

Report Title: Domestic Abuse Update

Date of meeting:	Tuesday 28 January 2025		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)		
Report of:	Assistant Director Communities		
Portfolio:	Communities & Partnerships		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

The purpose of the report is to update Overview & Scrutiny Members on Sefton's strategic approach to tackling domestic abuse.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) Members note the content of the report

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

Elected members will benefit from understanding the work of the Domestic Abuse Board and how the council collaborates with partners to respond to the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act locally. This will provide assurance as well as information and insight to support overview and scrutiny of this issue.

2. Financial Implications

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed duties on local authorities across England to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation when they need it. The council received £631,105 in new burdens funding for 2024/25 for delivery of this duty. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government has confirmed that the domestic abuse safe accommodation grant will continue in 2025-26.

3. Legal Implications

The work of the board and commissioning of domestic abuse services is a statutory responsibility of the council

4. Corporate Risk Implications

If the work of the board and commissioning of domestic abuse services using allocated funds is not carried out, there is a risk that statutory requirements are not fulfilled.

5 Staffing HR Implications

None

6 Conclusion

The work of the board and commissioning of domestic abuse services is a statutory responsibility of the council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

There are no alternative options as Sefton's domestic abuse response and the work of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board are a statutory requirement.

Equality Implications:
The equality implications have been identified and mitigated
Impact on Children and Young People:
Children and young people affected by domestic abuse are defined as direct victims within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Therefore, it is imperative that addressing the needs of children and young people is integral within the preventative and response work associated with domestic abuse.
Climate Emergency Implications:
The recommendations within this report will have a neutral impact.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial (FD7889/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD 5989/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Implementation Date for the Decision:

With immediate effect.

Contact Officer:	Mel Ormesher
Email Address:	mel.ormesher@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board Mid-year Report September 2024

Background Papers: None

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 In September 2023 elected members were provided with an update on the work of Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and the refresh of Sefton’s Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and accompanying action plan.

2. Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board

2.1 Over the past year, Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has continued to meet on a bi-monthly basis and has focused on taking forward some of the key priorities identified in Sefton’s Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2028.

2.2 On 15 May 2024 the board met for a half day workshop session to review the work achieved so far against the strategy objectives and action plan and what activity needs to be prioritised going forward. This has been compiled into a mid-year report to share across partners and partnership (see attached appendix to this report). Key highlights from this report around what has been achieved over the past year include:

Objective 1

To prioritise a strategic partnership approach to the reduction of domestic and sexual abuse in our communities.

- Partnership approach with Safer Sefton Together for the 2023 White Ribbon and 16 days of action campaign, repeated in 2024.
- Additional funding from the Standing Together national whole health project to trial the IRIS programme, which focuses on improving the response to domestic abuse in health settings. The programme started in January 2024 and by September there were 22 GP practices signed up for the IRIS domestic abuse training, with 6 practices having been

trained in full. In addition to this, there have been 32 referrals from GPs for domestic abuse support since the programme started.

- Partnership mapping around current domestic abuse provision to build on the outcomes of the domestic abuse strategic assessment which has informed the development of the Healthy Relationships programme and multi-agency training on domestic abuse.
- Partnership away day held in May 2024 which aimed to take stock of progress so far and consider the experience of children's services in defining outcomes and measuring impact against activity.

Objective 2

To improve the prevention, early identification and response to domestic and sexual abuse.

- Introduction of the new Healthy Relationships offer for children and young people. The Women's Aid's 'Expect Respect' programme is delivered in Sefton schools by Sefton Women and Children's Aid (SWACA) as part of Sefton Domestic Abuse Service. 4,128 children and young people have attended sessions between January and June 2024.
- An increase in opportunities for professionals working in Sefton to access free multi agency training on domestic abuse, including sessions on domestic abuse awareness, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), coercive control and domestic abuse and children. Sessions continue to be delivered, and further training options are being developed, including a new e-learning domestic abuse awareness package which is hosted by Sefton Council's corporate learning site and launched in November 2024.

Objective 3

To increase the reporting of domestic and sexual abuse through awareness raising and access to support services.

- Launch of a new borough wide Domestic Abuse Helpline 0151 394 1400 as part of the integrated Sefton Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS) open 8am-6pm Monday – Friday. Between November 2023 – June 2024 the helpline has received 3,173 calls.
- Introduction of new community based drop-in sessions as part of the integrated Sefton Domestic Abuse Service offer.
- Creation of a new Health IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) post in January 2023 seconded to Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust following a successful bid for funding from the Ministry of Justice via the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner Merseyside. In 2023/24 144 victims/survivors were supported by the health IDVA.
- Development and launch of a new domestic abuse microsite which includes a range of information and guidance as well as links to support services:
www.sefton.gov.uk/domesticabuse

Objective 4

To work with commissioners to ensure a wide range of services are in place to support and protect victims and survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, including children.

- New domestic abuse housing advisor post created within Sefton Council's housing options team who can offer specialist advice and guidance and is linked closely to local specialist domestic abuse support services.
- Opening of Sefton's new 24-hour refuge provision Eva House managed by SWACA for female victims of domestic abuse and their children. This consists of a total of 19 bedspaces – for up to 5 adults and 14 children. Between December 2023 and June 2024, 8 women and 14 children have been supported.
- Ongoing co-production of the new Sefton Domestic Abuse Service between the community safety and engagement team, children's services and the Integrated Care Board Sefton Place commissioning team, utilising learning from the proof of concept model currently in place.
- Development and procurement of a new Complex Lives Accommodation service – Athena House - for female victims of domestic abuse by Sefton Council. This service launched in August 2024 and is being delivered as a partnership approach between Excel Housing and Venus. It offers 12 beds with a mix of crisis, short, and long-term accommodation and will include 24/7 support with a therapeutic and trauma informed approach.

Objective 5

To hold perpetrators to account through appropriate criminal justice sanctions and effective interventions that promote long term behaviour change.

- Development and introduction of a new pilot multi-agency approach to tackling serial/high risk of harm perpetrators of domestic abuse in Sefton which started in February 2024.
- Introduction of the Caring Dads programme within the safer families practice team in children's social care, in May 2023. This is a group behaviour change programme for fathers who have been abusive, neglectful or violent in their families and is run by trained facilitators.

Objective 6

To safeguard children and vulnerable adults from the impacts of living within a household experiencing domestic and sexual abuse.

- Creation of the Sefton safer families practice team in children's social care, with a focus on improving practice in social care, the implementation and delivery of a new Caring Dad's programme to offer behaviour change opportunities to perpetrators of domestic abuse and supporting the multi-agency training offer.
- Additional domestic abuse staffing resource provided by SWACA to Sefton Children's Social Care at the Integrated Front Door (now FAST and CHAT) and in the Sefton Safer Families Practice Team.

- 2.3 The board is also working on a creating a performance dashboard which will include a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and will be used as a tool to help measure the impact of the strategy.

3. Domestic abuse improvements - Ofsted monitoring visit June 2024

- 3.1 Positive work around domestic abuse was highlighted in the feedback provided by Ofsted following their latest monitoring visit to Sefton children's services on 25 and 26 June 2024. This included specific reference to improvements in the response to domestic abuse (please see below) which reflects the partnership work between children's social care and community safety & engagement and preventing homelessness teams, and the prioritisation of this work.

"The approach to dealing with domestic abuse concerns is improving. There are now clear discussions with victims in considering children's safety before contacting perpetrators. Additional resources of a dedicated Sefton's women and children's aid worker are enabling swift access to support victims. Victims are quickly contacted, risk assessments are completed, and safety plans implemented. This is providing a more holistic approach to supporting victims to keep children safer."

4. Other initiatives

- 4.1 Several other initiatives are also in development or being rolled out, including:

4.1.1 Brighter Kinder Future project

In September 2024 Sefton was successful in securing funding from Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership to implement Brighter Kinder Futures to offer a whole family response to domestic abuse. Delivered by children's social care, this includes 3 elements:

- Father's using harmful behaviours – Caring Dad's is a 17-week programme using a CBT model of intervention to create behaviour change.
- Adult victim/survivors – Healing Together is a 6-week trauma informed programme to support increased emotional recovery following abuse.
- Child victim/survivors – Healing Together is a 6-week trauma informed programme with 3 options – experience of domestic abuse, angry feelings, stress and anxiety.