

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES
Date of Meeting:	20th MARCH 2024
Report Title:	VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	VAWDASV MANAGER PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	THERE IS NO IMPACT ON POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PROCEDURE RULES
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assia Domestic Abuse service in Bridgend is meeting the purpose of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV), (Wales) Act 2015. • The service is delivering against national strategic aims for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. • Information contained in this report covers from April 2021, when the Assia service was established, to December 2023. • The report demonstrates the positive impact the service is making and the ways in which Assia are trying to engage and support a diverse range of people.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update to Cabinet Committee Equalities on:
- The services provided by the in-house Assia Domestic Abuse Service
 - Information regarding the range of domestic abuse related services delivered by our third sector partners.

2. Background

- 2.1 There are several UK wide, national and local strategies and directives in relation to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) agenda. The UK Government defines domestic abuse as:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality”.

There are many different forms of domestic abuse, these include but are not limited to:

- coercively controlling behaviour emotional / psychological abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- financial abuse
- harassment and stalking.

Domestic abuse may also include a range of behaviours that, when viewed as isolated incidents, do not seem much. If they involve a pattern of behaviour that results in you feeling fear, alarm or distress, it is abuse.

- 2.2. At a Welsh level, there is the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV), (Wales) Act 2015. The purpose of the Act is to improve:
- (a) Arrangements for the prevention of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
 - (b) Arrangements for the protection of victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
 - (c) Support for people affected by gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

- 2.3 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) also works to deliver the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) VAWDASV Strategic Aims as set out in the local VAWDASV strategy required under the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015.

CTM aims were as follows:

Aim 1 – Increase awareness of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence across the CTM population.

Aim 2 – To break the generational cycle of VAWDASV behaviour in families by promoting healthy relationships in children and young people.

Aim 3 – Hold perpetrators to account for their actions and support them to change their behaviour.

Aim 4 – Ensure services are designed and commissioned to meet the needs of the CTM population.

Aim 5 – Ensure that services are fit for purpose and quality assured.

The CTM VAWDASV regional Strategic and Commissioning Partnership developed its aims to be consistent with the VAWDASV National Strategy and to meet local need.

The CTM VASDASV Delivery Plan is included as appendix i.

- 2.4 At BCBC's Cabinet meeting on 22 October 2020, it was agreed to:
- Bring the externally commissioned support for the community domestic abuse service in house when the contract expired in April 2021.
 - Approve the development of an integrated first point of contact / support in the community service for all victims of domestic abuse, based on need as well as risk.
- 2.5 This decision was informed by a comprehensive Needs Assessment completed early in 2020.

- 2.6 Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) applied to the team delivering the existing contract. A series of meetings with the commissioned provider, BCBC Human Resources and Trade Unions were held to ensure that affected staff had all the information needed to decide whether to transfer to BCBC.
- 2.7 Six members of staff transferred to the new service and joined the four existing Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors (IDVAs), one of whom was with an agency and the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) co-ordinator who was already in post.
- 2.8 A VAWDASV service manager was recruited who commenced the role in July 2021 along with a MARAC and VAWDASV Business Support Officer.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The new in-house service started on 1st May 2021 and a restructure of services was implemented April 2022, following recruitment and union consultations within the restructure process. The restructure introduced a new framework and process for the service that would ensure an improvement to the previous key findings. All members of the team now work to the same framework, processes, policies and procedures ensuring a consistent structured approach.
- 3.2 The Assia Suite's drop-in service remains in Civic Offices. Due to the limitations of the locality, the service now works across the borough in other locations including, but not limited to: Hartshorn House, Pyle Life Centre, Garw Valley, Probation offices and Department for Work and Pension offices, such as Job Centres. This ensures ease of access within local communities.
- 3.3 Assia has a dedicated High Risk (HR) service that ensures all HR victims / those submitted through Public Protection Notices (PPNs) take a priority and are easily identifiable. Medium Risk (MR) and Standard Risk (SR) are picked up by the triage service that works very closely with and alongside the HR team. This ensures better communication in the team, continuity, and consistency of support as risk changes. IDVAs that work across any service within the team have regular Case Reviews, line management supervision and clinical supervision.
- 3.4 Every person within the team that are dealing directly with victims are fully IDVA qualified and accredited, and any new team members who do not hold the qualification complete the training. The team may have separate specialisms and / or dedicated roles but all receive the same in-depth training. This ensures that the team can fully support each other during times of sickness and / or leave.
- 3.5 The service is going through the Safe Lives 'Leading Lights' Accreditation. This is the mark of quality for domestic abuse services and is increasingly being recognised by commissioners and funders across the UK.

The Leading Lights accreditation programme offers services, partner agencies and commissioners a set of standards for supporting victims of domestic abuse.
- 3.6 Referrals to the service have increased, this is in part due to increased awareness of domestic abuse and the services available within the borough.

	April 2021-March 22	April 2022 - March 2023	April 2023 - Dec 2023*
Total referrals accepting support	1505	2330	1307
Total referrals	1767	2891	1948

*information as end of quarter three.

- 3.7 The difference between referrals and referrals accepting support includes repeat referrals where the victim is already accessing support from the Assia service. Repeat referrals / incidents can be a high number.

Some referrals are not appropriate as there is no current domestic abuse and no relevant risk identified so these referrals are signposted appropriately to the service that is most appropriate.

Where the service is unable to make contact, all known agencies are contacted to see if anyone else is working with the individual (or family). When all avenues are exhausted a letter is sent out advising of the service and all contact details along with a safety plan.

It should also be noted that the support offered is not mandatory and service users must want to engage.

- 3.8 There has been a real focus on dedicated IDVA roles within Assia as it is recognised that it is not a one size fits all service and there are bespoke support needs.
- 3.9 At a recent Safe Lives review it was identified that the service lacked an Older Persons IDVA, (the older persons service supports victims 60 years plus in line with the Older Persons commissioner, although will consider 55 plus due to the additional complexities posed). Due to the complex nature of abuse within older people, including cases with dementia and where the perpetrator may be the carer, this service works closely with Adult Safeguarding and New Pathways, a crisis and sexual abuse support service, who also have an older person's independent sexual violence adviser (ISVA) for sexual abuse. The numbers are lower within this service, but cases are often more complex.
- 3.10 There is a dedicated Court IDVA who works very closely with the Criminal Prosecution Service, Witness Service and Court Officers and supports all victims through the Criminal Justice System. The remote evidence suite in Maesteg has been a real success and has been welcomed by victims that have utilised it, including for civil cases and family court where there is a history of post separation abuse.
- 3.11 A CHIDVA (Childrens IDVA) supports all children up to the age of 15 who have experienced of familial abuse. The CHIDVA is based in Safer Merthyr Tydfil (SMT, who act as the regional strategic lead for VAWDASV) and the Assia service has recently recruited a dedicated Child and Young Person (CYP) worker who can work with any young people that fall through the gap, such as those identified as not in education, employment or training (NEETS), those affected by intimate abuse and

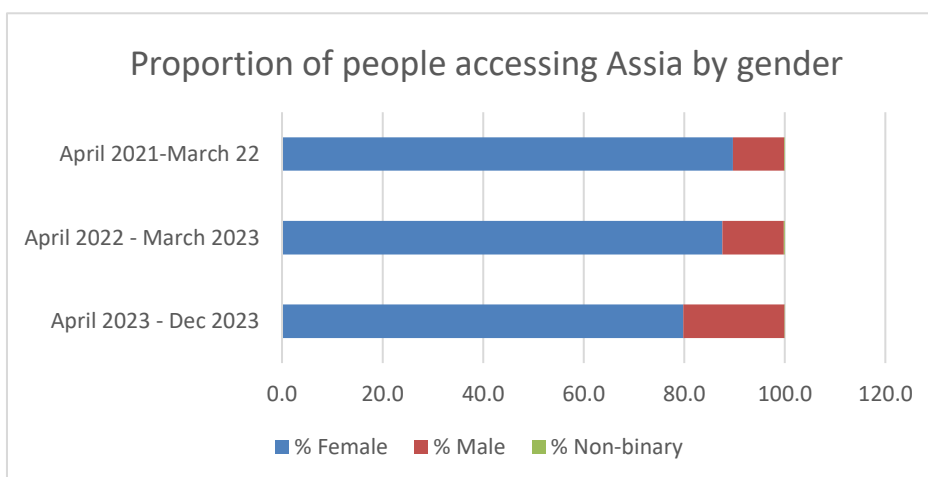
also those that are displaying unhealthy behaviours that could potentially form into perpetrator traits.

3.12 A service with Bawso to support black minority ethnic and migrant victims was also trialed within the county borough, but the referrals did not warrant the service. The Assia team are all IDVA qualified and trained in female genital mutilation and honour-based violence (HBV). There is a dedicated IDVA who completes HBV risk assessments if needed. The service continues to link in with Bawso for training, advice and guidance to ensure the team are up to date with emerging themes. Links are also in place with Opoka, a service working to help women and children in the Polish community improve health, well-being, financial stability, and happiness by stopping domestic violence and abuse.

There is also a translation service in place.

3.13 The service has a dedicated Male Victim IDVA and it is largely down to this dedicated role that engagement with male victims has been more successful, and more male victims are now accessing support, including a male victim focus group.

	April 2021-March 22		April 2022 - March 2023		April 2023 - Dec 2023*	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Female	1350	89.7	2040	87.6	1043	79.8
Male	153	10.2	286	12.3	263	20.1
Non-binary	2	0.1	4	0.2	1	0.1
Total referrals accepting support	1505		2330		1307	



*information as end of quarter three.

As can be seen from the information above, the proportion of males accessing the service has almost doubled from 10.2% to 20.1% between April 2021 and December 2023.

- 3.14 Assia has recently run a Male Victim Focus Group, consisting of six sessions and had 23 attendees. The intention was for the group to be victim-led, and so the first session focused on identifying what the participants wanted to get out of the meetings.

The focus group decided that they would like to see what other agencies were in Bridgend that could specifically help them and what they could offer within the community for additional support. Guest speakers gave an overview of their services and what programmes, activities, and support that they had to offer in the community, including Connecting Dads, Employability, BAVO Community Navigators and Men's Shed.

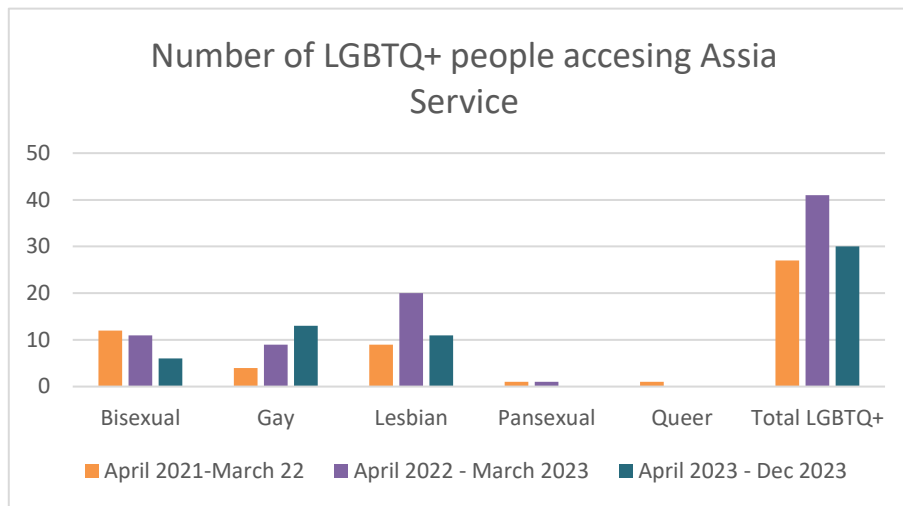
- 3.15 The feedback in relation to the focus groups was very positive and there were good discussions around issues with child contact, how male victims often feel judged by professionals and feel that females have an advantage as their perception is that the male is automatically assumed to be the perpetrator.

One male victim was the recipient of a negative comment from a police officer when he reported the abuse. The comment was "Are you a man or a mouse?", which in turn prevented him from reporting again. This led to the focus group discussing toxic masculinity, and social perceptions of relationships and domestic abuse.

- 3.16 Building on this, the service is setting up more sessions from the 9 April 2024 and will be looking at engaging representatives from agencies and partners where the group can discuss their experiences for the representative to hear and feedback to their service. These will include but not be limited to: Police, Social Services, Legal Services, Cafcass, Compass Programme, Myriad Programme, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Men's Shed, Gingerbread, BAVO Community Navigators.
- 3.17 Commissioning on a regional basis has taken place with New Pathways and Barod. The New Pathway worker offers sexual violence support and stabilisation work to identified victims that need ongoing trauma work around their experiences whilst the IDVA stays in situ to continue with the specialised domestic violence work.
- The Barod role is a VAWDASV worker who will work with both victims and perpetrators where there are substances involved, ensuring we are addressing all needs and working holistically.
- 3.18 All staff are trained to support members of the LGBTQ+ community seeking support and work very closely with the Myriad programme where appropriate / required to ensure specific needs are being met. Myriad are a 'by and for' service for LGBTQ+ victims of domestic abuse to support recovery and resilience.

	April 2021-March 22	April 2022 - March 2023	April 2023 - Dec 2023*
Bisexual	12	11	6
Gay	4	9	13
Lesbian	9	20	11
Pansexual	1	1	0
Queer	1	0	0
Total LGBTQ+	27	41	30

*information as end of quarter three.



As shown by the information above, the proportion of service users who identify as LGBTQ+ is relatively low, but this information is reliant on disclosure and is not mandatory.

3.19 The service also works with perpetrators. High Risk cases are considered for 'DRIVE', which works with high-harm, high-risk and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent their negative actions and protect adult and child victims. Through the intervention, the perpetrator is engaged to identify and manage triggers and understand healthy relationships to disrupt and change abusive behaviours. Each perpetrator is looked at as an individual as opposed to completing a one size fits all programme. There is a dedicated DRIVE IDVA who works very closely with the service.

3.20 Medium Risk cases are considered for 'Driving Change' for perpetrators who recognise that their behaviour in intimate relationships is abusive and/or violent and want to change this, and Standard Risk cases considered for the Change that Lasts Early Perpetrator Response (CLEAR) services with the IDVA service working closely with them to meet the needs of those who have identified that their behaviour is causing concern and are motivated to do something about it, but are not yet disclosing or taking responsibility for their abuse. This means earlier intervention and support for families.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider

the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The Assia Domestic Abuse Service demonstrates the sustainable development principle by ensuring that by meeting the needs of the present it does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs this is evidenced through the five ways of working:
- **Long term** – the service seeks to understand and mitigate the long-term implications of domestic violence on victims and their children.
 - **Prevention** – delivering a service based on need as well as risk offers longer term support to prevent future incidents of domestic abuse. It also aims to prevent medium and standard risk victims escalating to high risk.
 - **Integration** – the project contributes to the wellbeing goals: an equal Wales, a Healthier Wales, and Wales of Cohesive communities and to the Wellbeing objectives. The Assia Domestic Abuse Service feeds into the regional VAWDASV service and the work is also integrated into that of the Community Safety Partnership.
 - **Collaboration** – the success of the service depends on collaboration with partners, in particular South Wales Police, National Probation Service, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board
 - **Involvement** – the views of stakeholders and service users are regularly sought and used to inform and review delivery models.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change implications linked to this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 In considering how we tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, Bridgend County Borough Council is ensuring that all people living in the county borough are safe and protected.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications resulting from this information report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 That Cabinet Committee Equalities note the content of this update report.

Appendices

- i. CTM VAWDASV Delivery Plan

