe accommodation and support, publishing an associated Domestic Abuse Strategy, and commissioning the accommodation and services. Annual reports have to be provided on progress annually to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, (DLUHC). The DAPB is a subgroup of the Worcestershire Safer Communities Board, which has strategic oversight of community safety across the County.

### Domestic Abuse Figures in Worcestershire

<b>West Mercia Police Figures</b>	<b>North Worcestershire 2020/21</b>	<b>North Worcestershire 2021/22</b>	<b>South Worcestershire 2020/21</b>	<b>North Worcestershire 2021/22</b>
<b>DA Crime</b>	4090	3910	3820	3972
<b>DA Incidents</b>	2543	2463	2379	2355

## **Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy**

5. The Worcestershire Strategy, like those in other Local Authority areas, goes beyond just the Part iv statutory requirements and builds upon the existing countywide partnership approach to prevent and tackle domestic abuse in all its forms. The four key principles in the Strategy are Prevention, Provision, Partnership and Pursue. It has been developed with partners and places victims and their families at the centre of the approach. As required by the DLUHC, the strategy was published in advance of 5 January 2022 deadline.
6. The Strategy sets out a high-level approach under the four principles and from this, the DAPB has developed a more detailed Action Plan which focuses on the individual and collective response by agencies working with the wider Worcestershire community. Amongst a range of activity this includes Public Health working with the Police to improve the data and analysis for DAPB; developing a service directory for domestic abuse; working with businesses to ensure that they have access to information on how to support staff members who may disclose abuse; working together to improve the process and journey through the family court system for survivors of domestic abuse; reviewing/renewing the Worcestershire Domestic Homicide Review protocol and processes and developing improved oversight of the Worcestershire Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

## **Domestic Abuse Grant**

7. The commissioning of new services to meet the requirements of the Strategy (and the Act), was led by Public Health and supported by a Joint Commissioning Group, made up of statutory agencies including Worcestershire Children First (WCF). The DLUHC has provided annual allocations of DA Grant to Upper tier Local Authorities (currently £1.1m pa to this Council), and total of £194,000 pa to Worcestershire District Councils, which has been used to commission a number of services including:
  - Specialist domestic abuse support for survivors and their families in safe accommodation (refuges and dispersed accommodation units); Community outreach support; Psychological/ Psychotherapy support for children and adults and Domestic Abuse Training.
  - Specific funding to District Councils to assist securing support into 29 additional units of safe dispersed accommodation, into which support can be provided. 15 of these units have been commissioned to date.
  - Public Health are providing significant financial contributions through a range of grants to support the Family Safeguarding Model in 2022/3 and 2023/24.
8. Providing safe accommodation is central to the Act and is strictly defined by legislation and in Worcestershire primarily relates to Refuge accommodation and dispersed accommodation across the six Districts. It should be noted that accommodation such as generic bed and breakfast accommodation and homeless hostels are not considered relevant safe accommodation and as such,

local authorities cannot commission support within these types of accommodation.

9. The Council, working with partners is currently developing an approach called “Sanctuary”, which allows victims/survivors and their children to remain safe, subject to risk assessment, in their own properties, by adding security measures and a package of support. It will involve training staff in “designing out crime” and commissioning a service to deliver the Sanctuary model across Worcestershire in a consistent manner. The advantage is that families avoid the disruption of moving home and the impact that has on employment, schooling and family and social networks. This will operate as a pilot funded by Public Health.
10. The Council also commissions other Domestic Abuse activity:
  - Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), which are funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Ministry of Justice.
  - DRIVE (Perpetrator Programme), funded by the PCC and Public Health. In 2021/2 Drive dealt with:
    - 104 perpetrators
    - 109 associated victims for whom there were
    - 253 associated children

### **Domestic Abuse Advice and Support Service (DAASS) contract – focus on children**

11. West Mercia Women’s Aid (WMWA) deliver a spectrum of services as part of the contract. All of the services support victims and survivors of domestic abuse and so by association the children in those families. However, by working with WCF as part of the commissioning, specific support for children in the safe accommodation provided has been secured.

### **Working with Children in the Refuge/Safe accommodation.**

12. A dedicated WMWA worker focuses on assisting young people in age ranges 5 to 15 years. Typically, this could include basic safety planning, learning to deal with not having their own space and the difference between healthy & unhealthy relationships in group and one to one sessions. Through these sessions the worker is able to start them on a journey of understanding why they had to move to a refuge or safe accommodation away from their family home and that it wasn’t their fault and that they are not alone. Comments made about the sessions and living in refuge have included “I’ve enjoyed doing craft while we talked, it has made it easier to talk about things” and “being able to talk about my feelings has been good”.
13. A recent case example involved the worker engaging a 7-year-old who presents as very happy but struggles to talk about how they are really feeling about things. It helped them to talk about expressing feelings in a safe way and giving them some ways to explore those feelings. The child was worried about being a burden and causing trouble for people if they talked about how they are really feeling. They have discussed how everyone has the right to feel safe and that the adults in their life now, are there to support them no matter what. This work has allowed

them to start to think about how they can share feelings and worries with adults when they need to and has started to help them feel like they aren't a burden on the adults around them.

### **Counselling - Children in refuge**

14. WMWA are working in partnership with West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (WMRSASAC) to provide this service. WMRSASAC's qualified children's counsellors deliver counselling for children that are currently living in WMWA refuges. There are 12 spaces for the year to provide those children who have been adversely affected by domestic abuse.

### **Trauma informed support and Play therapy**

15. The aim of a Trauma Informed Children and Young People's worker is to work with children and young people that have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse, and to help them to cope and recover from the trauma that this can cause. Trauma is defined as any incident experienced as out of control, frightening, and characterised by a lack of a supportive person. Witnessing and or experiencing domestic abuse fits this definition. WMWA have been trained to run Recovery Toolkit (RTK) groups for children and younger adults. RTK is an evidence-based intervention and integrated in its approach using a combination of trauma-informed resilience focused work, specific trauma focused cognitive behavioural therapy and person-centred therapeutic principles.
16. These sessions draw on the study of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and utilise established psychological therapies and practise. At the end of the session, the children and young people's worker gives out a "coping box" of resources (tailored to the child's individual needs and containing books, craft/art materials etc) that the children can use to manage difficult feelings moving forward.
17. Between April - June 2022, WMWA received a total of 26 referrals for trauma informed support and play therapy services. The WMWA staff member has been providing the one-to-one sessions and working alongside the parent to provide advice and guidance on helping their children.
18. WMWA delivered 2 Nurture programmes (previously Parenting Through Domestic Abuse programme) for mothers, and these were attended by 18 participants.
19. Overall, in 2021/2022 WMWA dealt with the following:

	<b>Group Work</b>	<b>Helpline Support</b>	<b>One to One Support</b>	<b>Refuge</b>	<b>Male Victim Service</b>
Referrals	630	1139	187	224	70
Entered Service/Support	432	1139	112	44	42

## **Domestic Abuse Training**

20. Training has successfully been commissioned from Sarah Wigley Associated for three years. This training is available in 3 separate modules – Recognising Abuse, Working with Victims and Working with Perpetrators. This training is made available to WCF staff, Adult Social Care and other partners and is part of the approach to assisting staff (and Members if required), how to understand the signs of abuse and how to signpost, support and assist.
21. WCF have worked with the Council and partner agencies to review the Domestic Abuse Training and the learning objectives have been refreshed to meet the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This updated training offer was launched in April 2022. WCF will evaluate the training impact on workers awareness and confidence working with domestic abuse.
22. Between April and December 2022, a total of 46 WCF staff have booked onto the courses:
  - 19 places on Module 1
  - 13 places on Module 2
  - 14 places on Module 3

## **The Voice of the Victim – the Lived Experience Advisory Group**

23. The Domestic Abuse Act requires Authorities to protect victims/survivors and their children, with the expectation that Authorities listen to the views and experiences of victims and their family members. Whilst statutory and commissioned services do talk to their service users and gather very helpful information to assist service delivery, the Act requires an explicit and proactive consideration of the needs of all people with protected characteristics (under Equalities legislation) who may require domestic abuse services and support. This is a complex area and so the Council is partnering with Herefordshire Council to jointly commission a Lived Experience Advisory Project, to assist in ensuring that the Council and its partners fully understand wider community needs and provide services appropriate to all people's needs.

## **Worcestershire Children First (WCF) – Domestic Abuse**

24. WCF Family Front Door receives a significant amount of information from West Mercia Police on incidents and experience a significant amount of police information sharing, on incidents that they classify as domestic abuse that do not identify a level 4 need requiring a social work assessment or child protection enquiry.
25. The Police also share information with the WCF Early Help Family Support service for families they feel would benefit for an early help response. This has proved to be challenging both in terms of volume and capacity to manage this lower-level information sharing. The partnership has been successfully delivering Operation Encompass to schools in Worcestershire for some years and now are in a position to be piloting Encompass in Early Years settings.

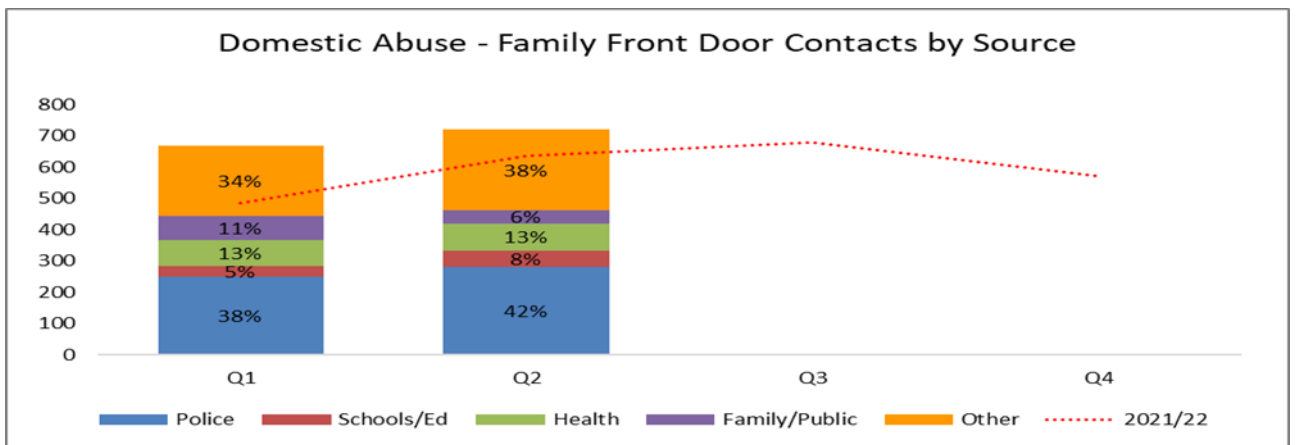
26. In recognition of partnership working and information sharing, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children’s partnership have identified joint funding to provide additional staffing capacity to WCF both within the Family Front Door and education to support this management of information sharing across the partnership for children and young people.

**Domestic abuse analysis**

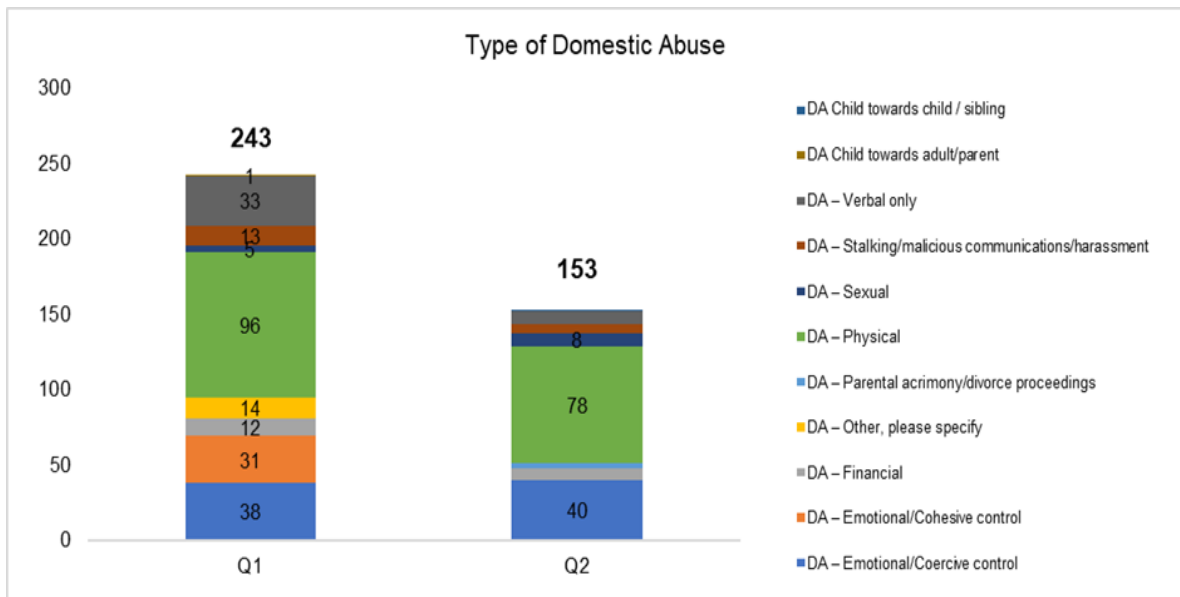
27. WCF have developed data analysis in relation to Domestic Abuse and are able to monitor domestic abuse notifications from police, partner agencies and family / members of the public. They also break down further the type of domestic abuse e.g., physical, verbal, sexual, coercive and control etc.

28. The graph below illustrates referral sources quarter on quarter. This data includes referrals on new cases but also children and young people open to children’s social care on a plan or being assessed. It can be seen that 38% in Q1, and 42% in Q2 are police domestic abuse contacts.

An illustration of Quarter 1 and Quarter 2:



29. In their assessments WCF have a strong focus on the ‘impact on the child’ which together with the specific identification of domestic abuse risk ensures that the safety plan reflects the types of domestic abuse, such as child-to-adult abuse or harassment and stalking. (See below)



## Quality Assurance

30. WCF conduct thematic audits in the Family Front Door on contact and referrals and responses to each of these. Two separate focused audits to ensure and evaluate the timeliness and quality of decision-making in response to domestic abuse notifications received in the year were completed in January 2022 and September 2022. Each looked at a sample of 20 cases of new and repeat domestic abuse notifications on open social care cases. They considered how Team Managers responded to new information on cases, and whether the responses were in line with current practice standards and how timely the police notification was.
31. In January 2022, 60% (12) cases complied with the agreed practice standard in respect of managerial oversight within 24 hours of the notification. In September 2022 compliance in this area had increased to 95% (18 cases).
32. Timeliness of Domestic Abuse Notifications from the Police continues to vary. In January 2022 this ranged from the same day to 21 days, the average being 10 days after the incident was reported to Police. In September 2022, this ranged from 1 day to 35 days, again the average being 10 days after the incident was reported to Police.
33. This issue of delay in respect of Police Domestic Abuse Notifications was noted during the Ofsted focused visit in July 2021. West Mercia Police senior officers and partners, including WCF, worked together to support West Mercia in addressing this issue. The delays were attributed to police staffing challenges and, following additional resources being identified, the timeliness of Domestic Abuse Notifications have improved and is monitored through the Family Front Door Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Managers meeting and the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group.

## **Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC)**

34. In Worcestershire MARACs are held twice a month, one north and one south. WCF Team Managers attend these to represent children's social care within the meetings and contribute to the victim safety plans. The leads share information between the MARAC meeting and allocated worker and this ensures that adult records in Liquid logic Children's Social Care are updated, and the relevant information is added to the records of any children who are connected to the victim or perpetrator. There is a specific Liquid Logic form which holds the record from each MARAC meeting, making the information readily available for social workers to formulate their risk assessments and safety plans.
35. For children and young people who are exposed to, or experience, domestic abuse in Worcestershire, West Mercia Women's aid are commissioned to provide support as part of the Worcestershire domestic abuse strategy. This is part of a wider offer of help and support services for children and young people in social care.

## **Worcestershire Family Safeguarding model**

36. The Worcestershire Family Safeguarding Pilot is one of WCF's innovation projects, developed as part of the WCF Business Plan 2021-22, with a priority to support positive and timely outcomes for children at risk of significant harm and reduce care proceedings.
37. The pilot is a collaborative approach working alongside partner agencies in Public Health, Cranstoun, DRIVE and WMWA to support families to live healthier, happier and safer lives, specifically reducing issues impacting on the quality and adequacy of parenting associated with domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health.
38. As of 31st December 2021, Worcestershire Family Safeguarding had worked with 236 children.
  - 79% success rate in care prevention. 49 children became Looked After.
  - 75% success rate for reducing risk of harm. 61 children stepped up to a higher threshold - 49 became looked after and 12 children stepped up into pre-proceedings.
  - 34% success in decreasing need for statutory intervention. 80 children stepped down 46 down to Child in Need and 34 closed to Children Services.
  - 40% of children (96) maintained their plan status through intervention.

## **Operation Encompass**

39. Operation Encompass is a communication process between the Police, WCF, the Education Safeguarding Team and schools that informs schools when a child or young person has experienced any domestic incident that has been reported by the Police. This contact is intended to be prompt and made on the next school day. This information sharing between professional agencies allows school staff



to provide emotional and practical support to their pupils experiencing domestic abuse.

40. Since the launch of Operation Encompass in Worcestershire 2018, there have been over 12000 domestic abuse notifications sent to schools to August 2022. (Education Safeguarding team). The daily figure of domestic abuse notifications can range from 10 – 60 per day. (WCF Education Safeguarding team). 1 in 5 children in school will experience domestic abuse. (Operation Encompass data).
41. Operation Encompass ensures that a member of the school staff, usually the Designated Safeguarding Lead, is trained to enable them to liaise with the Police and WCF in receiving and using the information that has been shared, in confidence. Schools have welcomed this method of information sharing as it enables them to support and keep children safe and create the right environment for learning along with maintaining supportive relationships with families.

### **Operation Encompass – Early Years**

42. There is currently no facility to share information in a similarly effective manner about the very youngest children experiencing domestic abuse (0 - 5 years of age at the oldest). To address this, in 2021 Operation Encompass begun a series of national pilots to extend notifications to Early Years settings. In some areas the process is led by the local NHS providers using health visitors to make this communication.
43. Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership have committed to take part in this pilot which will start with communicating with those settings that WCF commission to provide early years funded education. There are approximately 490 settings of this type in Worcestershire serving 7000 children. The intention is to extend this pilot with health colleagues to include all children under 5 over time.
44. In November 2022 the Education Safeguarding Team will launch training for participating early years settings in Worcestershire to have suitably trained staff to be key adults for the management of Operation Encompass for their setting.
45. The evaluation of this pilot will be led by the Education Safeguarding Team and the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Head Teacher steering group where there is representation by the early years sector. Additionally, all participating early years settings will have an opportunity to complete an evaluation. WCF will report activity, impact and outcomes to the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership and Operation Encompass national programme.

### **Purpose of the Meeting**

46. The report sets out the background to the DA Act and its implementation and demonstrates how the Council's services are focused on supporting families and children and that working with WCF is a key element on this.
47. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the update provided by the Public Health Team and Worcestershire Children First;
- Determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.
- Provide any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health & Wellbeing and the Interim Director of Public Health.

### **Contact Points for this report**

Tim Rice, Head of Safer Communities (Public Health).

Tel: 01905 843107

Email: [trice@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:trice@worcestershire.gov.uk)

Alyson Grice/Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officers Tel: 01905 844962/846607

Email: [scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk)

### **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no specific background papers relating to the subject matter of this report

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