

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES AND EMPLOYER RELATIONS
Date of Meeting:	2 SEPTEMBER 2026
Report Title:	VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE
Report Owner / Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	CORPORATE DIRECTOR – FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION DEPUTY LEADER / CABINET MEMBER SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AND WELLBEING
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:	• The Assia Domestic Abuse service in Bridgend is meeting the purpose of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, (Wales) Act 2015. • The service is delivering against national strategic aims for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. • Information contained in this report covers the period from April 2022, when the Assia service was established, to the end of March 2026. • 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 the 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 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 Act.

CTM aims are 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.

BCBC's local version of the CTM VASDASV Delivery Plan is included as **Appendix 1**.

2.4 At a meeting of Cabinet 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 in 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 The Leading Lights accreditation will be reviewed in 2027. Since first awarded, and based on recommendations, the service has gone through a restructure to create a second team leader post and secured clinical supervision support for staff.

3.3 The Assia Suite's drop-in service remains in Civic Offices, Bridgend. 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. This ensures ease of access within local communities. Additional spaces, such as in Nantymoel, have been used on an ad hoc basis.

3.4 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.

There are also daily Domestic Violence Arrest (DVA) meetings which take place every morning across the region. These discuss any overnight domestic violence incidents and allow early intervention / victim safeguarding. Relevant information, such as senior investigating officer details, are also provided allowing for information to be shared timely.

- 3.5 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. There is a wide range of training and development within the team to keep abreast of changing policies and trends. This includes having four members of staff who are trained in stalking advocacy.
- 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 2023 – March 2024	April 2024 – March 2025	April 2025 - March 2026
Total referrals accepting support	2886	2744	2940
Repeat Victims	556	471	1211
Referrals not accepted	354	417	314
Total referrals	3796	3632	4465

- 3.8 The difference between referrals and referrals accepting support includes referrals where the victim is already active in service and having support from the Assia service. Repeat referrals / incidents can be a high number. It should also be noted that the support offered is not mandatory and service users must want to engage.

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, contact details and a safety plan.

- 3.9 Over the last twelve months, and in preparing numbers for this report, the service has undertaken a deeper dive into the repeat referrals. This has highlighted a significant increase in victims that keep returning to the service in need of support as shown at paragraph 3.7. Work will be done to understand this, including a pilot called 'Learning Before Loss' to look at merged chronologies and the complexities of high-risk victims.
- 3.10 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.

The service has an Older Persons IDVA who supports victims aged 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.

- 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 welcomed by victims that have utilised it, including for civil cases and family court where there is a history of post separation abuse. There is little doubt that without the remote evidence suite, far less victims of domestic abuse would pursue justice.
- 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 and works out of Assia once a fortnight,

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 exist between the Assia service and Youth Services as well as education settings which will be utilised as much as possible.

Whilst the service provides a comprehensive response for adult victims of abuse, there remains a significant gap in specialist provision for young people experiencing intimate partner abuse. Emerging evidence and local experience suggest this is a growing area of need, with young people often falling between domestic abuse, safeguarding and exploitation pathways. The absence of a dedicated specialist role limits opportunities for early intervention, prevention and tailored support.

Assia staff members have also undertaken training on Extreme Right Wing and the Manosphere.

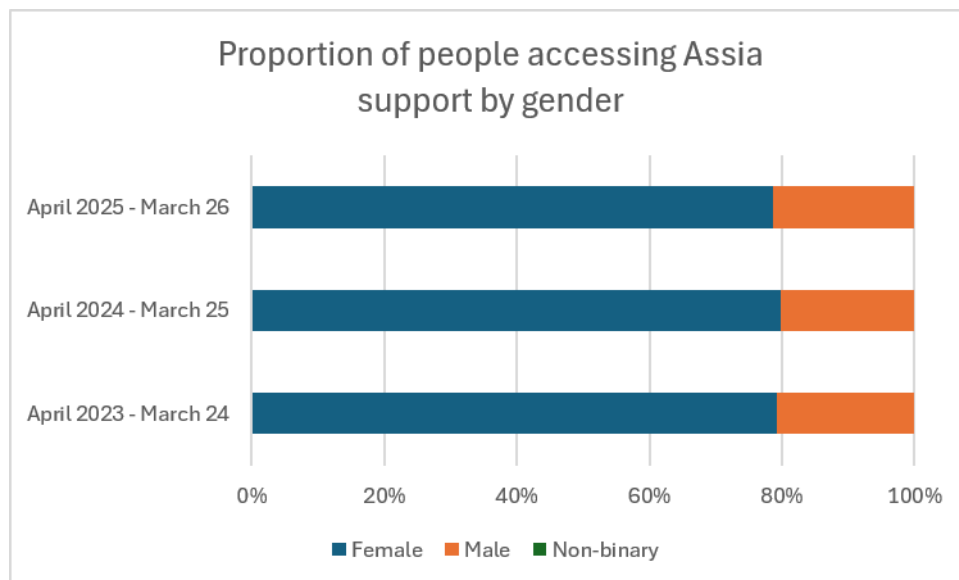
- 3.13 The Assia team are all IDVA qualified and trained in female genital mutilation and honour-based violence (HBV). There is a dedicated IDVA who completes HBV risk assessments if needed. The service continues to link in with Bawso for training, advice and guidance to ensure the team are up to date with emerging themes regarding support to black minority ethnic (BAME) and migrant victims. 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 are arrangements in place for translation; 2024-25 saw a noticeable increase in demand for support in languages such as Thai and Turkish. This levelled a little in 2025-26. Training has been completed on Immigration Law and on supporting people with no recourse to public funds.

- 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.

In November 2025 the IDVA was recognised as highly commended for her work with the male domestic abuse victims and their focus group at the Wales Safer Communities Network.

People accessing support by gender	April 2023 - March 2024	April 2024 - March 2025	April 2025 - March 2026
	%	%	%
Female	79.2	79.9	78.6
Male	20.8	20.1	21.4
Non-binary	0	0	0



As can be seen from the information above, the proportion of males accessing the service is increasing, linked to the promotion of the male victim focus group and recovery groups.

- 3.15 The Male Victim focus group has run throughout 2025 – 26 and has been attended by 56 victims over 12 sessions. The focus group works with men who have been victims of domestic abuse, who previously were unlikely to engage with the service. The group has been established as a safe space for male victims to share their experiences of abuse knowing they will be believed and not judged and have support from their peers. The co-productive element of the group, with the men picking what they want to focus on or receive advice on is at the heart of everything.
- 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 children, leaving safely and how to find the right organisation to meet their needs.

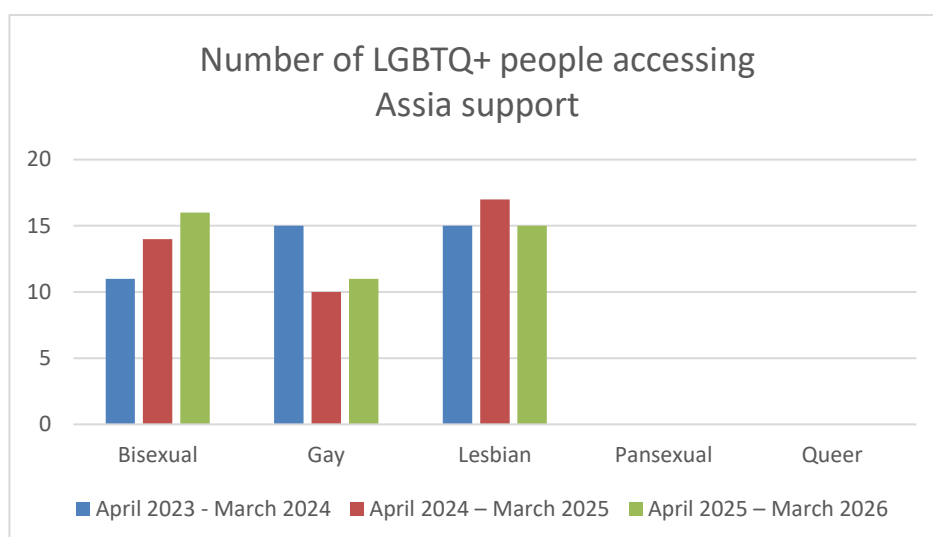
3.17 From the beginning of this financial year, more sessions with the Male Victim focus group have been set up, and Assia have also set up a 'Hope 2 Recovery' for Male Victims. Three blocks of this programme have been run, each block consisting of 11 sessions. These have been attended by 41 victims taking their first step towards recovery. The programme enables participants to understand the dynamics of domestic abuse, why they have coped the way they have, and how their parenting has been affected if they have children. In recent times there have been some issues with securing rooms for both the recovery programmes and focus groups.

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 identify 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 2023 - March 2024	April 2024 – March 2025	April 2025 – March 2026
Bisexual	11	14	16
Gay	15	10	11
Lesbian	15	17	15
Pansexual	*	*	*
Queer	*	*	*
Total LGBTQ+	41	43	44



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 with a bespoke programme for support. There is a dedicated DRIVE IDVA who works very closely with the service.
- 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.

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

- 3.23 The 2025 'White Ribbon' theme encouraged men to speak up against sexism, misogyny and harmful behaviour in everyday situations. Assia worked with the communications team to support the national campaign in November 2025, and in January 2026 a White Ribbon fundraising gala raising over £1,600 to support the victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Assia also supported the 'Ask for Angela' scheme training held in Bridgend at the end of March 2026 and attended by a wide range of pubs and hospitality settings.

- 3.24 Assia management is also integrated into other areas of strategic work across CTM VAWDASV steering group, including the Community Safety Partnership and Safeguarding Board. This includes ensuring VAWDASV is considered in Serious Violence Duty work and supporting Single Unified Safeguarding Reviews as panel members, reviewers and chair.

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 and Nature Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change or Nature 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