

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for Policies, Procedures and Services

Proposal name	The Provision of Domestic Abuse (DA) Emergency Accommodation Support Service		
Directorate	Children's and Customer		
Service	Money Home Job (MHJ) and Transformation		
Responsible Officer	Isabel Vanderheeren/Rashida Hussain		
Proposal planning start	December 2020	Proposal start date (due or actual date)	01/04/2022

1	What is the purpose of the proposal?	Yes / No	New / revision
	Policy	No	
	Procedure	No	
	Guidance	No	
	Is this a service to customers/staff/public?	Yes	
	If yes, is it contracted or commissioned?	commissioned	revision
	Other - give details		
2	What is the business case for this proposal? Please provide the main purpose of the service, intended outcomes and reasons for change? <p>The council wants to provide safe accommodation and support services for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their children. In 2021 the Domestic Abuse Act came into force and has outlined a number of duties for the local authority. To ensure we deliver effectively our new duties outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ("the Act"), which requires the commissioning of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective support to victims of domestic abuse and their children • Sufficient and effective safe accommodation to victims of Domestic Abuse (DA) <p>The Act places a new legal duty on local authorities to assess the need for and commission support for victims and their children within safe accommodation. The new duty covers the provision of support to victims and their children residing in some/all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refuge accommodation; • specialist safe accommodation; • dispersed accommodation; • sanctuary schemes; and • move-on or second stage accommodation. <p>Domestic abuse support element of the duty includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 relevant 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; and
- Counselling and therapy for both adults and children.

The Act sets out to place clear duties on the Local Authority to strengthen the support for victims of abuse. The Act places a statutory duty on tier one local authorities relating to the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children residing within refuges and other safe accommodation. New Burdens funding to the total value of £690K has been allocated to Walsall to cover the costs of the new duty to provide support in safe accommodation for 2021-22.

Safer Walsall Partnership Board developed a Domestic Abuse Strategy based on a needs assessment and consultation with key stakeholders. This strategy provides evidence to inform our commissioning decisions for the support of victims with children and the provision of accommodation-based domestic abuse support in Walsall.

The Walsall Domestic Abuse Strategy sets out the collective priorities of the Domestic Abuse Strategic Group and the key areas of action for the next three years. The strategy aligns with the wider priorities identified within the national and regional Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategies. The strategy builds upon the findings of the Walsall Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2021 and incorporates the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The Strategic Vision from the strategy *Is for Walsall to become one of the safest places in the West Midlands where domestic abuse is not tolerated whether at home or on the streets of Walsall.* Our ambition is to develop a co-ordinated, multi-agency and community response to end domestic abuse in Walsall. Over the next three years we will work towards this vision by:

- Working in Partnership to develop a coordinated community response to domestic abuse
- Developing robust Prevention and early intervention approaches which reach everyone including those with protected characteristics
- Ensuring our support Provision are tailored and survivor led to meet the individual needs of every victims/survivor
- Ensure that our approach provides Protection to all those affected by domestic abuse and holds perpetrators to account

The Family Safeguarding Model, originally developed by Hertfordshire Local Authority, is identified as a best practice model in the National Domestic Abuse Guidance Framework which has a track record on delivering significant improved outcomes for children and their families. Family Safeguarding is a whole-system approach to safeguarding children and young people. As part of the Department for Education’s Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme Walsall is in its second year of

implementing this model. The approach places specialist mental health practitioners, domestic abuse workers, probation officers and children's social workers together in a Family Safeguarding team to give direct help to parents. Adopting a whole family approach makes it easy for parents to access all the support they need from within one team, to help them deal with the complex issues of domestic abuse, mental health and drug/alcohol abuse that harm their lives and those of their children.

The domestic abuse accommodation duty will be delivered in response to known need in the local area as set out within the [Walsall Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024](#). As a council we want our Safe Accommodation offer to provide housing choice, sustainability and integration for customer. Our corporate vision and values form part of the basis of the quality of services and behaviours as a council we will embrace through [Walsall council's Corporate Plan 2021/22](#). Our [Housing Strategy 2020-2025](#) and [Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022](#) detail how we will work with our residents and communities to deliver a range of housing options and resilient communities.

Money Home Job currently contracts with Accord Housing Association for the Provision of Domestic Abuse Emergency Accommodation Support Service. The annual value of the contract is £188,870. On the 10th February Cabinet approved an extension of this contract to 30th September 2021, along with delegated authority to the Executive Director Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration to approve any further contractual variations, to allow any future commissioning decisions being informed by the Strategic Needs Assessment and review of the current provision.

Children's Services currently contracts Black Country Woman's aid (BCWA) to support children and families impacted by Domestic Abuse. The annual value of the contract is £220,000. This contract is due to end on the 30th September 2021. Children's Services completed a review of the provision with a view to form future commissioning intentions in light of demand, transformation plans and other related strategic developments internally to the council.

The proposed option to support victims of domestic abuse and their children and commission accommodation with support is split into two separate but linked service proposals:

Commissioning of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children to the value of £220K that will provide:

- A full time DA specialist support in MASH to ensure effective identification of need, decision making and timely advice and guidance.
- The integration of DA specialist victim support (parent and child) as part of Walsall Right for Children Early Help and Social Care locality model to effectively engage and meet the need of the diverse communities. This will consist of 4 full time Domestic Abuse Specialist workers

In order to meet the requirements of the Act, the Council has carried out consultation on its existing DA services. As a result, and in line with the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy and Needs Assessment, the future service provision requirements have been restructured, which has subsequently seen two services put out to tender:

- Emergency Accommodation - a hybrid model of a smaller block refuge (up to 12 units), and increased numbers (minimum 15) of dispersed units with floating support, to provide increased options and improved outcomes for victims.
- Independent Domestic violence Advocacy - Children's Services support to victims of Domestic Abuse (including adult and Children) – The service which

	will be delivered through an integrated delivery model within our Children's Services provision.		
3	Who is the proposal likely to affect?		
	People in Walsall	Yes / No	Detail
	All	No	Victims (adults and children) impacted by Domestic Abuse
	Specific group/s	Yes	
	Council employees	No	
	Other (identify)		
4	Please provide service data relating to this proposal on your customer's protected characteristics.		
	<p>Review of current provision including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance data from current contract with Black Country Woman's Aid and Accord Housing Association including engagement of service users with protected characteristics – this has been regularly throughout lifetime of contracts • Feedback from service users including those with protected characteristics • Feedback from those in refuge and dispersed pilot units in 2019/20 • Feedback on safe accommodation through a listening and engagement exercise in 2021/22 		
5	Please provide details of all engagement and consultation undertaken for this proposal. (Please use a separate box for each engagement/consultation).		
	The review of BCWA included following data/consultation:		
	Question	Data	
	Who has BCWA helped %children/%adults (without children) % of CH who need help through CH services (against thresholds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals in MASH for DA • Source of referrals • Referrals • How many where known to Childrens Services? • Childrens service status at point of referral • Breakdown of protected groups 	
	How well have we helped children and victims?	<p>Number of referrals received help? reason for victims/children not receiving help (Did Not Attend, inappropriate referral)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of help offered • Length of intervention • Kind of intervention provided • Feedback of children and victims of the help received • Feedback from professionals who have referred 	
	What has been the impact of the help?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C&YP report feeling safer • C&YP report a change in behavior including education, health • C&YP feel their relationship with parents / victims has improved • Professionals working with families report positive changes • Status of plan at end of intervention • Re-referrals 	

What do we know about the demand going forward? %of demand that matches Family Safeguarding cohort	Walsall safer partnership needs assessment
Refuge accommodation Service Review 2019/20	Qualitative data from refuge service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone interviews • Staff feedback • Service user feedback • Feedback from dispersed unit users • Review of 10 dispersed units (case review) • Quarterly monitoring and review of refuge service • Focus groups with staff and service users • In 20/21 – feedback from neighbouring authorities on provision type and assize along with commissioning intentions • Review of Housing IDVA caseload and effectiveness
Listening and Engagement Safe Accommodation 2021/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone and face to face surveys • Online survey • Focus Group – service users • Focus Group – Staff • Easy Read survey • Review of model through – Kotter, Nudge Theory, ADKAR and Lewins change models

6 Concise overview of all evidence, engagement and consultation

1. Overview of findings through the review of BCWA related to protected characteristics:

Access to the current service

Access to service can be affected by institutional barriers/agency engagement levels with those with protected characteristics.

Ethnicity: The Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service reaches a diverse population, with percentages of minority ethnic groups in Walsall broadly in line with overall population according to the last Census. White British referrals are 68% of the overall, less than the population average. In approx. 10% of cases ethnicity is unrecorded – these are mainly agency referrals where, as clients did not engage, we did not have the chance to capture data.

Gender: IDVA service referrals are 97% female, 3% male. This is influenced by major referral routes via children’s safeguarding where the cohort is mainly women with school-age children, and the higher prevalence of high-risk domestic abuse amongst women.

Sexual orientation: The DA cohort is 95% heterosexual, with 0.5% gay/lesbian referrals, 0.3% bisexual referrals. However as 8.7% were unspecified, the actual cohort may be more diverse. BCWA has implemented a ‘prefer not to say’ option for sexuality so we can see how much of this is client preference.

Age: The majority of referrals fall into the 24-34 age category (42%) and 35-44 age

category (28%), indicating major referral cohort being women with school-age children and revolving around children's safeguarding, and increased risks around pregnancy which may be more common in this age group. Older clients may be more likely to reach DA services via IRIS (not included in this data) and primary care routes where the physical and mental health effects of domestic abuse are demonstrated.

Disability: 5% of clients overall report a disability, and 95% do not. Disabled victims may also be more likely to reach DA services via IRIS as above.

Engagement/uptake with the current service

Ethnicity

Tier 1: advice and guidance stage

For cases closed at tier 1, the average engagement rate is 53%, with 14% declining support, 3% not eligible, and 30% unable to contact. White British client engagement follows these averages. Groups who engage at a rate higher than the average include Asian British Pakistani and Indian, Black Caribbean, Black African clients. Groups who engage at a lower rate than the average include white Eastern European and white other (more likely to be unable to contact, which may indicate fluctuating EU migrant populations or clients accessing European-language NGOs in Birmingham and the Black Country).

Tier 2: Casework

For clients consenting to one to one casework, the average engagement rate is 98%. Most ethnic groups follow this average within a few percent. However, some groups engage at a lower rate than this average and are more likely to be recorded as "unable to contact", these include Asian British Indian, Black British and some mixed ethnic groups.

Age

Tier 1: advice and guidance stage

Most age groups engage with advice and guidance within a few percentage points of the average, identifying no major barriers. Clients aged 65-74 are more likely to engage than the average (65% against average engagement rate of 53%); clients of this age group often favour phone support.

Tier 2: Casework

Most age groups engage with casework within a few percentage points of the average, identifying no major barriers. Clients aged 75+ are however more likely to be logged as "unable to contact" (20% against average of 1%).

Disability

Although small cohort of reach, people with disabilities are more likely to engage in advice and guidance (62% against average of 53%, and are slightly more likely than average to decline support at casework stage. Disabled clients tend to favour telephone advice and guidance as they may find this easier to access. They may also have adult safeguarding services involved for practical elements of support, so Black Country Women's Aid's (BCWA) role revolves primarily around advice and guidance.

Gender

Tier 1: advice and guidance stage

Female clients engage in line with the average. Male referrals are significantly more likely

to be ineligible for service at tier 1 (17% against average of 3%), this will usually be because they are known to BCWA as perpetrators. They are also slightly more likely to decline support at tier 1.

Tier 2: Casework

Female clients engage with casework in line with the average, men are more likely to be unable to contact (9% against average of 1%).

Sexual orientation

It is difficult to identify trends based on sexual orientation as number of clients identifying as gay, lesbian and bisexual are low; it appears that gay and lesbian clients engage at less than the average rate; we would in these cases offer signposting to the LGBT IDVA service operated by Birmingham LGBT as clients may prefer LGBT services. We have a high rate of “not specified” in this category, which may be due to incomplete agency referrals.

2. Review of the current service provided through Accord Housing Association

An in house review into the current DA accommodation provision demonstrated:

- The council currently funds a DA refuge in partnership with Accord Housing association. The refuge service provides a 24 bed refuge with 3 dispersed units in the community. Walsall refuge saw a total of 84 service users access the refuge in 2019/20 and 62 service users in 2020/21. One of the key reasons in the reduction in usage is attributed to Covid and service users not willing to utilise shared facilities
- In 2020/21 such over 39% of victims stated they were from an ethnic minority with Pakistani groups being the largest group. Feedback in 2019/20 from those who were ethnic minority and currently in the refuge suggested a large amount of stigma associated with accessing DA related accommodation and suggested dispersed accommodation within a community setting is preferred by service users.
- Service user feedback in 2019/20 also suggested concerns from service users stating large number of service users in a block setting can lead to housing management issues, issues for those leaving tenancies not suited to refuge accommodation and concerns from those with older male children. One area which service stated in particular was concerning was when the location of the accommodation was disclosed and the impact this had on their mental health and well-being.
- In 2019/20 an average of 8 children were present in Walsall's refuge provision a week aged between 0-14 years, this proved a challenge for staff providing support and ensuring the setting is safely managed. In response to this a shorter term MHCLG funded Children and Young Persons Worker who commenced work in May 2020 has provided up to 6 sessions daily for children and young people. Feedback from service users and staff suggested this was positive, however service users stated a need for a therapeutic style service was also needed as the impact of DA was not fully recognised and wanted their families to be better integrated within communities.
- In 2019/20 the council Contracted Accord HA to provide a domestic abuse emergency dispersed accommodation and support service, for up to 10 dispersed units. Feedback from service users suggested a general support for dispersed accommodation and people feeling they generally were happier with the option to remain in a property and receive support as required. The pilot

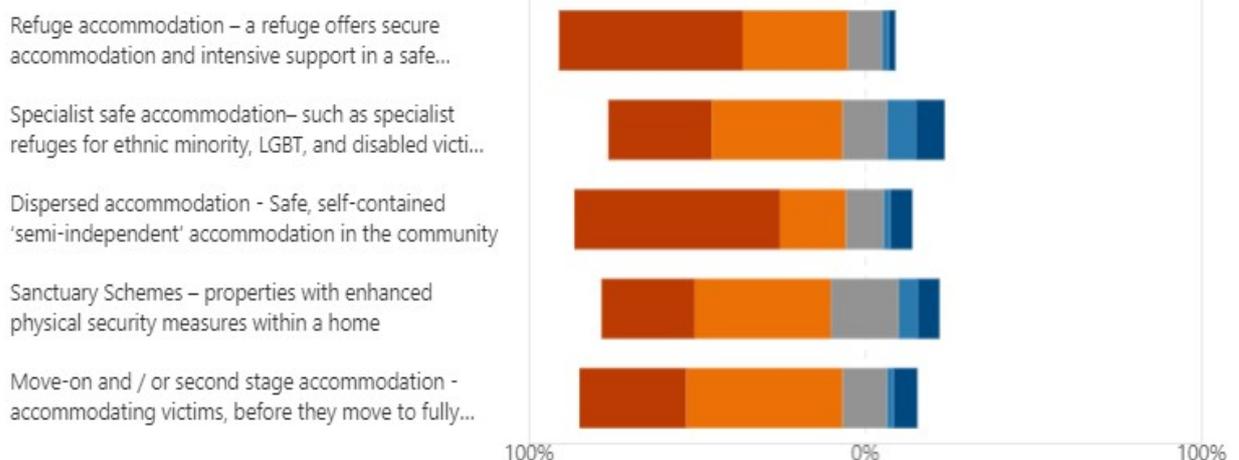
concluded the majority of the clients have sustained and remain within their properties 6 months post pilot. Feedback from those taking part in the pilot stated a potential need for a small level of refuge accommodation (for those with safety issues) but in the main the opportunity to rebuild their lives, realise their potential and receive support in a community based settings was an advantage.

- The dispersed pilot achieved a number of outcomes; Provided a safe and supported environment for domestic abuse victims; helped prevent re-victimisation; increase levels of tenancy maintenance in this group; enabled households to have their none secure tenancy converted to a secure tenancy; helped individuals achieve and maintain independent living skills; helped individuals access education and training and employment opportunities.
- In the 2019/20 financial year the Housing IDVA worked with 141 service users and for the 14 month period in the first year total cases were 170. The Year 1 allocation allowed for 2 months of the previous financial year (February and March 2019) to be included as the funding was allocated in January 2019.
- Of the 170 cases (which were for a 14 month period) 62 (44%) were medium risk, 33 (23%) were low risk and 75 (53%) were high risk. Of those who stated their ethnicity, in 2019/20 29% were from an ethnic minority group and 32% stated they suffered from a mental health issues.

Safe Accommodation Listening and Engagement Exercise 2021/22

- 92 Responses, 66% Resident of Walsall (61), 8 (9%) refuge customers
- 27 units currently - Not Enough – 68 (74%) 17% stated just right
- Safe accommodation – very important to have outdoor space, safety security, access to own bathroom and lowest responses were for access to kitchen, away from town centre location
- 61% - dispersed fully meets needs and 54% refuge fully meets the needs.

■ 1 - Fully meets the need
 ■ 2 - Mostly meets the need
 ■ 3 - Partially meets the need
 ■ 4 - Does not meet the need
■ Dont Know



5 respondents reported a need to consider male victims, those with complex need and children within safe accommodation

5 respondents (31%) answered **needs** for this question.



[Pin to question](#) [Hide Details](#)

Overall a mixed or hybrid model was seen as more suitable response with refuge for those that required refuge and dispersed for those who required a different type and level of support.

7. Overall, what do you think is the best type of accommodation for people in the borough?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

92

Responses

Latest Responses

"Refuge"

"SAFE AND SECURE ACCOMODATION ALSO SAFE INSIDE SURROUN...

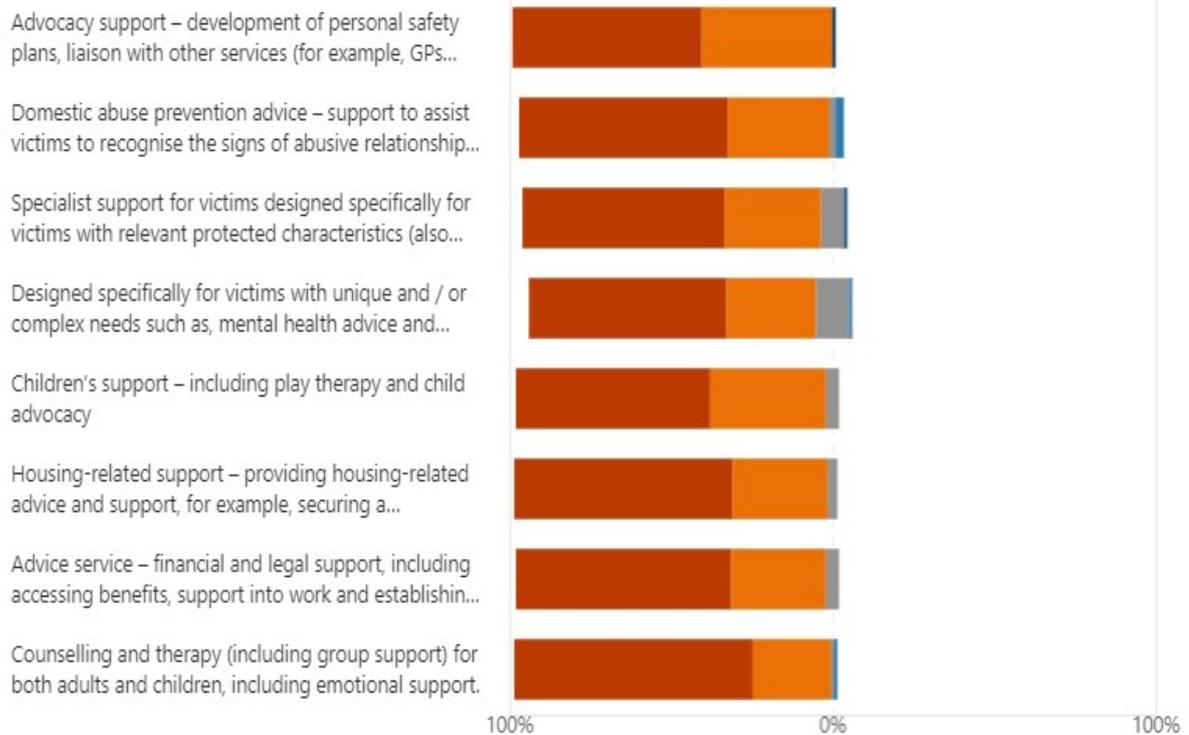
"MIXED OPTIONS"

14 respondents (15%) answered **accommodation** for this question.



All support needs were recognised as being needed.

■ Very Important
 ■ Fairly Important
 ■ Not Important
 ■ Not at all Important
 ■ Dont know



2021 Survey respondents stated:

- Flexible help which comes to you when you need support – (27)
- An office in the community that people can visit, when needed - (26)
- Male victims support is missing along with Childrens support
- What's missing overall – Perpetrator support
- The Support element needs to: Flexible and personalised
- Majority were from Ws1/Ws2, 16-34 made up just under half, 57 females and 33 males, 31 stated disability, 59% from a non-white British group

Focus Group Feedback showed:

- A need for both refuge and dispersed
- A need for a good security system for refuge
- Self-contained kitchens and bathrooms in refuge
- A place for those who need respite from children
- A place for therapeutic services such as a lounge area
- A secure outdoor place in refuge
- A need to understand not everyone in a refuge will use communal facilities
- Work better with neighbouring local authorities
- Support needs to consider perpetrators
- All support factors important – and a need for a specialist hub
- Complex needs to be considered
- Keep people in Walsall where possible

Easy Read Survey Feedback

- Consider disabled access (as a whole system approach)
- Wheelchair users need to be considered in properties
- Those with learning disabilities that need more specialist help

- “Perhaps more disperse units which would cater for larger families and the children would not have to encounter disruption to their routine”
- “Everything was over the phone which helped just in case someone saw me and followed where I was going. If there was a cross over between two authorities to make smoother transition for victims of domestic abuse”
- “The communication was good particular with the housing IDVA and black country women’s aid and I was informed of any outcomes at all stages”
- “Leaflets, that tell people where to get help. They need to be in public places, I was living with husband and family, so could only seek help outside. Leaflets in hospitals and supermarkets but in other languages too, so that everyone can access them”.

7 How may the proposal affect each protected characteristic or group? The effect may be positive, negative, neutral or not known. Give reasons and if action is needed.

Characteristic	Affect	Reason	Action needed Yes / No
Age	positive	New service delivery model recognises children and victims in their own right and is seeking to provide effective support for children and young people. The safe accommodation element will ensure those with older male children are able to access accommodation also.	No
Disability	Positive	Services targeted at those who require reasonable adjustments can be better provided through a model and one which is able to tailor targeted support. In the first half of 2020, 1 person with a disability accessed the refuge. There would be	No

		adequate provision should there be further referrals. Safe accommodation fit for the customer would mean that the customer may be able to either stay in that property and not have to move again or have a unit suited to their needs.	
Gender reassignment	Neutral	No referrals to date, however a suitable safe offer (subject to further consultation) may make the customer more comfortable in reporting DA and coming forward for help, knowing that they will have suitable accommodation.	No
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	No information specific data is available and so the impact is not currently known – The cohort of people from previous years have not generally been in a marriage or civil partnership and tend to be single or a lone parent household. Where service users have been married, this issue normally will only be an issue if the service user wants to divorce (this is likely after permanent housing is secured)	Unknown
Pregnancy and maternity	Positive	No information specific data is available and so the impact is not currently known. Where a service user	Unknown

		is pregnant consideration is given to the household. A safe accommodation option could provide more settled accommodation with the right support for the customer ready for when baby is born.	
Race	positive	The model is aligning support to the localities to align support closer to communities ensuring we can deliver better outcomes.	No
Religion or belief	Positive	No information specific data is available and so the impact is not currently known	Unknown
Sex	Positive	Women are more likely to experience homelessness than men. The refuge service is for women so all customers accessing the refuge will be female. An alternative safe accommodation option would mean that male victims could also be accommodated if required who may not be suited to traditional settings.	No
Sexual orientation	neutral	No information specific data is available and so the impact is not currently known.	Unknown

	Other (give detail)			
	Further information			
8	Does your proposal link with other proposals to have a cumulative effect on particular equality groups? If yes, give details.	(Delete one) No/YES		
	The safe accommodation delivery and support services will provide an opportunity to work collaboratively for council services achieving the key principles of Walsall's Domestic Abuse Strategy.			
9	Which justifiable action does the evidence, engagement and consultation feedback suggest you take?			
A	No major change required			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good engagement with communities' resources will be key once the service is procured as part of communication and implementation plan. • Further consultation with groups, third sector and customers in 2022/23 will ensure continuous improvement and the pathways to services are developed and enhanced 			
B	Adjustments needed to remove barriers or to better promote equality			
C	Continue despite possible adverse impact			
D	Stop and rethink your proposal.			

Action and monitoring plan				
Action Date	Action	Responsibility	Outcome Date	Outcome
01/04/22	Monitor all characteristics where possible of those DV victims who access service to help to inform the development of future services.	MHJ/Childrens	Qtrly	Measure which clients are on project and referrals Measure outcomes have been achieved
	Conduct customer feedback/service	MHJ	Annually	Look at service improvement through service user led forums.

30/07/21	improvement Conduct further consultation on Safe accommodation options		Post cabinet approval	Completed

Update to EqIA	
Date	Detail
11/06/2021	Review EQIA as part of contract delivery
04/01/2022	Review of EQIA incorporating updated consultation data
July 2022	Review in response to implementation of IDVA and Safe Accommodation

Contact us

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