



## Report of the Joint Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities & Council Member Champion for Women

### Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 24 March 2021

#### WAO Report: Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (includes fieldwork in Swansea amongst others)

<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To provide an overview of the increase in domestic abuse throughout the pandemic and how the collaboration between child and family services and adult services, and wider partners is addressing issues and responding to the recommendations of the WAO report.</li></ul>
<b>Content</b>	This report includes a summary of <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How we are addressing the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office Tackling VAWDASV report</li><li>• Current position in Swansea</li><li>• Areas for future development</li></ul>
<b>Councillors are being asked to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Endorse the recommendations for future areas of development</li></ul>
<b>Lead Councillor(s)</b>	Councillor Louise Gibbard Joint Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities
<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>	Julie Davies - Head of Child & Family Service Jane Whitmore – Strategic Lead Partnership & Commissioning Kelli Richards – Principal officer, Child & Family Services Megan Stevens – Practice Lead (VAWDASV Partnership Development)
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#### Background

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Act Wales was implemented in 2015, and placed a duty on the public sector to provide a coordinated response to **prevention, protection and support** for those affected by VAWDASV across Wales.

The Wales Audit Office (WAO) wrote the report 'Progress in implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act', which aimed to examine how the new duties and responsibilities of the VAWDASV Act, Wales, 2015 are being rolled out and delivered. This followed fieldwork and visits to partners in Swansea, back in 2018.

There were 3 main focus points which were explored:

- How public sector bodies work together to understand *which services are needed* in their local area to prevent VAWDASV and protect and support victims and survivors.
- Public bodies' work towards *prevention* of VAWDASV
- How public bodies *fund and commission* VAWDASV services

*N.B. This was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## Report Findings

The report found that across Wales, local authorities and their partners do not have a complete picture of VAWDASV services, nor of the demand for these services. Support provided by the Welsh Government to these public bodies has not always been helpful and timely. Overall, services provided to victims and survivors of VAWDASV are fragmented, with some areas of overlap but also many gaps in provision.

The roll-out of training under the National Training Framework is having some success in improving public sector workers' awareness of the issues around VAWDASV. In general, social housing landlords are working well to support victims and survivors. The Act is helping to drive the transformation of VAWDASV services. Collaboration is working well in some parts of the country; however, too many barriers such as data-sharing require further work. Work with perpetrators remains the most challenging and weakest area of prevention activity.

Funding of VAWDASV services is generally fragmented, complex and short term, and commissioning is too inconsistent to ensure public bodies are always getting value for money. Many public bodies find it difficult to evaluate performance and judge the impact of their VAWDASV services because of weaknesses in their performance management arrangements.

**The report highlighted the following success in Swansea:**

“The positive partnership approach of Swansea’s Domestic Abuse Hub (set up and funded by the City Council and the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner) brings together Swansea Council services with health, police and the third sector to help children and families experiencing domestic abuse or escalating relationship problems. A range of specialist services is available, and the co-location of services has enabled public bodies to co-ordinate and integrate activity as a single gateway for VAWDASV services.”

## Recommendations

The report produced 5 generic recommendations to be taken forward;

R1. Needs assessment and mapping of service provision by public bodies

R2. Produce comprehensive and relevant information in a variety of media on the full range of services available to protect and support victims and survivors

R3. Create a joint pathway to access services and support for both victims and professionals and advertise access arrangements widely.

R4. Delivery agencies (local authorities, health bodies, the police, fire and rescue authorities and the third sector) review their approach to regional working to better integrate services and maximise the positive impact they can make on victims and survivors

R5. Review their commissioning arrangements

## What is happening in Swansea?

**Prior to the COVIC pandemic**, the Swansea VAWDASV governance structure, leadership group and subgroup was reinvigorated, in response to recognition of the importance around having key stakeholders fully engaged and committed to a partnership approach to VAWDASV. A workshop was held to engage senior managers from across the statutory and non-statutory sectors to highlight Swansea’s vision and commitment to implement the requirements of the VAWDASV Act, and provide a truly collaborative response to prevention, protection and support of those affected by VAWDASV. Work was also carried out with key leads from Neath Port Talbot Council and Swansea Bay University Health Board to ensure that subgroups were regionalised where appropriate, and that the local strategies were aligned, with shared objectives

*(This addressed recommendation 4)*

### **Quarter 1, (April – June 2020)**

Shortly after this piece of work, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the response to VAWDASV shifted to a rapid and adaptable partnership approach to the emerging crisis and the impact it had on the VAWDASV sector. During the early weeks of the pandemic, there were frequent reports in the media of heightened domestic abuse rates, however this was not reflected in number of police reports or referrals into specialist services. The domestic abuse helplines were seeing

record numbers of contacts, but this was not reflected locally. The concern was that victims of domestic abuse were 'staying put', or feared that the 'stay at home' messaging would prevent them from leaving. In response to this, Swansea Council prioritised awareness raising campaigns with a strong message that help is still available. We developed multimedia campaigns involving staff from Child and Family services, supporting national messaging such as #youarenotalone, and ensured that local information on support services was regularly promoted.

In recognition that not everyone can access social media, the Community Safety team ensured that large scale posters were on display in supermarket car parks and other public areas.

The VWASDV Practice Lead worked with Microsoft to develop the first domestic abuse Chatbot in Wales, which allows professionals and members of the public to access round the clock information, advice and details of local support services in an interactive, anonymous way.

In recognition that not everyone is able to access the internet, Welsh Government capital funding was secured to provide IT equipment and SMART phones to families affected by domestic abuse. The equipment was provided in collaboration with Child and Family services.

In response to the concern that domestic abuse victims may feel less able to leave their homes, funding was secured to purchase additional target hardening equipment to reinforce the safety of the homes of high risk domestic abuse victims, including video doorbells and safety packs.

*(This addressed recommendation 2)*

In order to monitor the situation, weekly meetings were held with the specialist VAWDASV providers across Swansea, where data was shared on any emerging trends, and partners encouraged to highlight any gaps or barriers they were facing to ensure any additional resource was placed where the need was. This continued throughout the whole of 2020, reducing to fortnightly meetings in quarter 3, and are now being held monthly to ensure that communication and coordination continues.

In-house services continued to operate, but adapted to largely telephone support or use of video calling, only visiting when essential to do so.

During April/ May of 2020, increased need for emergency housing became apparent. This led to close working with colleagues in housing, the specialist sector and Swansea University to develop a temporary emergency housing provision using some of the empty student accommodation. The purpose of this was to ease demand on specialist refuge provision, and to provide an option to those who may not meet the criteria for refuge locally e.g. male victims.

VAWDASV services began to report that those presenting had a higher level of complex needs, many of whom were not able to go shopping or access basic household goods. Liaison with community safety ensured a weekly supply of food parcels was delivered to the Domestic Abuse Unit for workers to disperse to those who needed it.

*(This addressed recommendation 1)*

Several additional funding streams became available through Welsh Government to assist the VAWDASV sector with COVID related needs. The Western Bay regional commissioning group worked together to rapidly coordinate and disseminate funding, ensuring that specialist providers across the sector had ample opportunity to highlight their needs in order that they could be supported where necessary.

*(This addressed recommendation 5)*

### **Quarter 2 (July – September 2020)**

During the summer, as the first lockdown started to lift, there was a surge in referrals to the IDVA project (who support high risk victims of domestic abuse) and this was also reflected in the numbers seen by the specialist sector. The Domestic Abuse Hub worked closely with Welsh Government and the Police and Crime Commissioner's office to identify funding opportunities and alternative ways to increase resilience of projects, including training wider staff to assist and opportunities to increase resource.

Operation Encompass (an information sharing process where police notify schools of domestic abuse incidents) continued throughout the lockdown and the summer holidays, to ensure that schools were made aware of any incidents that may affect children so they could respond accordingly.

The Domestic Abuse Hub within the Single Point of Contact for Child and Family Services received public protection notifications for domestic abuse related incidents for 4,376 children or young people either resident or linked to the adults involved; 2,255 of these already had an allocated lead worker or social worker and 2,121 were provided with information, advice or assistance by the Domestic Abuse Hub.

The restructured early help offer in Swansea, which was launched on 1st April 2020, includes representation from South Wales Police as part of the Early Action Together programme. This involves PCSOs placed in the five early help hub community teams and an officer from the Public Protection Unit being based in the Integrated Safeguarding Hub (ISH) within the Single Point of Contact. The ISH also has representation from health and education and this has enabled information required to be accessed to complete proportionate and timely assessments and ensure that children and young people are able to access the right support at the right time, from the right service to prevent escalation of need.

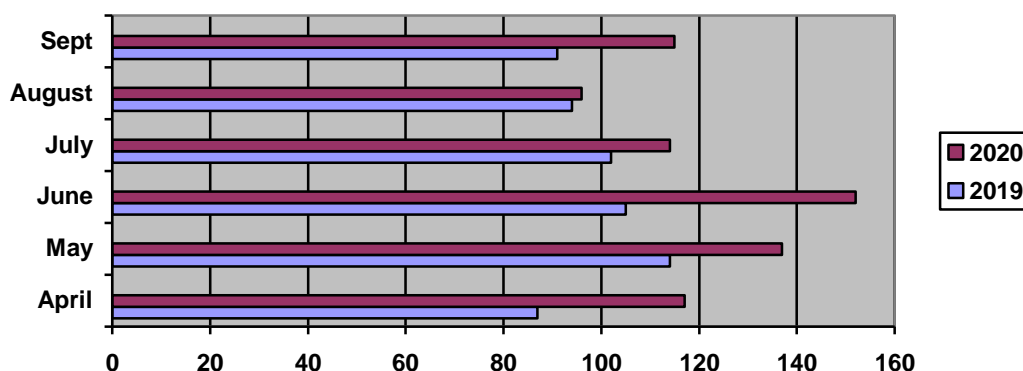
The sector adapted well to remote delivery of services with most projects continuing to run despite the difficulties.

The courts were back up and running but dealing with a backlog of cases, meaning a greater delay for outcomes having a negative impact on victims.

In the main, quarter 2 saw the planning outlined in quarter 1 being actioned and delivering services to address need as it arose.

The IDVA statistics below outline the increase in demand for service from the two first quarters of the year compared with the same time period last year.

	April 19	Apr 20	May 19	May 20	June 19	June 20	July 19	July 20	Aug 19	Aug 20	Sep 19	Sep 20
<i>No of referrals</i>	87	117	114	137	105	152	102	114	94	96	91	115



### ***Quarter 3 (October – December 2020)***

During the second period of lockdown work was carried out with a focus on sustainability and longer term planning, to ensure that work continued towards the 'pre-COVID' objectives, and that the work plan reflected the changes seen during the COVID pandemic.

A gap was identified across Western Bay for 'primary prevention' services, and so work is ongoing to secure funding in this area.

Work was undertaken with the Police and Crime Commissioner's office towards a 'whole systems approach' to working with perpetrators, and there is currently a fully operational DRIVE team working with high-risk, high harm perpetrators, and the Equilibrium Perpetrator programme working with medium risk perpetrators.

Ask & Act rollout began across Western Bay, with a cohort of trainers identified and accredited, and a regional training plan established. This is overseen by the Regional Ask & Act Steering Group, which includes local authorities, Swansea Bay University Health Board and specialist provider partners. As part of the rollout, a joint Ask & Act pathway was developed which provides local authority and health board staff a single process to follow when disclosures are made and a clear route into support.

*(This addressed recommendation 3)*

There is a commitment to extend the domestic abuse Chatbot funding for a further 6 months, when it will be reviewed and considered for longer term funding.

Worked was completed with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service and the specialist sector on a bid to provide a safe place for victims of VAWDASV to give evidence away from the court room, and was successful in securing the funding to make adaptations to a site in Swansea. Work has started and this will be piloted in early 2021/22.

The Adult Service Safeguarding Hub is in development and has a focus on domestic abuse. Pathways between this team and specialist domestic abuse support have been developed and further work on this will continue as the team

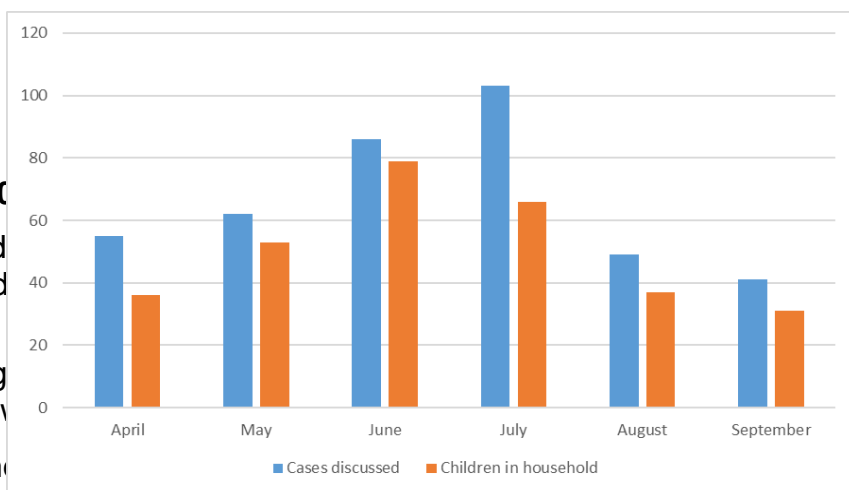
becomes more embedded. A member of the team has been identified as a domestic abuse lead and will be attending Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) to represent Adult Services.

In Child and Family Services the responsibility for safeguarding children and young people already allocated to a lead worker or social worker is within the case managing team. PPNs in respect of open cases are received in the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and forwarded to the allocated worker. Any new referrals received in SPOC have a proportionate assessment within the Information Advice and Assistance Hub or Domestic Abuse Hub and escalated to the Integrated Safeguarding Hub if there are identified child protection concerns. The ISH undertakes all initial strategy meetings and Section 47 enquiries and transfers the case to the supported care planning hubs if the concerns are substantiated or to early help if there are no ongoing child protection concerns but wellbeing needs are identified.

A Practice Lead from the Domestic Abuse Hub represents Child and Family services at the fortnightly Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and is responsible for sharing details of the child or young person's care and support or wellbeing plan and feeds back any updated information or actions agreed at the MARAC to the allocated worker.

Work started on developing and reviewing the Western Bay MARAC, which is a fortnightly partnership meeting chaired by police to manage risk and address the safeguarding of high risk victims of domestic abuse. The work is being led by the police, overseen by the Regional MARAC Steering Group, and will involve a review of practice and processes to ensure the meeting is efficient and effective.

The chart below shows the number of cases discussed in Swansea MARAC between April and September 2020:



#### Quarter 4 (January – March 2021)

A monitoring exercise was conducted where partners shared data and addressing recommendation 1.

A multi-agency task and finish groups were set up to plan for 2021/22, with the following areas for planning:

- Accommodation for women
- Accommodation for women exploited by the sex industry
- Specialist support for male victims, older people affected by VAWDASV, and LGBTQ community
- Primary prevention work
- Sexual violence service, including for children and counselling

This information will be shared at the Western Bay VAWDASV Commissioning Group, with a view to identifying opportunities for regional commissioning where appropriate. It will be used to inform next year's delivery plan and be shared at the Swansea VAWDASV Leadership Group to encourage strategic buy in from key stakeholders

*(This addresses recommendations 4 and 5)*

A further monitoring exercise will be conducted in 6 months' time to measure distance travelled and progress will be reported quarterly to the VAWDASV Leadership Group and the Safer Swansea Partnership board.

### **Indicative Additional Funding Available 2021/22**

Additional funding from Welsh Government (approx. £250K) has been made available through the Housing Support Grant, which is proposed to address some of the priorities going forward as outlined below:

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Scheme Name</b>	<b>Description of provision</b>
Increasing capacity/addressing previously unmet need.	IDVA Worker	VAWDASV: Increasing number of IDVA workers to become more in line with report number for levels of domestic abuse in area.
Increasing capacity/addressing previously unmet need.	Domestic Abuse perpetrators focused worker	VAWDASV: A new role working with perpetrators
Increasing capacity/addressing previously unmet need.	2 x Specialist Support Workers	VAWDASV: Specialist workers for men, older people and LGBTQ
Eligible and strategically relevant but temporary funded from external sources which is ending such as Lottery, Comic Relief etc. where the service would otherwise be discontinued.	Sexual Exploitation Swan Project Worker	VAWDASV: Existing post where alternative funding is ending 31/03/21
Eligible and strategically relevant but temporary funded from external sources which is ending such as Lottery, Comic Relief etc. where the service would otherwise be discontinued.	Domestic Abuse Advice & Information Worker	VAWDASV: Existing post where alternative funding ends
Eligible and strategically relevant but temporary funded from external sources which is ending such as Lottery, Comic Relief etc. where the service would otherwise be discontinued.	Domestic Abuse Additional Daisy/Support Workers	VAWDASV: Increased contribution to existing service where alternative funding is ending. Covid worker included for 12 months



Further additional funding from Welsh Government (approx. £320k) has been made available through the Needs Based Activity Portion of the VAWDASV grant, and the capital grant for dispersed accommodation. The table below outlines the areas that this will prioritise, which has been determined through partner consultation and the Regional VAWDASV Commissioning Board.

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Description of provision</b>
Primary prevention work across the region (regional funding)	A programme aimed at challenging attitudes and behaviours in the community, through training and awareness raising
The impact of sexual violence (regional funding)	Counselling and well-being support for survivors of sexual violence
Increased number of those identified as high risk of domestic abuse, and higher complexity of need	Adding capacity to the existing provision
Eligible and strategically relevant but temporary funded from external sources which is ending such as Lottery, Comic Relief etc. where the service would otherwise be discontinued.	VAWDASV Increased contribution to existing service where alternative funding is ending. Covid worker included for 12 months
Accommodation for VAWDASV victims who may not be eligible for refuge provision e.g. male victims	Dispersed units with specialist support attached.

### **Actions and Next Steps**

- Strengthen the joint working between adults and child and family, building on success on Domestic Abuse Hub in Child and Family services (Integrated Information Advice and Assistance/Integrated Safeguarding Hub).
- Continue to build on the 'everyone's business' model, promoting a whole council approach to recognising and responding to VAWDASV and incorporating that into policy.
- Build on partnership working so that a multiagency response is consistent and coordinated.
- Secure all additional funding available to deliver and develop services to meet increased demand and respond to need.
- Regional working and commissioning where appropriate.
- Awareness raising and promotion, supporting local and national campaigns to develop a primary prevention approach

