

Leicestershire Domestic Abuse Reduction Strategy 2022-2025



Foreword



Councillor Deborah Taylor

(Lead Member Children and Family Services and Chair of the Leicestershire Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board)

I am delighted to present the Leicestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy, which outlines how Leicestershire County Council will work with partners to meet new duties to provide safe accommodation and support in Leicestershire for adult and child victims of Domestic Abuse (DA) as part of the Council's statutory requirements within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

We will work to ensure that all victims are supported to remain safe in their own home if they wish and it is safe to do so, or access alternative safe accommodation and support. The Domestic Abuse Reduction Strategy outlines how agencies will work in partnership to provide victims with a range of options, enabling them to make the choices that they feel are right for them.

The Women's Aid Annual Audit 2021 presents information on the provision and usage of domestic abuse services (both accommodation and community support services) in England:

- It is estimated that 10,592 women and 12,710 children were supported by a refuge in 2019/20.
- There are 3,935 refuge spaces in England, falling short of the number of spaces recommended by the Council of Europe by 30%.
- It is estimated that a total of 24,748 referrals were received by refuges, meaning that 57% of all referrals received for refuge were rejected. 32% of rejections was due to a lack of space or capacity.
- 63% of women in refuge services had children and 6% were pregnant.
- 48% of service users in a refuge reported feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts because of the abuse.
- 26% of women at refuge services have a disability; most common were mental health disabilities, 7% had a physical disability.

There are many further barriers to victims accessing refuge support with many victims having complex needs; I am committed to ensuring that we do all we can to support and protect all victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse and their families.

I do not believe that in Leicestershire, homelessness, inappropriate accommodation or remaining in an abusive relationship is a choice that any victim should be faced with.



Jane Moore
(Director Children
and Family Services)

Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Service is committed to becoming a trauma informed responsive department where we believe ***"we are stronger together"***. Our culture is one of partnership where we look for solutions and recognise the potential impact of trauma on the children and families we work with in Leicestershire.

The DA Act 2021 states: ***"Children and young people are deemed to be victims under the 2021 Act as a result of seeing, hearing or otherwise experiencing domestic abuse between two people where the child is related to at least one of them whether that be the victim or perpetrator"***.

The Leicestershire Needs Assessment undertaken by SafeLives in 2021 demonstrates a year-on-year increase in under 18's becoming victims of DA; in 20/21 this increase equated to almost a doubling on the previous year. The highest prevalence of child victim age in both 18/19 and 19/20 was 6-11year olds, changing to 0-5year olds in 20/21.

In 20/21 we changed our practice in the Children's Social Care Assessment Team to include other children in the family as part of all case management records; this saw the number of children being identified as victims of DA increase dramatically, enabling us to identify over three times as many children requiring support, in line with the requirements of the new DA Act (2021).

We are committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable children and families; we will strive to create a safe, compassionate, healing environment demonstrated through relationships based on trust, respect hope and empathy.

Introduction

The Leicestershire Domestic Abuse Reduction Strategy 2022-25 outlines how Leicestershire County Council (LCC) will work in partnership to reduce Domestic Abuse and support victims and how the statutory duties associated with the provision of safe accommodation will be implemented, as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

This Strategy adopts the Government definition of domestic abuse which is outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The new definition emphasises that domestic abuse is not only physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse.

It describes how safe accommodation and support for domestic abuse (DA) victims and survivors will be provided over the next three years and outlines five objectives that will be the focus of delivery:

- 1. Early Intervention and Prevention**
- 2. Targeted Support**
- 3. Reachable Services**
- 4. DA Act (Part 4) - Safe Accommodation**
- 5. Strong Partnerships**

Background

Domestic Abuse causes significant harm to individuals, children, families, and communities.

The scale and impact is vast. The SafeLives prevalence tool shows that 98,350 of adults in Leicestershire have experienced Domestic Abuse at some point in their lives since the age of 16, with approximately 15% experiencing both partner and family abuse. Furthermore 28,360 adult victims have experienced Domestic Abuse in the last year with approximately 8% experiencing both partner and family abuse.

The overall number of victims has increased year on year, with a 4.9% increase in 19/20 and 7.6% increase in 20/21 on the previous year.

The increase in the 20/21 year can be attributed to a change in practice by Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Children's Social Care (CSC) assessment team to 'including other children in the family' as part of case management records. Victims being assessed by LCC's CSC increased by 218%. This change in practice enabled CSC to identify over three times as many children as victims of DA in 20/21 in line with the requirements of the new DA Act (2021).

This puts LCC in good stead to ensure information is gathered to support the authority to respond effectively to the DA Act 2021 S.3(181) - "Children and young people are deemed to be victims under the 2021 Act as a result of seeing, hearing or otherwise experiencing domestic abuse between two people where the child is related to at least one of them whether that be the victim or perpetrator".

In respect of the highest prevalence of child victim age in both 18/19 and 19/20 this was 6-11 year olds (2.7% and 3.1%) but in 20/21 this changes to 0-5 year olds (6.8%).

Using the SafeLives prevalence tool the research shows 4080 older people (55+ year olds) in Leicestershire experienced Domestic Abuse in 20/21; only 802 older people accessed services for support around DA.

A Delivery Plan will be developed to deliver the Strategy. Progress against the implementation plan will be monitored by the Director of Children and Family Services (CFS) and the CFS DA Strategic Group, Chaired by the Assistant Director for Targeted Early Help and Social Care. Progress information will also be shared with partners and key stakeholders to ensure alignment across the system and monitored by the DA Local Partnership Board.

DA Act 2021

The DA Act places a statutory duty on Tier One local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within refuges and other safe accommodation. Part 4 of the 2021 Act introduces a new statutory duty on local authorities which places clearer accountability on local areas to ensure the needs of victims within refuges and other forms of domestic abuse safe accommodation are met in a consistent way across England.

Under the new duty in the 2021 Act, Tier One authorities in England will be required to appoint a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to provide the governance for this work.

The Domestic Abuse Act statutory guidance describes Domestic Abuse Support within safe/relevant accommodation as:

- **Overall management of services within relevant accommodation** - including, the management of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a Service Manager).
- **Support with the day-to-day running of the service** - for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff).
- **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**
 - Designed specifically for victims with protected characteristics (also known as by and for), such as faith services, translators and interpreters within BAME-led refuges, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and / or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims [not limited to].
 - Designed specifically for victims with unique and / or complex needs such as mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, including sign-posting accordingly.
- **Children's support** - including play therapy and child advocacy.
- **Housing-related support** - providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- **Advice service** - financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements.
- **Counselling and therapy** - including group support for both adults and children, including emotional support.

Funding Allocations

The Department of Levelling Up Communities and Housing (DLUCH - formerly MHCLG) has allocated funding to each local authority for the delivery of the Safe Accommodation duty under the DA Act. Leicestershire County Council has been awarded £1.126 million, with each district receiving £33k.

It is unclear whether the financial allocation awarded in 2021/22 will be reflected in subsequent years of this strategy. Both years 2 and 3 are tied to a Central Government spending review. A joint financial plan will be developed alongside this strategy and will outline how funding will be allocated.

The Priorities

1. Early Intervention and Prevention

Where we are now:

- United Against Violence and Abuse (UAVA) Service (including a helpline giving advice and support about domestic abuse; Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and outreach workers).
- Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services provide a range of support to families to recognise and respond to the early signs of domestic abuse and provide support to families in need, including a new toolkit for practitioners and work to recognise and alleviate family conflict.
- Leicestershire Police and other criminal justice agencies deploy a range of tools and powers, which includes but is not limited to: Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Notices, Non-Molestation Orders, Integrated Offender Management and promotion of Claire's Law (Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme).

What we want to achieve:

- Victim-survivors (adults and children) are supported at an early stage and provided with options to remain in their homes if this is what they want and importantly if it is safe to do so. This includes the use of civil remedies such as non-molestation orders and occupation orders and holding perpetrators to account for their behaviour through the criminal justice process.
- Promote prevention from an early age through education, including working with schools.
- Upskilling front-line officers/staff from statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations.

How we will get there:

- Build further capacity within service provision.
- Improve and support options and choices for victims to remain in their homes.
- Raise awareness and deliver education on healthy relationship and DA.
- Multi Agency workforce DA Training.
- Healthy Schools Work.
- DA Toolkits and Champions within organisations.
- Promotion and implementation of Trauma Informed Practice and Services.
- DA Support Policy's for Staff.
- DA awareness programmes for victims/survivors.
- Manage and work with perpetrators through criminal justice agencies and Voluntary Sector Providers.

2. Targeted Support

Where we are now:

- The Needs Assessment has highlighted that within the datasets, data capture for certain categories is lacking. This includes:
 - **Ethnicity:** Different ethnic groups have different experiences of services and experience different barriers. It is important to ensure that ethnicity is captured appropriately to fully understand the demographic and needs of Leicestershire.
 - **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:** Those in LGBT+ relationships face additional barriers to reporting and accessing services. It is important to ensure that this information is asked and captured in order to fully understand the demographics and needs of Leicestershire.
 - **Socio Economic status:** Research in the UK has consistently found vulnerability to DA to be associated with low income, economic strain, and benefit receipt.

What we want to achieve:

- A clear understanding of need through robust data collation and authentic voice work.
- Targeted and appropriate support services for all communities.

How we will get there:

- An Equality Impact Assessment will accompany this Strategy.
- Targeted Services will be commissioned e.g. specialist support for Black, Asian and multi ethnically diverse victims; victims with substance misuse and mental health; young people; older victims; victims with disabilities, LGBT+ victims etc.
- Good quality data capturing by all partner agencies and service providers.
- Further engagement with “by and for services”.



3. Reachable Services

Where we are now:

- Leicestershire is a large rural county where victims may feel isolated due to the lack of local services within their immediate vicinity.
- The impact of Covid-19 across all services is yet to be fully understood, it is something LCC will continue to assess.
- Insights from front line specialist DA services highlight numerous factors, including the closure and/or reduced capacity of services (including the courts) means they must hold clients for longer and provide more time intensive support than previously.

What we want to achieve:

- Victims and professionals know how to access services and are aware of safe accommodation options, both inside and outside of Leicestershire.
- Victims can access services when and where they need them at reachable moments.

How we will get there:

- Co-ordinated Community Response including Community Champions such as hairdressers and community groups.
- Build capacity in the local DA helpline.
- Work with partnerships to deliver services in localities.
- Consideration of Impact of Trauma.
- Making Every Contact Count (MECC).
- Engagement through Authentic Victim Voice.
- Robust Communication Plan for communities and professionals.

4. DA Act (Part 4) – Safe Accommodation

Types of safe accommodation:

- Refuge accommodation.
- Specialist safe accommodation - dedicated specialist support to victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs such as specialist refuges for Black, Asian and multi ethnically diverse, LGBT+, and disabled victims and their children.
- Dispersed accommodation - safe self-contained accommodation with the same level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims who are unable to stay in a refuge.
- Sanctuary Schemes - may also be called Target Hardening scheme. A survivor centred initiative which aims to enable a victim to remain in their own home by installing additional security to the property and perimeter.
- Move on and/or second stage accommodation - accommodation temporarily housing victims, who no longer require the intensive support provided in a refuge, but still require a lower level of domestic abuse specific support before they move to fully independent and permanent accommodation. May include support accommodation schemes and resettlement schemes.
- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation - a safe place with support given victims an opportunity to spend a temporary period of time to consider and make decisions in an environment which is self-contained and safe.

Safe accommodation is not generic temporary accommodation which is not solely dedicated to providing a safe place to stay for victims of domestic abuse. It is important to note that those experiencing Domestic Abuse may well be in standard temporary accommodation but may not have been identified as such or may have been placed in this accommodation due to the Homelessness Duty.

Where we are now:

- There are currently 21 safe accommodation spaces in Leicestershire. The Council of Europe recommendation is 1 family place per 10,000 population. The population of Leicestershire is 706,155 therefore the recommended number is 70 spaces. The current provision available in Leicestershire is below the recommended level.
- Referrals for Safe Accommodation Increased significantly (by 339%) from 67 in 2018/19 to 281 in 2019/20. There was a small decrease to 252 in 2020/21. In 18/19, 49.3% of referrals were successful, in 19/20, 49.1% of referrals were successful and in 20/21, 51.2% were successful.
- The average length of stay in Safe Accommodation across Leicestershire ranges from 102 days in 2018/19 to 110 in 2019/20 and 113 in 2020/21. Consideration is given for recovery support that will enable survivors to move on to suitable accommodation and free up space for higher risk victims to access.

- Across all three years, almost half of referrals to safe accommodations have been refused with the main reasons being “client does not want support or client disengaged”. This will be explored further in order to gain understanding.
- Several victims were unable to access safe accommodation due to the accommodation not being suitable, size of accommodation, communal spaces, location etc. This will be explored further to understand the reasons for refusals and the barriers for victims as this may include location of accommodation and therefore be due to lack of available space in an area.

What we want to achieve:

- Current provision will be increased from 21 spaces to 70 spaces as recommended by the Commission for Europe (1 space per 10,000 population).
- Alternative forms of safe accommodation more suited to those who cannot access a refuge such as dispersed accommodation or a Housing First scheme, where wrap-around support for complex and additional needs will be provided.
- Consideration regarding the location and size of safe accommodation to be given as safe accommodation is not available across all 7 districts.
- Consider how any further barriers preventing families from accessing refuge accommodation can be overcome (such as Pet Sanctuaries).
- Appropriate support for victims and survivors using a holistic approach to ensure their needs are not treated in isolation but are seen in the context of a whole person.
- Support to return home or move on from refuge accommodation: victims are supported to return home safely or move into alternative permanent accommodation.
- Enable/support victims and families to remain in their home where it is safe to do so.
- Provide accessible supported accommodation (for older victims or those with disabilities).
- DA support, including therapeutic and peer support.

How we will get there:

- Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation (DAHA) – The Domestic Abuse and Housing Alliance accreditation framework for local authorities and social housing providers are based on standards of good practice in response to domestic abuse in a total of eight priority areas, which are: policy & procedure, case management, risk management, partnership working, perpetrator management, inclusivity & accessibility, staff training, and publicity & awareness. The purpose of accreditation is to professionalize the housing response to domestic abuse and embed culture and system change.
- Leicestershire Housing Reciprocal – The Leicestershire housing reciprocal intends to increase safer options, offer choice and an alternative route to homelessness in the hope of preventing long spells in “temporary accommodation” such as Refuge accommodation (safe house’s). Housing Reciprocal is a scheme that means people with social tenancies who are at serious risk of harm, can access another social tenancy in a different borough and remain safe.
- Enhanced service provision.

5. Strong Partnerships

Where we are now:

- Leicestershire has strong partnership arrangements in place to share information and develop joint plans to protect victims and survivors and hold perpetrators to account – the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings take a joint approach to risk assessment and safety planning for victims living in Leicestershire. There is currently a review of the MARAC underway.
- Agencies work together to consider the wishes of the victim, options for keeping individuals safe in their own home and powers that can be used to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour.
- Strong governance arrangements across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland ensure a strong partnership to support victims and survivors and the management of perpetrators.

What we want to achieve:

- Improve data quality: The police submitted the largest data set for this needs assessment and their records highlight over the three-year period they reduced the number of unknowns (934, 599, and 554). It is recommended across all services that teams are regularly trained on expected practice standards and the importance of accurately recording data of victims accessing help. An 'unknown record' is a chance lost in better understanding a victim's needs.
- Develop a relationship support pathway for families with the goal of reducing the impact of harmful conflict between parents on children.
- Victim needs will be met by effective, collaborative multi-agency support.
- A proactive DA Local Partnership Board (Act).
- Strong Resilient Partnerships.
- Multi agency response to Domestic Homicides / post separation abuse.

How will we get there:

- LCC and the DA Local Partnership Board will ensure that an appropriate and consistent approach to collecting data is adopted across all districts and partner agencies to confirm that all demographics are captured. This will provide a clear understanding of victim's characteristics, areas of multiple disadvantage and complex needs, which will in turn, inform a comprehensive strategy for domestic abuse and ensure that services delivered can meet identified needs.
- MARAC review recommendations are implemented.
- Domestic Homicide Review Recommendations are actioned.
- LLR strategic, tactical and operational groups will drive this work forward collaboratively.
- LCC Children and Family Service DA Strategy Planning Group (Chaired by AD CFS) will drive this work forward within the Council.

How will the Strategy be Delivered?

- Leicestershire County Council's DA Strategy Planning Group, Chaired by the Assistant Director for Social Care in Children and Family Services (CFS), will develop and implement a delivery plan, that is annually refreshed and reviewed by the Director of CFS and the DA Local Partnership Board quarterly. This will identify short-term transitional arrangements and improvements as well as medium to long term work that is required to deliver the strategy. A set of measures will be developed to monitor the impact of the strategy.
- The Leicestershire Officer DA Act Working Group which includes membership from the Voluntary Sector Providers, 7 Districts, police, public health and social care for children and adults will drive and support implementation of the Delivery Plan across the Partnership.
- To address current gaps, service commissioning options for additional safe accommodation and support will be developed and delivered.
- A financial plan will be developed for the tier 1 safe accommodation funding allocation. This will be spent on safe accommodation and accompanying DA support as defined by the Statutory Guidance and will be annually refreshed.
- Awareness raising, training and communications on the safe accommodation offer will be delivered for professionals across **Leicestershire's** agencies.
- We will raise awareness of Domestic Abuse and communicate safe accommodation and the broader DA offer to residents of Leicestershire as well as communicating all new provision to professionals.
- Progress against the Strategy will be monitored and reported back to the Leicestershire Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board and other relevant Boards on a quarterly basis and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) when required.

For further information about this Strategy please contact: communitysafety@leics.gov.uk

