

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 OCTOBER 2024

DOMESTIC ABUSE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the requirements on the Local Authority under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and an update on how Darlington is supporting victims of Domestic Abuse to adhere to The Act.

Summary

2. The Domestic Abuse Act came into force in 2021 which brought in new requirements which Local Authorities must fulfil. The Act created the first statutory definition of domestic abuse to ensure that "domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable and actively challenged across statutory agencies and in public attitudes".
3. The Domestic Abuse Act was implemented to help ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experience, safe in the knowledge that the justice system and other agencies will do everything they can both to protect and support them and their children and pursue their abuser. This supports a whole family approach.
4. Domestic Abuse is 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. In the vast majority of cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.
5. Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to the following:
 - (a) Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence).
 - (b) Psychological and/or emotional abuse.
 - (c) Physical or sexual abuse.
 - (d) Financial or economic abuse.
 - (e) Harassment and stalking.
 - (f) Online or digital abuse.

6. Since the Domestic Abuse Act came into force the statutory requirements on the Local Authority are:
 - (a) To provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.
 - (b) Establish a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.
 - (c) Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims (and their children) who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area.
 - (d) Publish a domestic abuse strategy.
 - (e) Give effect to the strategy through commissioning/decommissioning.
 - (f) Produce an annual return detailing the effectiveness of the strategy.
7. As part of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024 Darlington have set out the following priorities. The strategy has been jointly produced with Durham County Council.

Appendix 1

- (a) Priority One: Survivor/Victim Voice will be at the heart of our decision making.
 - (b) Priority Two: Early identification, intervention and prevention of domestic abuse.
 - (c) Priority Three: Effective support for vulnerable groups Priority.
 - (d) Priority Four: Prioritising the needs of children and young people effected by domestic abuse within safe accommodation.
 - (e) Priority Five: Improve the use of data and intelligence in order to better understand and respond to demand and levels of need.
 - (f) Priority Six: Improve the workforce knowledge and skills in responding effectively to domestic abuse.
8. These priorities are reported on at our Partnership Board Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG).
 9. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy is currently being refreshed in partnership with Durham County Council.

Recommendation

10. It is recommended that: -

- (a) Complete review of the Needs Assessment.
- (b) Additional services commissioned by Darlington continue and re-evaluate following completion of the Needs Assessment.
- (c) Scrutiny to note and agree joint working arrangements on Domestic Abuse.
- (d) Report to Scrutiny on an annual basis.

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Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

ChristineShields - Extension 5851

Council Plan	This report contributes to the priorities agreed in the Council Plan
Addressing inequalities	There are no implications arising from this report
Tackling Climate Change	There are no implications arising from this report
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report supports the efficient use of resources through shared partnership priorities
Health and Wellbeing	This plan supports the priorities set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy
S17 Crime and Disorder	This plan will support measures to reduce crime and disorder
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no implications for the Budget or Policy Framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report supports measures to reduce the number of Looked After Children

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

11. Before the Domestic Abuse Act, the Local Authority commissioned 2 Domestic Abuse support services, the Women's Refuge (Family Help) and an Outreach Support Service (Harbour).
12. As part of the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act, funding was made available to Local Authorities in the form of the Burdens Fund. In 2023/24 Darlington Borough Council received an allocation of £227,440 from the national Burdens Fund and an allocation of £231,731 was received in 2024/25.
13. A needs assessment was undertaken, and additional services have been commissioned using this funding. The additional services are listed below, and further details of the needs assessment can be found in **Appendix 2**
 - (a) 2 Dispersed properties
 - (b) Domestic Abuse Housing Options officer
 - (c) Counselling for adults
 - (d) Outreach support and therapy for children
 - (e) Additional children's workers based with the children's team for a multi-agency approach.
 - (f) Domestic Abuse Navigator worker
 - (g) Domestic Abuse Navigator emergency crash pad
 - (h) Prevention scheme for perpetrators
 - (i) Sanctuary scheme for accommodation
 - (j) 2 therapy workers for children in The Refuge (part time)
14. In addition to the services funded through the Burdens Fund, the following services are also commissioned:
 - (a) The Refuge - funded by Public Health
 - (b) Harbour outreach services - jointly commissioned by DBC and the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC)
 - (c) Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA) service - funded by the PCC

Governance Arrangements

15. Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 local governance arrangements have been reviewed to support the implementation of the Act at a local level. These are outlined below:

Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (LDAP)

16. The Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (LDAP) is a partnership group responsible for supporting Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) in meeting their duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.
17. The LDAP is known locally as the County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) (Terms of Reference is provided in **Appendix 3**).

Darlington Domestic Abuse Local Working Group

18. The purpose of the Officer Working Group is to raise awareness across all Council departments ensuring that 'Domestic Abuse is everyone's business' and to ensure that work being undertaken locally is coordinated and reported into DASVEG. (Terms of Reference is provided in **Appendix 4**).

DASAN and the new County Durham and Darlington Violence against Women and Girls Provider Forum

19. A review has been undertaken of the DASAN (Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Network) to further strengthen links with DASVEG, ensuring work could be fed into DASVEG by the Chair if the Group.
20. Following discussion with the local Domestic Abuse providers forum DASAN (Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Network), it was agreed that the DASAN would be disbanded and that Darlington providers would attend the County Durham provider meeting.
21. The first meeting of the County Durham and Darlington Violence against Women and Girls Provider Forum took place in July 2024, where the new Terms of Reference were approved.

Appendix 5.

22. The purpose of the Forum is to:
 - (a) support the continued development of community-based specialist voluntary and community sector organisations in County Durham and Darlington.
 - (b) increase communication and collaboration between practitioners operating in County Durham and Darlington who are part of the system aimed at preventing harm, supporting victims, and pursuing perpetrators of violence against women and girls.

- (c) provide a platform which uses a problem-solving approach encouraging members to share barriers, challenges, and good practise.
- (d) support the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) agenda which include information sharing between operational and strategic professionals and organisations.

23. The next meeting is scheduled to take place towards the end of September 2024.

Communications Campaign

24. Work is beginning to prepare a draft communications campaign plan in partnership with Durham County Council and the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner, which will be presented to DASVEG and the Provider Forum. It is anticipated that the first big campaign will be launched in the winter on the lead up to Christmas.

Quality Assurance Arrangements

25. Services are monitored on a quarterly basis by officers in the DBC Commissioning, Contracts and Brokerage team through contract monitoring meetings. These meetings focus on performance data and qualitative feedback received from service users.

26. Currently the Police and Crime Commissioning team are involved in quarterly monitoring meetings for those services they jointly commission with the Council, but work is currently underway to further strengthen quality monitoring arrangements and to involve them in monitoring the wider group of services provided across Darlington.