

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES AND EMPLOYER RELATIONS</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>4 June 2025</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>VAWDASV MANAGER PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>THERE IS NO IMPACT ON POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PROCEDURE RULES</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Assia Domestic Abuse service in Bridgend is meeting the purpose of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence,(Wales) Act 2015.</li> <li>• The service is delivering against national strategic aims for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region.</li> <li>• Information contained in this report covers the period from April 2022, when the Assia service was established, to the end of March 2025.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update to Cabinet Committee Equalities and Employers Relations 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 (Wales) Act 2015 (the VAWDASV Act). 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 Act.

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.

Bridgend’s local version of 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 Following this agreement, Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) applied to the team delivering the existing contract, and six members of staff transferred to the new service. A VAWDASV service manager was recruited who commenced the role in July 2021 along with a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and VAWDASV Business Support Officer.

2.6 The in-house service started on 1st May 2021 and a restructure of services was implemented April 2022. 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. Current situation**

3.1 In June 2024 the Assia Service achieved 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.

3.2 In August 2024 there was an agreement to restructure the Assia team to create a second Team Leader post. This was to better support the team, which had expanded in size and specialities, and to allow the VAWDASV service manager to work more strategically, in line with changes to relevant legislation and guidance. The restructure was also linked to maintaining the 'Leading Lights' accreditation and adhering to good practice.

3.3 The additional Team Leader post was created from the existing team, allowing a member of the team the opportunity for advancement. Consultations with the team and Trade Unions took place, and the recruitment process was completed in February 2025.

3.4 The Assia Suite's drop-in service remains in Civic Offices. In addition, the service also operates in other locations across the county borough 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.

3.5 Assia has a dedicated High Risk (HR) service, led by a Team Leader, 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. Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) that work across any service within the team have regular Case Reviews, line management supervision and clinical supervision.

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 Referrals to the service have increased, which is in part due to increased awareness of domestic abuse and the services available within the borough.

	April 2022 - March 2023	April 2023 – March 2024	April 2024 – March 2025
<b>Total referrals accepting support</b>	2330	2848	2867
<b>Total referrals</b>	2891	2375	2468

- 3.8 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 as appropriate to the relevant service.

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.

- 3.9 There has been a 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.
- 3.10 The service has an Older Persons IDVA who supports victims 60 years plus, although will consider 55 plus due to the additional complexities posed. This post was created to meet an identified gap and to manage the complex nature of abuse within older people, including cases with dementia and where the perpetrator may be the carer. The role 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.

An older person victim case study is included as appendix ii to this report.

- 3.11 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.

- 3.12 A CHIDVA (Childrens IDVA) supports children up to the age of 15 who have experience of familial abuse. The CHIDVA is based in Safer Merthyr Tydfil (SMT), who act as the regional strategic lead for VAWDASV.

As part of the restructure, funding for the Children and Young Persons (CYP) IDVA ended. The role holder had worked with young people, including those not in education, employment or training (NEET) affected by intimate abuse.

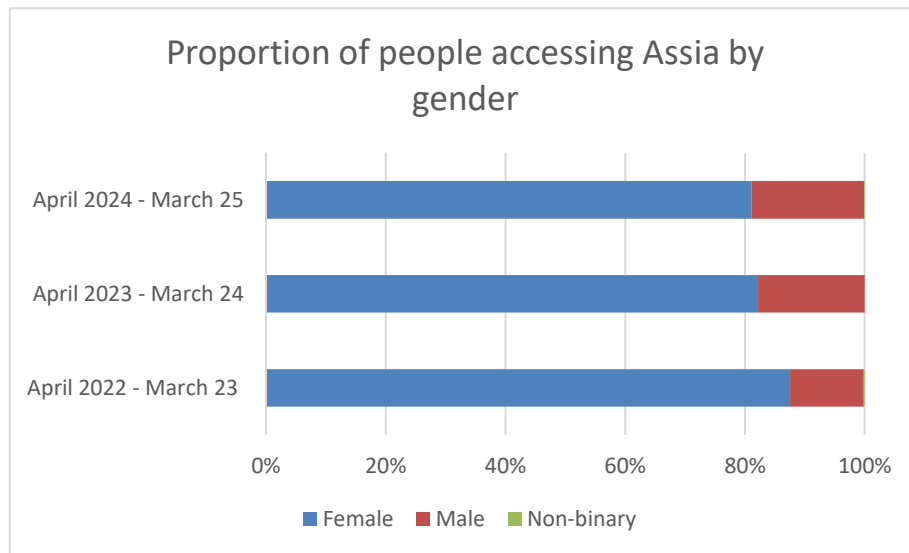
Healthy relationships, behaviours and consent amongst young people remains a concern for the service, particularly in the context of concerning social media trends, rising reports of misogyny and growing attention on the 'manosphere'. Links had been made between the Assia service and Youth Outreach teams and education settings which will be maintained as much as possible.

- 3.13 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.

The translation service in place has seen a noticeable increase in use over the last twelve months to provide support through languages such as Thai and Turkish.

- 3.14 The service has a dedicated Male Victim IDVA and it is largely down to this dedicated role that there has been an increase of referrals in male victims and more male victims are now accessing support, including a male victim focus group.

People accessing Assia support by gender	April 2022-March 2023		April 2023 - March 2024		April 2024 - March 2025	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Female	2040	87.6	1953	82.2	2002	81.1
Male	286	12.3	422	17.8	464	18.8
Non-binary	*	0.2	0		*	0.1
Total referrals accepting support	2330		2375		2468	



As can be seen from the information above, the proportion of males accessing the service is increasing year on year, linked to the promotion of the Male Victim focus group and Recovery groups.

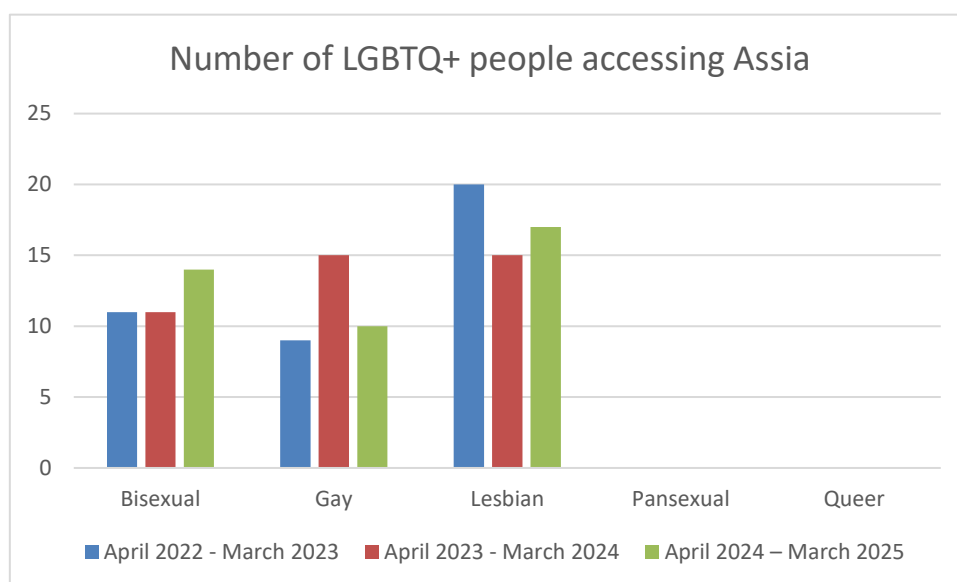
A male victim case study is included as appendix iii to this report.

- 3.15 The Male Victim focus group has run throughout 2024 – 25 and has been attended by 25 people. The group is victim-led, and it was the members of the group who decided that it would be an open group and to meet once a month. The group also made the decision to invite guest speakers to hear an overview of their services and what programmes, activities, and support that they had to offer in the community, including Connecting Dads, Lads and Dads, Employability, BAVO Community Navigators and Men's Shed.
- 3.16 The feedback from focus group members is positive. Attendees welcome the opportunity to discuss with their peers' topics such as issues with child contact, how male victims often feel judged by professionals and the perception that the male is automatically assumed to be the perpetrator.  
  
The group has said it has been extremely useful to learn more about domestic abuse, ways of coping with the abuse, the impact that it has had on the children, leaving safely and how to find the right organisation to meet their needs.
- 3.17 From the beginning of this financial year, more sessions with the Male Victim focus group have been set up, and Assia are also setting up and 'Hope 2 Recovery' for Male Victims. This is a programme that helps victims recover from the abuse and trauma they have experienced.
- 3.18 Commissioning arrangements on a regional basis remain in 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.

- 3.19 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 2022 - March 2023	April 2023 - March 2024	April 2024 – March 2025
<b>Bisexual</b>	11	11	14
<b>Gay</b>	9	15	10
<b>Lesbian</b>	20	15	17
<b>Pansexual</b>	*	*	*
<b>Queer</b>	*	*	*
<b>Total LGBTQ+</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>43</b>



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.

- 3.20 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, and there is a case study included as appendix iv.
- 3.21 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.

- 3.22 Raising awareness of domestic abuse and the support available through the Assia is a key area of work for the service. This includes working with partners to provide training on abuse, the signs and how to help, contributing to national work such as Welsh Government VAWDASV Blueprint Programme Board and supporting campaigns such as 'White Ribbon', which was marked in February 2025 with the 5k 'Run for Change, end the violence'.

The service will look to increase this awareness raising work, as detailed in the delivery plan.

#### **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. The service is funded largely through the Housing Support Grant (HSG) along with grants from the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and VAWDASV related Welsh Government grants.

## **9. Recommendation**

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

**Background documents - None**