

Meeting date: 29th November 2022

Report to: Stronger Communities & Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Bord

Report title: Service update on the delivery of new duties brought into effect by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

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Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood | Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle | Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South | Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
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Public/private report: Public

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The report provides an updated position on the local approach to domestic abuse, with a specific focus on progress on the delivery of new duties brought into effect by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

1.2 Key points and Considerations

New duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, are being addressed, with full compliance for most elements. Our dedicated refuge provision is compliant with the requirements of domestic abuse safe accommodation. We are aware that our existing provision is not meeting demand. There are challenges in rapidly expanding our capacity and will need to work on a continued phased approach.

Duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, primarily relate to the needs of individuals who need and want specialist accommodation, which while important, can serve to 'hide' the needs of individuals subjected to domestic abuse who have alternative accommodation arrangements, such as their own home, generic temporary accommodation, or staying with friends and family. Specialist community-based support continues to be an important part of our offer to protect victims and has the potential to reduce the demand for specialist accommodation.

An effective response to domestic abuse can only be achieved through a whole system approach which incorporates prevention, protection and accountability, and is supported by a commitment to partnership working.

2. Decision(s) Recommended

- 2.1 That the Board note the progress made in meeting our duties against the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and consider the accompanying delivery plan which will support delivery of the objectives in the Domestic Abuse strategy.

3. Matters for Consideration

Service update on the delivery of new duties brought into effect by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

- 3.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was enacted in April 2021. Part 4 of the Act placed new duties on tier 1 local authorities.
- 3.2 Requirements to establish a statutory Domestic Abuse Board, undertake a Needs Assessment and publish a local Domestic Abuse strategy are complete. Needs Assessments and accompanying strategy are to be undertaken every three years.
- 3.3 In addition to the above, Local Authorities were given a duty to provide specialist Domestic abuse support to adult and child victims in refuges and other 'DA Safe Accommodation'¹.
- 3.4 Many areas, including Solihull have found this challenging. The extra burdens monies provided by DLUHC² whilst very much welcomed, has limitations, in that it is ring fenced to cover the provision of specialist support only. The absence of capital funding has had an impact on our ability to quickly expand our current offer of DA Safe Accommodation. The issues areas are encountering in meeting this requirement have been fed back to DLUHC, and there are on-going discussions about how areas can effectively demonstrate alternative approaches.
- 3.5 Domestic abuse Specialist Providers operating across the region have been engaged to discuss opportunities for providing DA Safe Accommodation in Solihull. Similar discussions have been held with registered social landlords. However, high property and rental prices, combined with limited availability of large properties are proving to be a barrier to specialist providers being able to secure suitable premises, in which we can commission specialist support.
- 3.6 Nevertheless, we have improved our position, by:

Commissioning Childrens support in our existing 11 bed unit and extending the refuge contract to stabilise the Service.

¹ Defined as accommodation which provides dedicated specialist domestic abuse support. This can be refuge, dispersed accommodation, Sanctuary, second stage accommodation and other. It cannot be Bed & Breakfast, accommodation that is not separate and self-contained, where toilet, cooking & personal washing amenities are shared by more than one household, mixed sex.

² Department of levelling up, Housing and Communities

Commissioning a 6-bed refuge for black, and minority ethnic women and their children. Unfortunately, due to on-going planning issues this has only been able to operate at half capacity.

Working with SMBC Housing leads and Solihull Community Housing (SCH) to review and re-commission a local Sanctuary Scheme.

Commissioning a borough wide DA training programme for Housing practitioners

Piloting a scheme allowing specialist DA Advocates to co-work with SCH, to provide dedicated support to those in generic temporary accommodation or accessing Sanctuary.

Commissioning a specialist children and young people community-based service, which prioritises access for children and young people in temporary accommodation

- 3.7 A detailed data return to the Department of levelling Up, Housing and Communities was submitted on 30th June 2022. This is an annual reporting requirement, which helps to demonstrate an understanding of the accommodation needs of victims of DA, and our response.
- 3.8 Moving forward, we are committed to continue to improve our offer and will be undertaking a wider market engagement exercise, to reach out to Providers who are interested in working with us. We are also working with SCH to review existing housing stock, to check for change of use opportunities.
4. Update position on our approach to Domestic Abuse
- 4.1 The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (DAPB) has led on the development of a DA Delivery plan. The plan provides a framework to deliver the objectives set out in the DA strategy (appendix 1). The DAPB will retain responsibility for monitoring progress against actions to ensure they are completed in a timely and meaningful way. The delivery plan has been shared with the Councils main decision-making Boards and has been formally signed off by the DAPB. Below are examples of actions undertaken to date, and the plan is currently being updated to reflect improvement.
- 4.2 Since June 2022, significant work has been undertaken on communications. The domestic abuse page on SMBC website has been refreshed, we are engaging with our local pharmacies to support a Safe Spaces scheme and are working with West Midlands Police to review participation with 'Ask Angela'. A scheme which operates in licensed premises and helps individuals who feel vulnerable to get help from bar staff to safely leave the premises. We continue to support the international 16 days of Action to raise awareness of Violence against Women and Girls.
- 4.3 Operation Encompass, the process which enables West Midlands Police to share notifications of DA incidents with schools, has been reviewed and procedural guidance to improve consistency has been developed. The Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership Board will have responsibility for local oversight.
- 4.4 We have commissioned a series of training sessions for education designated

safeguarding leads. The training supports schools in delivering the mandated Healthy Relationship learning modules, by providing staff with the knowledge and confidence to have constructive dialogues with boys and young men about issues relating to them ‘being safe and being safe to be around’.

The current offer to support male victims of domestic abuse is accessible to all men aged 16+ and meets the cultural and demographics of Solihull. The service offers advice, information, support, and advocacy including emotional and practical support to victims to help them to cope and recover from their experiences by developing and maintaining safety plans, ensuring male victims are aware of available options and supported in their decision making.

We are in the process of re-commissioning a borough wide DA specialist community-based service, which is intended to provide an accessible and equitable service to females and males aged 16+, who are subjected to domestic abuse, and live in the borough. This is not a mandated Service, but it is part of our core offer and will enable individuals to access information, advice, one to work casework and group work. An increase in investment in this Service, will provide additional capacity.

2.5 Data shows that domestic abuse continues to be a significant driver for demand for services. The summary update on page 1 of the delivery plan provides headline figures, and data for quarter 1 2022/23, shows that we can expect similar rates this year

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

3.1 Our approach to managing domestic abuse is based on mandated requirements under the DA Act 2021, Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance, released in July 202, expectations set out in the National Statement of Domestic Abuse and learning from local reviews.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 The DAPB are committed to ensuring we comply with new duties and to adopt best practice frameworks.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving outcomes for children and young people in Solihull. 2. Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for Adults in Solihull when they need it. 	<p>Domestic abuse has a devastating physical, emotional and financial impact on adults and children who are subjected to it. Whilst anybody can be subjected to domestic abuse, factors such as gender, age, disability etc. increase vulnerability and risk.</p>

Priority:	Contribution:
3. Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities. 4. Enable communities to thrive.	
Economy: 5. Develop and promote the borough's economy, with a focus on revitalising our town and local centres. 6. Maximising the opportunities of UK Central and HS2. 7. Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable.	Enter text.
Environment: 8. Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions.	Enter text.
9. Promote employee wellbeing	Enter text.

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 The DAPB are the primary consultation point for domestic abuse. The DAPB reports to the Safer Solihull Board and provides updates to Health & Wellbeing and both Safeguarding Boards.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 The 2022/23 DLUHC grant is in line with the year 1 award, and there is a commitment for the grant to continue in 2023/24. However, there are no formal agreements past this date.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 sets out a statutory definition of DA, which we adopted, and we have a requirement to comply with Part 4 of the Act, and grant conditions.

6.5 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

6.5.1 Not meeting expected statutory responsibilities. Risk and needs of victims and their children who are unable to access quality support will escalate and cause demand on other services, including but not limited to, child and adult safeguarding and housing

6.6 Equality implications:

This work stream will be delivered as part of our compliance with the National Violence against Women and Girls and supports recognition that Domestic Abuse is a gendered crime which disproportionately affects females, with increased risk and needs for individuals with protected characteristics.

6.7 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Local Enterprise Partnership or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan.

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment.

8.2 Domestic Abuse Strategy.

9. List of Other Relevant Documents

9.1 N/A.