



Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director-Resources

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	14 December 2021
Subject:	Adoption and Publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024

Summary:

This item invites the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee to consider a report regarding the Adoption and Publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024.

This decision is due to be considered by the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement between the 16th and 23rd December 2021. The views of the Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Executive Councillor as part of her consideration of this item.

Actions Required:

That the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) considers the attached report and determines whether the Committee supports the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement as set out in the report.
- 2) agrees any additional comments to be passed on to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement in relation to this item.

1. Background

The Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement is due to consider the Adoption and Publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 between the 16th and 23rd December 2021. The full report to the Executive Councillor is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Conclusion

Following consideration of the attached report, the Committee is requested to consider whether it supports the recommendations in the report and whether it wishes to make any additional comments to the Executive Councillor. Comments from the Committee will be reported to the Executive Councillor for her consideration.

3. Consultation

The Committee is being consulted on the proposed decision of the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement, between the 16th and 23rd December 2021.

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix 1	Report to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement on the Adoption and Publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024.

5. Background Papers

No background papers within the meaning of section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this Report.

This report was written by Jade Thursby, Domestic Abuse Business Manager, who can be contacted on 07748 968170 or at jade.thursby@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director of Resources

Report to:	Cllr Mrs P Bradwell, OBE, Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement
Date:	Between 16 and 23 December 2021
Subject:	Adoption and Publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024
Decision Reference:	I023050
Key decision?	Yes

Summary:

This report provides the Committee with an overview of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 and the County Council's statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Recommendation(s):

The Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement approves the publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy as attached at Appendix A.

Alternatives Considered:

1.	<p>Not to approve the strategy.</p> <p>Throughout the development of this Strategy the risks of not meeting the obligation to adopt a Domestic Abuse Strategy in Lincolnshire were well understood.</p> <p>To not adopt and publish a Domestic Abuse Strategy for Lincolnshire would be a failure to meet our statutory duty in line with the Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports) Regulations 2021.</p>
2	<p>Adopt a revised strategy.</p> <p>The strategy is based on a wide-ranging needs assessment and has been developed through an extensive process of engagement with partners and service providers. It has the support of partners and service providers and responds to the issues identified in the needs assessment.</p>

Reasons for Recommendation:

To meet the obligation of publishing the final Strategy by the 5th of January 2022.

1. Background

The Domestic Abuse Bill received royal assent on 29th April 2021 as the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 creating new statutory duties for tier one local authorities from the 1st April 2021. There are a number of changes the new Act will deliver:

- A legal definition of domestic abuse which recognises children as victims in their own right;
- A Domestic Abuse Commissioner to stand up for survivors and life-saving domestic abuse services;
- A legal duty on councils to fund support for survivors in ‘safe accommodation’
- New protections in the family and civil courts for survivors – including a ban on abusers from cross-examining their victims, and a guarantee that survivors can access special measures (including separate waiting rooms, entrances and exits and screens);
- New criminal offences – including post-separation coercive control, non-fatal strangulation, threats to disclose private sexual images;
- A ban on abusers using a defence of ‘rough sex’;
- A guarantee that all survivors will be in priority need for housing, and will keep a secure tenancy in social housing if they need to escape an abuser;
- A ban on GPs for charging for medical evidence of domestic abuse, including for legal aid;
- A duty on the government to issue a code of practice on how data is shared between the public services survivors report to (such as the police) and immigration enforcement.

All of these elements of the Act have a positive impact on the Domestic Abuse agenda and will have an impact of how services across partners are delivered, however the area that affects Lincolnshire County Council significantly is under part four of the Act.

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a four-part statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation and provides clarity over governance and accountability.

(1) Section 58 specifically places a duty on each tier one local authority in England to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions under section 57. These are to:

- assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims in their area, including those who require cross-border support
- **develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the need’s assessment**

- give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions)
 - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
 - report back to central government
- (2) Require local authorities to have regard to statutory guidance in exercising their functions.
- (3) Require the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance, having consulted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, local authorities and such other persons as considered appropriate. (This has been produced by the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC))
- (4) Require tier two councils to co-operate with the lead local authority, so far as is reasonably practicable.

In Lincolnshire a full needs assessment has been undertaken including the whole of the Domestic Abuse Agenda and not just limited to Accommodation based services. This was a conscious decision to ensure that Lincolnshire was in a position to respond to the wider domestic abuse agenda, create consistency in service provision and support the interrelated nature of Domestic Abuse and the needs of service users. The needs assessment was undertaken by an independent consultancy and the Domestic Abuse partnership was fully consulted throughout that process. The subsequent Domestic Abuse Strategy has been developed and produced having regard to the Domestic Abuse needs assessment.

Before publishing a strategy under section 57 the Council must consult with the Partnership Board, any local authority within the area and such other persons as the Council considers appropriate.

The strategy attached at Appendix A has been the subject of wide consultation with all District Councils in Lincolnshire and other partner agencies and service providers in Lincolnshire. Feedback from all partners was received at various stages in the strategy development, of which all comments have been addressed and reflected within the strategy. A full audit trail of feedback has been documented and will in addition form part of the delivery and commissioning plans for Domestic Abuse. Survivor engagement has been undertaken through service providers and the intention as part of the strategy implementation is to develop a robust survivor engagement plan through the Domestic Abuse Partnership.

The Strategy has the general support of the partners within the Domestic Abuse Partnership and the providers consulted.

Regard has been had to the Guidance issued by DLUHC in producing the strategy.

The strategy summarises the national and local context in relation to Domestic Abuse, sets out the shared ambition and key priorities for the Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse

Partnership in tackling Domestic Abuse and outlines the key areas of action over the next 3 years, including the new statutory duties in relation to accommodation-based services. This is an inclusive strategy relevant to all victims of Domestic Abuse. Lincolnshire County Council has a statutory duty to publish the strategy by 5th January 2022.

Through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 funding was allocated to all tier one and tier two local authorities in order to ensure local areas could respond to the new duties in relation to accommodation-based services. Lincolnshire County Council was allocated £1.4 million for 2021/22 and each District Council was also allocated slightly different amounts in the region of £32 thousand. A separate funding allocation will be received for 2022/23 and 2023/24 and then subsequently this will be included in the annual spending review. This funding will be allocated and used in line with the Domestic Abuse Act requirements and support the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Strategy in relation to accommodation-based services.

2. Legal Issues:

Equality Act 2010

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

The duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the decision-maker. To discharge the statutory duty the decision-maker must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision-making process.

Equality Act obligations have been taken into account and there is considered to be a potential for the service to impact differentially on people with a protected characteristic given the degree to which attitudes to domestic abuse impacts particularly with race, religion, belief, sex, sexual orientation and disability. The actions will require the service to be sensitive to all victim groups.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council must have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) in coming to a decision.

The JSNA and JHWS have been considered. The recommendations in this Report are designed to improve the Service's response and therefore keeping residents of Lincolnshire safe thereby contributing to their health and wellbeing.

Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

Working closely with Police and other criminal justice partners to ensure crime prevention work is carried out as described in Appendix A.

3. Conclusion

It is hoped that this report and the Domestic Abuse Strategy outlines to the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee the intention and direction that Lincolnshire will be taking in the next three years in relation to the Domestic Abuse agenda, and the pivotal role that Lincolnshire County Council has in delivering this work

and new statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. In developing and producing the strategy through the Domestic Abuse Partnership it is intended that this is a partnership strategy, and its delivery has a collaborate approach by which all partners in Lincolnshire are fully invested. The next steps in fulfilling the statutory duties and ensuring Lincolnshire has a robust response to the wider Domestic Abuse agenda will be to produce an operational delivery plan and subsequent commissioning plans for both outreach and accommodation-based services.

4. Legal Comments:

Approval of the Strategy will fulfil the Council's statutory duty under section 57 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as referred to in the Report.

The decision is consistent with the Policy Framework and within the remit of the Executive Councillor.

5. Resource Comments:

There are no direct financial implications from this paper. Expenditure is funded either via Council budget or the Domestic Abuse grant.

6. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

n/a

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes, the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement has been consulted.

c) Scrutiny Comments

The decision will be considered by the Public Protection and Communities Committee on 14 December 2021 and their comments will be provided to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement.

d) Risks and Impact Analysis

See main body of the report.

7. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024

8. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
The Domestic Abuse Support (Local Authority Strategies and Annual Reports) Regulations 2021	https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2021/990/made

This report was written by Jade Thursby, Domestic Abuse Business Manager, who can be contacted on 07748 968170 or at jade.thursby@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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Lincolnshire

Preventing Domestic Abuse Strategy

2021 – 2024

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Foreword

Domestic Abuse can, and does, happen to anyone. It is indiscriminate of age, gender, race, profession or social background. In the UK around 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will be affected by domestic abuse in their lifetime and around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse. Whatever the number of those impacted by domestic abuse, it is too many.

The management and prevention of Domestic Abuse is a strategic priority in Lincolnshire and the authority and its partners are committed to understanding the current challenges facing the system and of the opportunities to manage Domestic Abuse differently.

Lincolnshire recognise that in response to increasing demand, the requirement for a new strategy, and the introduction of a new Domestic Abuse Act, there is now an opportunity to review and reform the system-wide approach.

As a partnership we will work collaboratively to take action against abusers, change attitudes and behaviours and we will support survivors, victims and children to ensure that our communities are able to live safe, happy and healthy lives, focusing on early intervention and prevention.

Diane Coulson

Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Partnership Chair

"I was terrified when I first started the Freedom Programme and didn't know what to expect. Linda and Kelly are lovely ladies who really do care deeply about every single person who attends the Freedom Programme and they provide a safe place for you to be able to talk.

I was so terrified of talking and speaking out but towards the end of the programme I managed to find my voice a little and speak with the other ladies after feeling I had to keep my mouth shut for so long. Everyone on the programme has a genuine approach of wanting to care and support each other. It helped me to feel that I wasn't alone and that I wasn't going mad, I wasn't judged, I could release my emotions and cry or get frustrated if I wanted to without being told I shouldn't. The course can make everything hit home and parts of it I found were extremely challenging but with the support from Linda and Kelly, it made it a bit easier to deal with"

**Quote from a survivor attending the SoLDAS
Freedom Programme**

Introduction

This Strategy sets out the shared ambition and key priorities for the Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Partnership in tackling Domestic Abuse and outlines the key areas of action over the next 3 years. This is an inclusive strategy relevant to all victims of Domestic Abuse.

In response to the Domestic Abuse Bill and after a partnership consultation that took place in 2020 Lincolnshire has reviewed the governance of the domestic abuse agenda. Since April 2021 Lincolnshire has developed a separate Domestic Abuse partnership that sits alongside the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership, Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Safeguarding Adults Board; putting Domestic Abuse at the core of the safeguarding agenda and ensuring it gets the focus and dedication it needs.

In Lincolnshire we take Domestic Abuse very seriously and agencies have worked extremely hard to support victims, survivors and children across the county, as well as striving to introduce effective programmes that tackle the behaviour of abusers.

The partnership in Lincolnshire is very conscious of the national issues the Country is facing, particularly in relation to violence against women and girls, as well as the local nuances that impact Lincolnshire communities. With this in mind it is important to note that when writing this strategy we had in mind relevant strategies such as the Tackling Violence against Women & Girls Strategy (including men and boys) 2021 (VAWAG), The Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy for England and Wales, The Ministry of Defence, No Defence for Abuse 2018-2023 to name a few and the 2019 report produced by the

National Rural Crime Network 'Captive & Controlled' Domestic Abuse in Rural areas.

As a partnership we recognise that there are further developments happening nationally and locally that will impact the Domestic Abuse agenda, particularly in relation to serious violence. With this in mind the strategy and delivery plans will be fluid to ensure we can respond to these important changes.

“ I cannot find the words to say thank you for all you have done, I didn't know my rights until I spoke to you, thank you for giving me my freedom ”

What is Domestic Abuse?

It is important to remember that each person's experience of domestic abuse will be different. Not all victims want or are able to leave their abuser at a particular time, and abuse can begin, continue or escalate post-separation. Many victims may not seek to pursue a criminal justice outcome, and so appropriate support must always be offered. It is important to remember the experiences of children and young people who are living with domestic abuse and their needs in any decisions made about the adult victim.

Domestic abuse can encompass a wide range of behaviours. It does not necessarily have to involve physical acts of violence and can include emotional, psychological, controlling, or coercive, sexual and/or economic abuse under section 1(3) of the 2021 Act. Many victims will experience these abusive behaviours simultaneously. At the centre of all these abusive behaviours is the perpetrator's desire to exercise power and control over the victim.

Section 1 of the 2021 Act creates a [statutory definition of domestic abuse](#).

In addition the Care Act states that freedom from abuse and neglect is a key aspect of a person's wellbeing. Domestic violence and abuse is included in the Care Act 2014 as a specific category of harm/abuse and therefore, where an adult with care and support needs is experiencing or at risk of domestic violence and abuse, the duties set out in Section 42 of the Care Act will apply.

Abuse in relationships between those under the age of 18 years will be treated as child abuse as a matter of law and child safeguarding

procedures should be followed. Abuse involving perpetrators and victims aged between 16 and 18 could be both child and domestic abuse. It is important to remember that abuse perpetrated by someone over the age of 18 against someone under the age of 18 also constitutes child abuse as a matter of law. The statutory guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' sets out what professionals and organisations need to do to safeguard children.

Forms of domestic abuse

Professionals and agencies must be aware that the types of abuse can differ in nature, dynamics, and impact, therefore to ensure they can deliver an effective response, there must be an explanation of the types and forms of abuse.

Intimate Partner Abuse

It has long been accepted that domestic abuse most commonly takes place in intimate partner relationships, including same sex relationships. Such abuse in intimate relationships can vary in severity and frequency, ranging from a one-off occurrence to a continued pattern of behaviour. Abuse often continues or intensifies when a relationship has ended, which can be a very dangerous time for a victim. Post-separation abuse, including stalking, harassment and forms of physical, emotional, sexual and economic abuse controlling and coercive behaviour often continues and causes ongoing harm

Teenage Relationship Abuse

Relationship abuse happens at all ages, not just in adult relationships. Young people can experience domestic abuse in their relationships, regardless of whether they are living together. It should be noted that if a young person is under 16 years old, the definition of domestic abuse under the 2021 Act will not apply to them, instead this abuse would be considered as child abuse. Victims under 16 would be treated as victims of child abuse and age appropriate consequences will be considered for perpetrators under 16.

Abuse may also arise out of casual relationships. Some perpetrators may deny abuse by stating that they were not in a relationship with the victim. Some victims may not self-identify as victims due to the casual nature of their relationship. Some perpetrators may have multiple romantic and sexual partners via dating apps and demonstrate abusive behaviour even though the perception is not one of being in an intimate personal relationship with the victim.

Abuse by family members

Abuse by family members can involve abuse by any relative or multiple relatives. A wide range of family members will be considered to be “relatives” that can perpetrate and be victims of abuse, and there is no requirement for the victim and the perpetrator to live together within the 2021 Act. For instance, familial abuse may be perpetrated by children, grandchildren, parents, those with parental responsibility, siblings, or extended families. In some cases, familial abuse may be perpetrated towards a victim by more than one person in the same family. Abuse by family members also encompasses

forced marriage, “honour”-based abuse and female genital mutilation.

Child to Parent/Carer Abuse (CPCA)

It is important to remember that this form of abuse, though commonly referred to as CPCA, can also include parents, those with parental responsibility, siblings, or extended families. There is no specific legal definition of CPCA, but it is important to recognise that CPCA is likely to involve a pattern of behaviour. This can include physical violence from a child towards a parent or other family members such as siblings and a number of different types of abusive behaviours, including damage to property, emotional abuse, and economic/financial abuse. Violence and abuse can occur together or separately. Abusive behaviours can encompass, but are not limited to, humiliating language and threats, belittling, damage to property and stealing and heightened sexualised behaviours. Patterns of coercive control are often seen in cases of CPCA, but some families might experience episodes of explosive physical violence from their child with fewer controlling, abusive behaviours.

“ I am starting to feel more positive now, you have helped me through the darkest time of my entire life and I couldn't of done it without your full support ”

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The prevention of abuse and the protection of all victims lies at the heart of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the wider programme of work. The measures in the 2021 Act seek to:

- promote awareness - to put abuse at the top of everyone's agenda, by introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognise children as victims in their own right;
- protect and support victims - including by establishing in law the office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner, introducing a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Domestic Abuse Protection Order and placing a new duty on tier one local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation;
- tackle perpetrators - extending the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse, extending the offence of disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress to cover threats to disclose such material, creating a new offence of non-fatal strangulation or suffocation of another person, clarifying by restating in statute the general position that a person may not consent to the infliction of serious harm and, by extension, is unable to consent to their own death;
- transform the justice response - including by helping victims to give their best evidence in the criminal courts through the use of video evidence, screens and other special measures, and ensuring that victims of abuse do not suffer further

trauma in family court proceedings by being cross-examined by their abuser; and

- improve performance - to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse.

The various aspects of the Act are due to be implemented at different stages as detailed in the [Commencement Schedule](#).

Duty to Provide Safe Accommodation

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a four-part statutory framework for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation and provides clarity over governance and accountability.

1. Section 54 specifically places a duty on each tier one local authority in England to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions under section 53. These are to:
 - assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims in their area, including those who require cross-border support
 - develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the need's assessment
 - give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / de-commissioning decisions)

- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
 - report back to central government
2. Require local authorities to have regard to statutory guidance in exercising their functions.
 3. Require the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance, having consulted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, local authorities and such other persons as considered appropriate. (This will be produced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC))
 4. Require tier two councils to co-operate with the lead local authority, so far as is reasonably practicable.

The makeup of Local Partnership Boards may vary across local authority areas, but they are expected to include a broad range of representative partners. As a minimum, the Boards will include persons representing local authorities, victims and their children, domestic abuse charities or voluntary organisations, health care providers and the police or other criminal justice agencies.

The types of accommodation that are included/covered by the new duty are broad in recognition of the diversity of housing in which victims and their children may live. The new duty covers the provision of support to victims and their children residing in:

- refuge accommodation
- specialist safe accommodation

- dispersed accommodation
- sanctuary schemes
- move-on or second stage accommodation

There is a requirement to offer domestic abuse support through the new duty, this includes:

- advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers)
- domestic abuse-prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online) and to prevent re-victimisation
- specialist support for victims with protected characteristics and / or complex needs, for example, interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice
- children’s support – including play therapy and child advocacy
- housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home and advice on how to live safely and independently
- counselling and therapy for both adults and children

Understanding the picture: National Context

Domestic abuse is a unique crime type. Whilst it is common, it is often hidden and therefore difficult to quantify. However, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years had experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020. Over 40% of victims of partner abuse have at least one child under the age of 16 years old living in the household, and Childhood Local Data on Risks and Needs estimated that 66 in 1,000 0-17 year olds lived in households where a parent is suffering domestic abuse in 2019.

The police recorded a total of 1,288,018 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police) in the year ending March 2020. This is an increase of 4% from the previous year. This follows a broader pattern of increases in police recorded domestic abuse and may reflect general improvements in crime recording by the police. This suggests that more victims are coming forward to report domestic abuse, and that there is greater police awareness of this crime. Excluding fraud, overall 15% of all police recorded crime was identified as domestic abuse related in the last year.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Domestic abuse can also manifest itself in specific ways within different communities.

Women are disproportionately the victims of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse perpetrated on men by women and on victims in LGBT relationships is often due to the need of the perpetrator to

exert power and control over their victim. The CSEW for the year ending March 2020 estimated that 1.6 million females and 757,000 males aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in that year. Women are more likely to experience repeat victimisation, be physically injured or killed as a result of domestic abuse and experience non-physical abuse - including emotional and financial abuse - than men.

According to the CSEW for the year ending March 2020, around one in four women aged 16 to 74 (27.6%) had been a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime, 274 women were killed in domestic homicides between April 2016 and March 2019. In 263 cases (96%) the suspect was male.

According to the CSEW for the year ending March 2020 around one in seven men aged 16 to 74 (13.8%) had been a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime. 83 men were killed in domestic homicides between April 2016 and March 2019. In 44 cases (53%) the suspected perpetrator of these homicides was male.

Research published by the Home Office has estimated the social and economic costs of domestic abuse in the region of £66 billion for the victims identified in England and Wales within the year 2016/17. The biggest component of the estimated cost is the physical and emotional harms incurred by victims (£47 billion), particularly the emotional harms (the fear, anxiety and depression experienced by victims as a result of domestic abuse), which account for the overwhelming majority of the overall costs. The cost to the economy is also considerable, with an estimated £14 billion arising from lost

output due to time off work and reduced productivity as a consequence of domestic abuse.

There are also additional barriers to services experienced by victims from protected groups and those experiencing multiple disadvantages. Black, Asian and ethnic minority women, women with insecure immigration status, deaf and disabled women and LGBT victims will experience further barriers when accessing services. Similarly, the co-occurrence of homelessness, drug and alcohol use, criminal justice system involvement and mental health will often mean that victims will face huge challenges when seeking support.

Lincolnshire Profile

Lincolnshire is a large and sparsely populated county with a population of 761,224 (ONS 2019 mid-year estimate), with a 49% male and 51% female breakdown. Lincolnshire has an ageing population with 24% of residents over the age of 65 and 21% under the age of 19.

In England 18% of the population (ONS Census 2011) live in rural areas, that is in towns of less than 10,000 people, in villages, hamlets or isolated dwellings. In Lincolnshire the figure is 48%. Lincolnshire has the 16th highest county population (ONS Census 2011) in England but the 5th highest population of people who live in rural areas.

More than 50,000 people in Lincolnshire live in an area recognised as being in the 10% most deprived in the country. Urban centres and coastal towns show higher levels of deprivation than other parts of

the county (IMD 2019), which is in line with the general pattern of deprivation nationally.

Six percent of Lincolnshire households are lone parents with dependent children and just under 74,000 people are divorced or separated (including same-sex civil partnerships) (ONS Census 2011). ONS findings suggest that an estimated 2.7% of the UK population aged 16 years and over identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019, this equates to around 17,000 people in Lincolnshire.

The residents of Lincolnshire are mainly UK born and, although diversity in Lincolnshire is ever changing, the non-white population remains small at 2.4% compared to a national non-white population of 14%. Over 28,500 people speak a foreign language as their main language. 69.3% of those speak English well which is below the national average (ONS Census 2011).

Prevalence models suggest that there are over 22,000 adults aged 18-64 living in Lincolnshire who have moderate or serious disabilities and a further 10,000+ with a Learning Disability (Source: PANSI 2019). In Lincolnshire, 17% of adults aged 16 and over suffer from a common mental disorder, with women being more likely to suffer than men. Rates of depression in Lincolnshire are above average at 10% (equivalent to 63,763 individuals), compared to 9% nationally (JSNA 2018).

Domestic Abuse in Lincolnshire

Domestic abuse has a significant impact upon the communities and public services of Lincolnshire. Estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2020 suggests 5.5% of adults aged 16-74 will have experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This national figure would equate to roughly 30,200 adults aged 16-74 suffering domestic abuse in Lincolnshire (assuming a similar prevalence in Lincolnshire compared to the England and Wales average).

The true number of victims of domestic abuse is also likely to be higher when children are included. CSEW figures suggest that 41% of partner abuse victims suffered abuse while their children were in the house, and that 21% of victims disclosed that the children did see or hear what happened. (Source: Office of National Statistics) If only one child was present at each of the 21% of domestic abuse victimisations in Lincolnshire each year, this would mean that 5,500 children witnessed domestic abuse in their home each year. This means that the true number of Lincolnshire residents affected by domestic abuse each year is likely to be upwards of 35,700 adult victims and child witnesses.

In the last five years, on average there have been over 10,000 domestic abuse incidents reported to Lincolnshire Police every year (up to April 2021). Of these, circa 6,000 are standard risk incidents, equivalent to around 3 in 5 reported domestic abuse incidents.

There were 930 victims who were at high risk of serious harm or death referred into Lincolnshire's Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) by partner agencies in 2020-2021. On average

238 referrals are made to MARAC every quarter (last three years ending March 2021).

There were just fewer than 2,000 referrals for adult victims of domestic abuse to specialist outreach support services in Lincolnshire (provided by EDAN Lincs) during 2020/21. For the same period there were 262 referrals for children experiencing domestic abuse supported by EDAN. In the 9 months April 2020 to December 2020, 6,648 people contacted EDAN Lincs for support advice regarding domestic abuse.

Since the introduction of the Statutory Domestic Homicide Reviews in April 2011 there have been 18 cases involving 27 deaths that have met the criteria for a domestic homicide review in Lincolnshire.

The refuges and dispersed accommodation in Lincolnshire (EDAN Lincs) supported 51 adult victims of domestic abuse during 2020/21. For the same period there were 74 children supported within the refuge. During the COVID Pandemic the refuges have had a slow turnaround of victims moving onto to alternative housing due to the housing stock available. This meant that the victims were staying in refuges for a longer period of time, however as soon as a refuge unit became available this was filled swiftly by a new family fleeing domestic abuse. SoLDAS supported 39 adult victims, with an overall 74% occupancy and an average stay of 82 days.

Domestic abuse is the single most prevalent assessment factor identified in children's social care assessments. It is more prevalent than the presence of factors such as mental health, alcohol misuse, drug misuse, disability and illness, emotional abuse, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. In Lincolnshire during 2018-19, 55.1% of assessments

identified domestic abuse as an issue. This is higher than the national average of 50.6%, and places Lincolnshire 42nd among the 151 local authorities in England that supplied information. (Source: Department for Education) Domestic abuse has also specifically been identified as a factor in 54% of all serious case reviews, which investigate child deaths relating to maltreatment, abuse and neglect.

In 2020/21 Domestic Abuse features in 7.6% of safeguarding referrals received by Adult Social Care, however as with all Domestic Abuse this is likely under reported and sometimes difficult to record accurately within assessment factors. Out of that figure a large proportion of the abuse reported was committed by a relative, with 27 people experiencing abuse from a family carer. The highest reporting came from adults aged 18-64 and 75-84.

Lincolnshire is vast and predominately rural with clusters of diverse communities. Access to domestic abuse services varies geographically and there are seasonal fluctuations in population owing to Lincolnshire's coastal resorts, all of which pose a unique challenge in equitably distributing the response to and services for domestic abuse victims in the county.

Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis

While prevalence estimates from the CSEW have remained stable, nationally and locally there has been an increase in demand on services over the past three years, and there is a hypothesis that Covid 19 has been an accelerating factor. There is however, recognition of a high likelihood of underreporting and changes to the experience of domestic abuse. This therefore makes it necessary to investigate the true demand picture.

A diagnostic and analysis was undertaken in Lincolnshire to understand the current position of demand and performance data, communications, partnership working and strategic alignment. The findings of which underpin this strategy. What we found and know is that:

- Many of the conditions of success for an effective partnership are already in place in Lincolnshire, and the Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Partnership has much strength to build on as it develops
- Competent, driven and united leadership
- Learning culture with willingness to pilot new ideas and honestly evaluate
- High levels of trust and honesty amongst partners with partners challenging one another, sharing honest reflections and willing to be vulnerable
- Strong sense of shared purpose with clarity on importance of the partnership and their role within it

- Ownership with partners willing to take on actions and reflect on their own contributions
- Lincolnshire has a well-established and high performing outreach and IDVA service that supports both adults and children
- Refuge spaces in the County are at recommended levels but not all of these are commissioned by the County Council
- Dispersed Accommodation is sufficient however we acknowledge that the partnership needs to better understand the needs of all victim groups
- Each District has a sanctuary scheme/target hardening, however the provision offered to victims across the County differs greatly and therefore a countywide approach would be beneficial
- We do not currently have 'move on accommodation' within Lincolnshire that meets the safe accommodation definition within the DA Act 2021 and therefore a key priority is to explore options further
- There is a continued requirement to support people with complex needs, including mental health, alcohol, and drugs issues, as well as homelessness.
- Significant changes are required to the way that information is captured, stored and shared across the partnership to support a more intelligence led approach.

- Most known interventions happen at, or after the point of crisis and there are opportunities to strengthen the existing early intervention offer
- There are opportunities to prevent DA from occurring or escalating by addressing known vulnerabilities, such as mental health problems
- There is an opportunity to move from a focus on formal services at the point of crisis to preventative community resources
- A common cross-partner approach to communications would allow for a more consistent and creative response

There are a number of key priority areas that need to be actioned in the short and long term to further develop the response to domestic abuse in Lincolnshire.

Locally we will practice a continual cycle of domestic abuse needs assessment conducted at three yearly intervals. We will take a rounded intelligence led approach in partnership, enabling us to continuously grow our understanding, identify and respond to changes and ensure the right services are in the right place.

Shared Ambition and Principles

The aim of the partnership is to work together in a fully committed and collaborative way to stop domestic abuse from happening through education, prevention and intervention. We will do this by strengthening and standardising our data collection and recording. We will use data to make predictive and intelligence-driven decisions that maximise our resources as a partnership and allow us to understand and fill gaps in provision. We are also working with the other three statutory safeguarding boards in Lincolnshire with the aim of developing a shared prevention strategy that will look at addressing domestic abuse alongside other safeguarding risks. By working together we can achieve more joined up outcomes and make best use of our resources.

We will further invest in prevention and early intervention and think creatively about different needs and ways of engaging with those vulnerable to Domestic Abuse. We will ensure our support is strengths-based and person-centred and driven by the needs of survivors. We will raise awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, promoting change and challenging negative societal attitudes and language.

As a partnership we will take a reflective practice approach, learning and continuously improving and creating a survivor network to support others. We will be focused on the future and have a clear outcomes framework in place that demonstrates the value of our work and the difference it makes. We will take a holistic approach to tackling Domestic Abuse and look at the impact and thus the offer to victims, survivors, children and perpetrators.

Make a change perpetrator programme

“The support has been absolutely amazing, it’s the first time I’ve ever spoken to anybody about it... I hadn’t ever told anybody the whole truth about it all, you know, I might hint, imply a bit to a friend or somebody, but you just feel like, too ashamed, stupid, like you’ve done something wrong... and also people will make judgements if you don’t leave somebody, whereas talking to [a support worker] just has...it’s like a weight has been lifted.”

Victim/Survivor

“So what it was, was that the Social Services Department were involved, because of something at the school, about the kids saying that daddy shouts at home and stuff. So anyway, they came round and they said to me, we can offer you some suggested courses... And at first, I was a bit sort of defensive about it, because I thought there’s nothing wrong... But then after a while, I thought about it, and I said to them, actually, you know what, can you give me more information about this course?”

Victim/Survivor

Business Intelligence Picture

Invest time into developing our business intelligence picture for Lincolnshire, looking at partnership data and how we can develop a continual cycle of data analysis that will support the partnerships ambitions. We acknowledge that further work is needed to understand the needs of all victim groups. Evaluation and performance against the strategy and delivery plan will also be developed.

Community Engagement

The importance of community engagement is acknowledged by the partnership; however development work would be beneficial in the following areas:

- Survivor engagement programme
- Communications activity
- Business engagement
- Community/neighbourhood engagement particularly looking at the role of the voluntary sector and community groups

Safe Accommodation

Through the initial needs assessment we have identified some areas of work specifically looking at a county wide approach to a Sanctuary Scheme/target hardening, the need to explore move on accommodation options and the continued support for complex needs. However the partnership acknowledges that further diagnostic and analytical work needs to be undertaken in the development of the delivery plan in order to fully appreciate the need in this area, especially in relation to male victims, older people and people with protected characteristics. This will be a priority focus for the partnership.

Our Delivery Priorities

In delivering our shared ambition we will, as a partnership, focus on the following key delivery priorities, which are based on an extensive needs assessment. The five key areas of focus for the Domestic Abuse Strategy are:

Early Intervention

There are a number of opportunities to develop the partnerships early intervention response; however the key areas identified are:

- School and early years engagement
- Creatively using health settings to support earlier identification of Domestic Abuse and offers of support
- Developing the partnership response to standard and medium risk DASH and how that information is shared
- Further development of the partnership multi-agency training programme
- Tackling culture and language at all levels
- We will work jointly with the Adult Safeguarding Board to raise awareness of and tackle the domestic abuse of older adults

Perpetrator Response

In order to tackle domestic abuse effectively the partnership needs to develop how it responds to the behaviour of abusers and what programmes/initiatives are most appropriate for a rural county.

The next steps to support the Domestic Abuse Strategy will be to develop a partnership delivery plan which will detail the what, how and who in each of these key areas and build further on the findings within the needs assessment, as well as a commissioning plan for accommodation based services and Outreach intervention. However as a partnership we acknowledge that continual diagnostic and analytical activity needs to be undertaken to ensure that each priority area is fully supported by relevant data and intelligence.

Indicators

As part of our Business Intelligence delivery and our approach to needs assessment, we will routinely review data from across the partnership relating to domestic abuse.

We know we have work to do to develop the data sources available to us and will include performance indicators against our delivery plan which are both quantitative and qualitative, including activity based monitoring.

Along with indicators of our performance, we will monitor trends in demand covering:

- Police incidents and recorded crime
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Support for victims
- Information from health services
- Children affected by domestic abuse

- Perpetrators – including serial and repeat offenders and those enrolled in perpetrator programmes
- Training participation
- Engagement and awareness raising activities (website clicks, businesses engaged)

Monitoring this data will serve to trigger questions, helping us continually grow our business intelligence, make evidence based decisions and focus resources where they are most needed.

“ I think the sessions were very helpful. They gave me a better view of good and bad relationships. I have learnt how to spot the dominator ”

Quotes from professionals on the Multi-agency DA training

"Opportunity to hear and learn from other's experiences backed by trainers' expertise. Made me reflect on the quality and the time spent in completing a DASH is of vital importance"

LCC Children's - Future 4 Me Team

"I found the importance of professional curiosity has more importance than I have previously thought and that how to add more notes to a DASH and SDASH form"

Charity - Gainsborough Trinity Foundation

"I have enjoyed discussing a case study with a variety of other professionals and looking at how we would complete a dash together, highlighting the different concerning factors. Being able to look at a case study with different sets of eyes - through different experiences, training and knowledge was very helpful and useful"

We Are With You

"Revisiting the DASH form has been beneficial as I don't have much experience with dealing with these cases. Looking at local cases also brought it home to me that this sort of thing happens in Lincolnshire"

School

"The most beneficial aspect of this training was having the opportunity to listen and share. Mary-Ann is so knowledgeable and a great delivery style so the questions that she offers to group really do promote reflection and thinking which is so powerful. We were lucky enough to have 2 colleagues who worked with adults and families who have experienced first-hand the issues which helped to really understand the reality further"

LCC Children's - Early Years and Childcare Support

Commissioning and Resourcing

The services currently commissioned in Lincolnshire are an Outreach and IDVA service as well as a Refuge service to support individuals experiencing Domestic Abuse and their children. In addition to the commissioned services there are other non-sustainably funded provision provided in the South of the County by a local charity SoLDAS.

The commissioned service provides:

Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Service

The IDVA Service is commissioned to support victims (men, women and young people aged 16 and over) who reside within the geographical boundaries of Lincolnshire, and who have been assessed as at 'high risk' of serious harm or death, and have been referred to a Lincolnshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). An IDVA provides a confidential information, advocacy and advice service; assisting individuals and their families to access criminal and civil justice remedies, housing, counselling, advice, health and other support services. A two year funding award from the MOJ has meant recently a Court IDVA, Child and young person IDVA and Rural IDVA has been added to the service.

Hospital-based IDVA

The aims of the service are to reduce the immediate risk of harm and homicide, and improve the physical and mental health outcomes of those affected by DA and receiving treatment. The hospital-based IDVA's provides immediate support and advice to victims to improve

their safety and advocacy, as well as link them and their families to longer-term specialist community-based support services.

Outreach Domestic Abuse Support Service - Support for Adults (Women and Men)

All referrals are triaged on access into the service to ensure clients are prioritised and managed in an appropriate and timely manner. The type of support offered varies and is determined by the level of risk and need identified. A comprehensive service user led safety & support plan is formulated, bespoke to the service user and their family. The nature of the support available for adults ranges from telephone support and signposting to online resources, to evidenced-based group and intensive 1:1 therapeutic interventions specifically targeting domestic abuse.

Outreach Domestic Abuse Support Service – Support for Children/Families

Once adults engage in the Outreach Service, families will have the opportunity to access the Family Focus programme where it is safe and appropriate to do so. The Family Focus programme consists of family group sessions with the non-abusive parent/caregiver and their child/ren together. The purpose of the support is to help the family to stay safe, assist in the rebuilding of relationships which may have been damaged or undermined by the impact of domestic abuse, and ultimately empower the non-abusive parent to meet the needs of their child/ren.

Targeted Children’s Support Service

The children and young people service is available to those aged 5 to 16 years, whose non abusive parent is already accessing Outreach

support, as well as Looked After Children, those under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and adopted children. Young people who have been identified as having SEND and/or are a care leaver, can access the service up to the age of 25. The support is suitable for those assessed as having higher levels of need or experiencing the more serious effects of domestic abuse. Those children will be provided specialist 1:1 therapeutic support and intervention that focus on the needs of the child, taking into account factors such as age and vulnerability.

Refuge and Dispersed Accommodation Services

The refuge contract was re-commissioned in September 2020 as a whole County service and offers specialist accommodation for victims and children fleeing Domestic Abuse. The service provides specialist support to DA victims and children in order to address the immediate safeguarding needs of those service users but in addition provides specific support aimed at survivors moving into independent living and breaking the cycle of DA within their family.

EDAN Lincs manage two refuges in the County, a purpose built, 11 unit refuge that are all self-contained accommodation which include 3 with access for people with disabilities. A multi-occupancy refuge that has 5 self-contained ground floor units of accommodation; these have several bedrooms to accommodate families. As well as 4 dispersed properties that can accommodate families with up to 5 children, including older male dependants and male service users. This type of accommodation supports people who are more suited for independent living.

Other provision in Lincolnshire:

SoLDAS have 8 shared units of refuge accommodation and 3 Dispersed Move on units based in the South of the County. New Refuge accommodation is due to open March 2022 – to include 10 units of shared accommodation with two attached units for male victims & children.

Other support services offered in the South of the County:

School Intervention work with Primary & Secondary schools including 1-1 work with any children that disclose during or after the education sessions. Rural hubs that provide face to face support in the community. Move on Together offering low level, early intervention support to help survivors move on from Domestic Abuse and to bridge the gap between intensive support services and living independently. As well as the Freedom Programme which offers online & face to face delivery, 12 week programme recognising the signs and effects of Domestic Abuse and impact on children.

As well as outreach and safe accommodation services the other interventions that are in place in the County and supported by the partnership are:

- Community based perpetrator programme which is currently funded until 2023
- Stay safe team that provides a single point of access to education programmes in school aimed at supporting children and young people to stay safe and raise awareness of important issues such as healthy relationships etc

- Multi-agency Domestic Abuse training for practitioners and managers across the County. This forms part of the wider safeguarding agenda and is included in the 6 year training pathway.

New commissioning plans will be formulated based on the needs assessment and the continual cycle of analysis and diagnostic work. The commissioning for safe accommodation will form part of the wider commissioning programme for Domestic Abuse and enhance the existing provision in place. It is important where possible that commissioning within the County is undertaken collaboratively in order to create a seamless person-centred approach by which survivors, victims and children can access support and the behaviour of abusers is addressed, therefore future commissioning will be undertaken in partnership with key agencies.

“ My daughter feels a lot safer since having completed her own safety plan, she now knows what to do, whereas before she didn't know and that made her feel really scared when Dad came to the family home at 5am drunk and banging on the door ”

Governance and Accountability

With all of the above in mind, the following is an outline of the partnership and governance structure that has been developed to fulfil the new statutory requirements and respond effectively to the breadth of the DA agenda in a coordinated, collaborative and sustainable way.

The DA partnership will sit alongside the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership, Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board and Safer Lincolnshire Partnership as a separate structure in the LCC Resources Directorate within the Community Safety Service. The DA partnership will also work closely with the Suicide Prevention steering group and Prevent workstream recognising the links between Domestic Abuse and these agendas. The DA partnership has the following groups of which separate terms of reference are available for each:

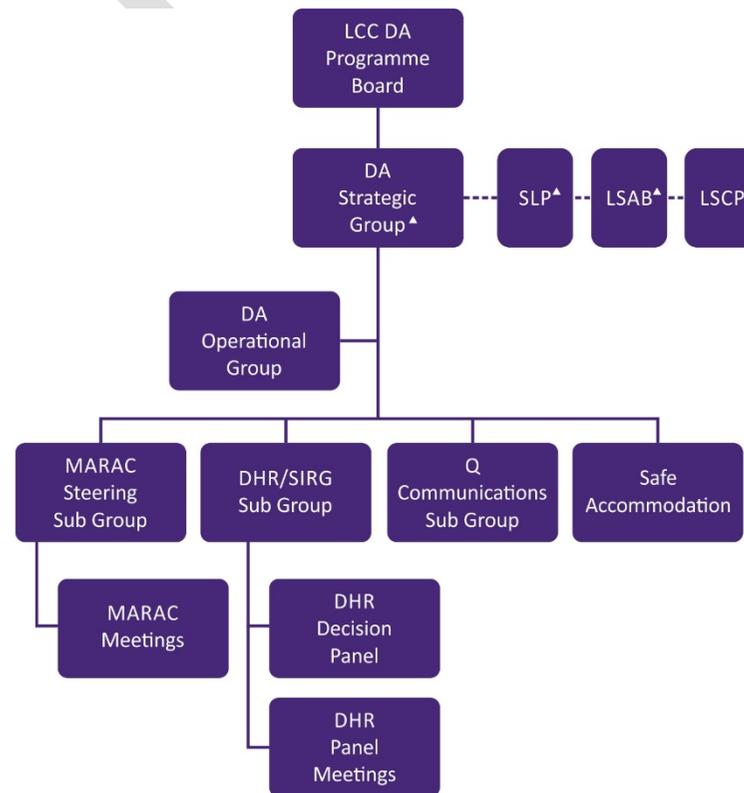
- The DA Programme Board – LCC senior leadership board
- DA Strategic partnership group (advisory role to the LCC Programme Board)
- DA Operational partnership group

Sub groups include but are not limited to:

- The MARAC Steering sub group
- DHR and learning sub group
- Q Communications sub group – this is aligned across the 4 boards and forms part of the collaboration work described
- Safe Accommodation sub group

Operational delivery groups:

- MARAC meetings
- DHR decision panel and DHR meetings



▲ We are currently working with the other three statutory boards to develop a more joined up approach to prevention. This will include exploring the development of a pooled fund to invest in prevention initiatives.

The partnership is made up of multi-agency representative from:

- Lincolnshire County Council, Community Safety, Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Children's Health
- Representatives from the District Councils
- Lincolnshire Police
- Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning group
- Lincolnshire Community Health Services
- Victim Support
- EDAN Lincs
- United Lincolnshire Hospital Trust
- Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation Trust
- Public Health
- Office for the Police Crime Commissioner
- Probation Service
- HM Courts and Tribunals
- SSAFA – the armed forces charity
- And other representatives where required

Collaboration opportunities between the partnerships

Domestic Abuse in particular, is a shared area of concern and cuts across the work of all four Boards/partnership structures. It is important to acknowledge that they have a role in preventing domestic

abuse and that is why this work is so vital. There is an intention to explore opportunities to integrate key functions across the key partnerships to create efficiencies, reduce duplication for partners and improve the collaborate working at both strategic and operational levels.

Scrutiny

Lincolnshire County Council will be required to:

- Report back to central government as part of the statutory duty in relation to safe accommodation services
- Report annually to Lincolnshire County Councils Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Provide regular reports to Lincolnshire County Council's Chief Executive and portfolio holder/s
- Report to Lincolnshire County Councils DA Programme Board on a quarterly basis

Conclusion

This strategy is Lincolnshire's partnership response to tackling Domestic Abuse in our county. It has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders and is as a result of a full needs assessment undertaken looking at the wider Domestic Abuse agenda. It is acknowledged within the strategy under the priority objectives, that further diagnostic and analytical activity is required in order to develop a detailed delivery plan that serves the partnership effectively, meets the statutory duties under Part 4 of the DA Act 2021, and provides the best outcomes for individuals experiencing and impacted by Domestic Abuse.

The delivery plan will be developed in collaboration with the partnership and strive to address the ambitions set out within the strategy. As a partnership we feel strongly that the strategy should set out our overall ambitions, principles and objectives in tackling domestic abuse, with the delivery plan setting out how we will achieve this, ensuring a level of fluidity is built into this process in order to respond to a changing landscape.

The strategy and subsequent delivery plan and commissioning plans will address the needs of all victim groups including those with protected characteristics.

Letter from a Service User

“To everyone at Boston Women’s Aid

On 6th November 2021, I told T I was taking the dogs for a walk. I went out with them, grabbed the rucksack I had hidden, and walked to the school. The children were waiting with their school bags packed with a few precious things. My friend loaded us into her car and drove us away.

I was homeless, jobless, without transport, without money and without a future. It was terrifying.

The next month of talking to me while we waited for the dispersed refuge to be ready was tough. I still couldn’t see my way forward. I existed in a bizarre alternate reality in which I handled my huge burden of anxiety by cleaning every square inch of C’s house. We finally got the call to say the refuge was ready and C drove us to a garage. Thanks to my totally awesome mum I was able to buy a car – that was step number one on the road to recovery. We were met by R and C, and I was utterly overwhelmed. I was expecting something like the hostels I had stayed in when I was younger. I was not expecting the perfect little home equipped with all the essentials as well as the lovely touch like scatter cushions and throws.

That was when the serious work of picking apart the last thirteen years began. I didn’t think I deserved any help. Deep down, I felt like I was the problem. I was a fraud, and you would soon discover that I didn’t belong here. He had never left a lasting mark on me (ok – maybe the odd bruise – but nothing serious). Our relationship wasn’t perfect but whose was?

Slowly I began to realise what he had done. The first revelation was how badly the children had been affected. I was devastated! They were my world and I stood by while it happened. The guilt was crippling. But by talking to you all and taking part in the Freedom Program, I began to realise what had happened.

I was broken and lost. The person I once was had nearly vanished. The woman that gave lectures to thousands and did adventurous things like skydiving had disappeared. All I knew how to do was keep quiet, do as I was told and not to talk back.

Mum was paying the rent and I knew there was no future for us if I couldn’t earn a decent wage. I started applying for jobs, utterly convinced couldn’t do them. But slowly my love for life was rekindled. The fact that several companies were competing for me did wonders for my confidence. This was my ticket to tomorrow.

The job led to a mortgage which enabled me to buy us a home.

And that is where we are now. My home is perfect- and it is mine. No one tells me when I am allowed to go out or how to be, no one gets cross if I am tired and want a nap. No one shouts at me for spending money on groceries. I have chosen all the furniture in my home – this may seem like a simple thing, but I didn’t even get a say in what plates we had in our old home. I can wear whatever clothes I like. I can sleep in pyjamas. I can spend an hour on the phone to my mum.

My friends are coming back. I have learned how to play with my children. Laughter is now a common sound. When there is a problem, we all sit down and talk about it. Voices do not get raised and ultimatums no longer exist, if one of the children are sad, they can curl

up in my bed and I can stroke their face until they fall asleep. I am no longer constantly existing at the point of exhaustion. I have one job that finishes at 5pm – then I can decide what to do with my evenings and weekends.

Then there is my job, which means I can afford to pay for everything. I no longer have to go without food so I can get the children school shoes. I can buy clothes I like, and I don't have to make do with what I can find in charity shops (although I do love a charity shop bargain!). But it's not just about the money – I love my job! The work stretches my brain and I get a real sense of achievement. I work in a team that supports me. I also feel like I am showing my children what is possible to achieve. I overheard O telling their friend that mummy was really clever – and that felt like a truth. After years of being told I'm stupid, I feel valued for my knowledge.

If I want to go out and spend weeks in the desert helping with the conservation of elephants – I can! I can see a future where the children are grown up and I am happy. I can see a future that I want to live in, rather than the inevitable darkness and despair that I had resigned myself to.

We are still a work in progress, there is still a lot of healing to be done. But given how much we have already overcome I feel confident that we will get there.

This happened because of you. You gave us a safe place to heal and constant support for every problem we encountered along the way. I know we are one of many families that you help but it does not stop you from making us feel like we were your top priority. We never felt like we had to do any of this alone. I have managed to do all of it

because I had all of you metaphorically holding my hand. You took us from that dark and desperate place and showed us a way to a future full of happiness and endless possibilities.

What you do is incredible.

Somehow thank you is not enough – but they have not invented the words I need, so

THANK YOU!

Love from us all”