

Equality Impact Assessment – Integrated Domestic Abuse Service 2024-2027

Details of proposal:

Sefton is seeking to procure a fully Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (IDAS) from 2024 for a minimum of 3 years. The service will provide holistic support to the victims and families of domestic abuse, irrespective of protected characteristic or risk level. The service will provide therapeutic counselling to those that require it in order to build resilience and aid recovery from the long-term effects of domestic abuse.

Ramifications of Proposal: The service will provide:

- A holistic support to the victims and families of domestic abuse who are deemed at standard risk (bronze) of following a Merseyside Police report of domestic abuse.
- A holistic support to the victims and families of domestic abuse who are deemed at medium risk (silver) of following a Merseyside Police report of domestic abuse.
- A holistic support to the victims and families of domestic abuse who are identified from other sources within the borough that are not deemed to be at the level of MARAC (Multi-agency Risk Assessment).
- Strong links with education settings & Family Well Being centres in the borough and support the delivery of Operation Encompass (the notification given to schools following a domestic abuse incident involving a child). To deliver appropriate healthy relationship sessions to groups when required.
- A domestic abuse helpline that can be contactable for a minimum of 5 days per week between the hours of 8am to 6pm which could be utilised by victims, the families & friends of victims and professionals seeking support and advice around domestic abuse.
- A minimum of one a week drop-in session in each of the localities, based on identified needs to allow residents to seek support around domestic abuse. These need to be flexible and accommodate all residents.
- Domestic abuse recovery-based programmes (e.g., Recovery Toolkit) that aid the long-term recovery of victims and build resilience across the borough developing flexibility to allow open access to all that need this.
- Strong links with Primary Care Networks, Mental Health providers, and Community Link workers, where they exist, and to offer support for victims and families who are within mental health services and in need.
- Offer therapeutic counselling support for victims and families effected by domestic abuse, aiding long term recovery and prevention.
- Strong links with the existing provision delivering domestic abuse support in the brough including the IDVA team, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise provision, and partner agencies.
- Effective communications to raise the profile of Domestic Abuse, and available services, advice and guidance, using a range of communication channels, including digital.
- Training programme for the Council, partner organisations, private sector business community and general public.
- Co-locating the IDVAs into the new service will be explored to ensure there is seamless transition from silver to gold and vice versa.

Are there any protected characteristics that will be disproportionately affected in comparison to others?

It is accepted that Domestic Abuse can affect anyone irrespective of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity. This is an important message to impart. Domestic Abuse does not happen to a certain type of person. Just because someone does not look like a “typical victim” does not mean s/he is not suffering from domestic abuse.

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- *Age*
- *Disability*
- *Gender Reassignment*
- *Marriage and Civil Partnership*
- *Race*
- *Religion or Belief*
- *Sex*
- *Sexual Orientation*
- *Pregnancy and Maternity*
- *Care Experienced*

Activities to prevent Domestic Abuse, support victims and deal with perpetrators need to be designed to meet the legitimate and particular considerations of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity of those within or having had experience of the care system.

Sex

The IDAS will support men as well as women. There is a risk that victims are portrayed only as women. The activities proposed in the strategy will, wherever possible, cover both genders in terms of victims and perpetrators. The local refuge is only available to females. It has been recognised that there is a lack of services for males in Sefton. This is a concern the service aims to address. There are real differences in how the genders experience Domestic Abuse and this will lead to variation in the approach taken towards men and women. Women do seem to experience the most serious physical and repeated assaults

Female victims accounted for 73% of domestic abuse related crimes recorded by the police 2020/21 and 74% in 2021/22 (Domestic Abuse in England and Wales Overview November 2021 and November 2022, Office for National Statistics (ONS)).

There were 373 victims of domestic homicide aged 16 and over in England and Wales between March 2019 and March 2021. 72% of these victims (269) were female. (Domestic Abuse in England and Wales Overview November 2022, Office for National Statistics (ONS)).

Sexual Orientation

The DA Act 2021 applies to same sex relationships in the same way as heterosexual relationships. This strategy also applies to people suffering from domestic abuse in same sex relationships. Training packages and publicity will stress this. The Local Domestic Abuse Partnership may consider it worthwhile to target our LGBT+ community to encourage victims to seek help.

Disability

The Domestic Abuse Partnership recognises the additional problems faced by victims with a disabling condition. The local refuge is accessible for people with mobility problems. The problems faced by disabled people are not seen as different, but over and above those facing people without a disability. Regarding mental health, this is complex. As a rule of thumb, all victims of domestic abuse (and their children) will have a reduced level of mental well-being as a result of the abuse. This needs to be taken into consideration by those offering them services. For someone who is depressed, making major changes can seem too daunting despite the risks of staying in a relationship. The service will provide a range of counselling options for victims and their children. Risk assessments for victims must include the risk of suicide and self-harm. It can also be argued, that the perpetrators of Domestic Abuse have mental health problems expressed by the need to feel power and control. Sometimes this stems from experiencing abuse in the home as a child. This again emphasises why work with children in violent homes is so important as it can help break patterns of abusive behaviour. There is a link between mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse for both the perpetrators and victims of Domestic Abuse. It is important for substance misuse treatment services to respond to Domestic Abuse and work closely with the service. It is also important to recognise that some disabled people have communication issues which may be a barrier to accessing the service. The IDAS will provide a range of communication options so that the service will be fully accessible to all.

Age

There is no upper age limit to being a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse. Seftons Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment highlighted unmet need for older victims of Domestic Abuse and this service will provide support for all victims of Domestic Abuse irrespective of age. Organisations representing older people will be made aware of the service. Domestic abuse has a detrimental impact on children, as this strategy has emphasised. The strategy aims to deal with concerns about:

- The impact on children in violent homes
- Young people adopting violent/victims patterns in dating relationships or towards other family members.

There will be a focus on work in schools, especially with primary age children.

The service will take part in and lead publicity campaigns and messages, as part of the Safer Sefton Together VAWG Statement aimed at young women regarding dating violence, date rape and sexual assaults.

Race

The service will offer culturally sensitive services for victims from ethnic minorities. Where appropriate the service will engage the smaller "by and for" market in order to provide person centred services, removing cultural or communication barriers to the service. There is concern at the lack of reporting from certain communities. This may mean that current data in relation to offenders and victims does not present an accurate picture of domestic violence within ethnic minority communities. Safer Sefton Together's approach to VAWG also covers so called Honour Based Abuse such as Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This issue has both an age and gender bias as problems are faced most by young people and are most detrimental to young women. However, it will not be overlooked that Forced Marriage affects men. Raising awareness and supporting victims of forced marriage will need to be done sensitively with the aim of working with local communities.

Pregnancy & Maternity

We know that the risk of domestic abuse increases during pregnancy and therefore the service will ensure that women who are pregnancy will be able to access the help they need as well as their unborn child.

Consultation:

The needs assessment carried out a number of focus group engagement sessions with victims/survivors as well as collection of views through interviews and questionnaires. The views of victims/survivors in Sefton has shaped the DA strategy which has led to the development of this service. We are keen to further develop the victim / survivor voice and it be at the heart of all strategic decisions. This will be regularly reviewed.

The Needs Assessment Consulted in a number of ways

COMMUNITY SURVEYS

- Distributed to key partners for promotion among their service users, and hosted on the Sefton MBC website.
- Covered key areas such as experience of service and barriers to services.
- 29 responses

PRACTITIONER FOCUS GROUPS

- Attended team meetings with SWACA and IDVA services to understand what is working well and the areas that require development in Sefton.

SURVIVOR INTERVIEWS AND GROUPS

- Completed survivor interviews with the assistance of SWACA.
- Gave an understanding of the self-identified need of survivors of domestic abuse and their experiences of services in Sefton

KEY PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS

- Completed 1-2-1 interviews with key practitioners to understand services response to domestic abuse in Sefton.
- Captured information on what is working well and areas that need to be Developed.

DOMESTIC ABUSE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

- Throughout the needs assessment process, we presented findings and draft versions of the needs assessment to the local partnership board, enabling us to develop the assessment.

Is there evidence that the Public Sector Equality Duties will be met?

The Equality Act 2010 requires that those subject to the Equality Duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- *Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.*
- *Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*
- *Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*

The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- *Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.*
- *Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.*
- *Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.*

The purpose of the IDAS is to provide Domestic & Sexual Abuse support services for victims of Domestic and Sexual Abuse/Violence no matter what their background, no matter what their risk level. Indeed the service aims to protect and support the most vulnerable in our society to increase their resilience in order to break the cycle of abuse.

What actions will follow if proposal accepted by cabinet & Council?

Include details of any mitigating action and ongoing monitoring to address any of the equality impacts highlighted above

Next steps will include refining the existing service specification in readiness for a full and open procurement process in April 2024. Returned tenders will be assessed with regards to their approach to Equality and Diversity.

An experts by experience victim / survivor voice group will be developed by December 2023 to seek input into codesigning the service in readiness for procurement activity.

The equality impact assessment will be reviewed annually as part of an annual contract review.