

North Wales
Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy
2021 - 2024

Update on Progress – June 2022

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1. Executive Summary

Our vision:

'The people of North Wales can live safe, equal and violence-free lives, in communities without abuse or exploitation'.

North Wales is working together to tackle all aspects of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Organised Immigration Crime and Exploitation.

The North Wales Vulnerability and Exploitation Board represents all statutory and non-statutory partners across the region, committed to a collaborative, joined-up approach to addressing all areas of vulnerability and exploitation.

The North Wales Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy 2021-2024 involves a multi-agency approach to addressing vulnerability and exploitation in North Wales. Both Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) and Modern Slavery agendas are aligned to the four Strategic Aims:

PREPARE PREVENT PROTECT PURSUE

The Strategy enables and supports innovative practices and ideas, as well as supporting existing services, to provide a cohesive package of support for victims, survivors and their families. The Strategy also ensures perpetrators are held to account and supports communities to promote an ethos of safety, equality and well-being.

2. Introduction

The North Wales Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategic Board met for the last time in Spring 2020, due to a complete reform of the Strategic Board structure across North Wales. Following a substantial amount of work and consultation, it was decided that the VAWDASV agenda would joint with Modern Slavery, Human trafficking, Organise Immigration Crime and other areas of criminal exploitation. The new arrangement is called the Vulnerability and Exploitation Board.

A new Strategy was developed in 2020/21, which gives clear strategic aims for the region and under that is a Delivery Plan, showing short, medium and long-term objectives. This is currently being updated, to show the connections to the new All Wales VAWDASV Strategy and the Blueprint.

The Vulnerability and Exploitation strategy clearly shows that North Wales is committed to tackling exploitation of the most vulnerable in our society and is a priority for all partners within the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

The North Wales Vulnerability and Exploitation Partnership Board is a strategic network of agencies aligned across all six Local Authority Areas of North Wales (Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham), comprising statutory, non-statutory and third sector organisations.

The purpose of the strategic partnership is to generate a coordinated, efficient and productive response to tackle Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) and Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Organised Immigration Crime and Exploitation. We will achieve this by:

- Working collaboratively to ensure that individuals within our communities who may be vulnerable and/or subject to exploitation are identified and heard in order to achieve the best outcome for them.
- Building trust and confidence through working alongside and within our communities.

The Vulnerability and Exploitation Board is designed to capture and guide the partnership work, as well as overseeing the delivery of the strategy objectives, by all partnership agencies, under the Regional Strategy as well as relevant national legislation.

The current Strategy encompasses the work already being done under the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence agenda, as well as other areas of exploitation. It does not dilute the previous work done under the direction of the VAWDASV Board, but rather supports us to consider the agenda from a more holistic perspective, developing new areas of collaboration, both from a delivery aspect, as well as investigating new opportunities for joint commissioning.

3. Governance

The North Wales Vulnerability and Exploitation Partnership Board is accountable for the strategy and delivery of the objectives and reports to the Safer North Wales Board. Chaired by the Chief Executive of the North Wales Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Strategic Partnership Board provides oversight, direction and support to local partners to ensure a collaborative approach. The Board meet on a quarterly basis to monitor and evaluate progression towards the Strategic Aims and Objectives as outlined within the Delivery Plan and Actions. All six Local Authority areas and partner agencies are encouraged to update and report on their progress and barriers to achieving success on a quarterly basis.

The Vulnerability and Exploitation Partnership Board Chair meets with counterparts from the, Safeguarding Boards (Adults/Children), Contest Board, Justice Board and Regional Leadership Board to ensure alignment of work streams.

The Vulnerability and Exploitation Board Representation and Partners:

- Anglesey County Council
- Barnardo's / Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs)
- BAWSO
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB)
- Church in Wales
- Conwy County Council
- North Wales Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU)
- Denbighshire County Council
- Flintshire County Council
- Gorwel
- Gwynedd Council
- Haven of Light
- HMP Berwyn
- North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS)
- North Wales Police
- North Wales Youth Justice Service
- Office of Police and Crime Commissioner
- National Probation Service
- Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis Wales (RASASC)
- Regional VAWDASV Team

- Stepping Stones North Wales
- Welsh Anti-Slavery Leadership Group
- Welsh Government
- Wrexham County Borough Council

4. Specific areas of progress during 2021/22

2021/22 was a year of recovery and consolidation and most partners saw a continued increase in the numbers of service users seeking support following the catastrophic effects of pandemic, local restrictions and full lockdowns.

2021/22 saw a continuation of the increase in financial support for the specialist sector, which was welcomed, but this came with its own issues, as funding was only for one year and therefore we were limited in the projects it could support.

Despite the many barriers in place, we did make some significant steps forward especially in the areas below:

1. Capital funding for disbursed units
2. Remote evidence facilities based within specialist sector provision
3. Increased numbers of specialist sexual violence workers, including counsellors, ISVAs and CYP SVAs
4. Increased numbers of specialist domestic abuse workers, including Crisis workers
5. Increased numbers of Children and Young People's workers
6. Increased numbers of IDVAs
7. Major capital investment from Welsh Government led to the specialist sector securing new and/or updated and renovated premises

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
<p>VAWDASV Objective 1</p>	<p>1.1 Improve access to high quality and up to date information on VAWDASV and the help available in public spaces and online through the promotion of the Live Fear Free Helpline and resources across the region</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV team</p>	<p>£5k WG Communication Grant spent on Live Fear Free merchandise – lip balms, hand sanitisers and pens –left in GP practices and pharmacies in rural areas during the pandemic. These have also been sent to NWP for distribution during Christmas campaigns in licensed premises.</p> <p>Regional Advisor worked with WCBC and NWP to support the Safer Streets 3 and Safer Women at Night projects, to ensure that LFF materials were shared widely across the region, especially within licensed premises, taxis etc.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>1.2 Promote appropriate family support and parenting programmes to ensure that safe, healthy relationships are modeled and any inappropriate attitudes towards gender inequality are challenged and addressed appropriately.</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>£20k Needs-Based Revenue Funding Grants awarded for Caring Dad's programme and also a support worker to work with mothers and children of those attending the programme. This programme has been re-commissioned for 22/23. This is only available in Gwynedd and Ynys Mon and something similar is required in Central and the East.</p> <p>The Family Group Meeting Service available in all LA, enables children, young people and their families to discuss a wide range of decisions relating the children's welfare.</p> <p>All LA areas provide enhanced parenting support via the Families First programme, to develop positives parenting skills and positive emotional well-being.</p>

	<p>1.3 Implement National Training Framework to ensure that all professionals working in public facing roles are fully equipped to support victims and survivors of VAWDASV.</p>	<p>“Relevant Authorities” under 2015 legislation</p>	<p>The VAWDASV Regional Training Board has now been merged with the Regional Safeguarding Workforce and Training Sub-Group.</p> <p>As of 1st January 2022, the completion rates for the Group 1 VAWDASV E-Learning module range from 45.4% - 90.3% across the region. The Regional VAWDASV Training and Development Officer is in discussions with the Regional Safeguarding Workforce and Training Sub-Group to explore ways in which the completion rates can be improved. They are also looking at the requirement for Local Authorities to “refresh” their knowledge of Group 1, in accordance with the Statutory Guidance on the National Training Framework.</p> <p>A total of 137 Group 2 Ask and Act sessions have been delivered across all six Local Authorities in the 12 months since 1st April 2021.</p> <p>A total of £18,000 has been allocated by Welsh Government in terms of the Ask and Act Subsidy Grant funding for 22/23.</p> <p>The Regional Workforce Development Group are looking at developing a North Wales version of the Group 1 workbook, to make it more reader friendly. There have been concerns about those with IT and general literacy issues having difficulty accessing the current model.</p>
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Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>1.4 Work with and support specialist BME VAW services to undertake community development to challenge cultural attitudes and change practice which can underpin FGM and forced marriage.</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>£20k of the VAWDASV Core Revenue Grant has been allocated towards the funding of BAME Community Advocates, to support the mainstream specialist services to tailor provision to the specific needs of BAME victims – to include no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>Other specialist sector providers work with Savera and Karma Nirvana to provide enhanced specialist support for victims of honour based abuse and harmful practices.</p>
	<p>1.5 Work with regional commissioners (drug and alcohol services, homelessness services, health and children’s services) to integrate VAWDASV into mainstream contracts to embed support for victims and their families in generic services.</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>£288k Capital funding was secured from WG to provide three additional disbursed units for victims of domestic abuse with additional complex needs (particularly focussed on substance misuse and mental health issues) for 21/22. The units have been purchased and renovated and are currently supporting service users with a variety of needs and levels of risk. The support attached to the units is being funded and monitored through the HSG. The Regional Commissioning Group has representatives from the APB, HSG, OPCC and other commissioners, to ensure a joined up approach to commissioning in general.</p> <p>For 22/23 we have been allocated the same amount, which the Joint Commissioning group is now looking at, to see where this funding is best spent.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
VAWDASV Objective 2	2.1 Develop robust pathways for children and young people to report violence and seek support and advice. Provision of children’s support workers in specialist agencies, (according to level of need identified) as well as work with local schools and youth groups, encouraging the use of “champions” to work as peer mentors and support.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners and Children’s Safeguarding Board	Pathways for support are part of the Ask and Act roll out within Education. This training has begun in a number of LAs, with the rest due to follow during 22/23. Children’s work in the specialist sector has been increased with additional funding from WG during and since the pandemic. The Regional Commissioning group have funded additional workers for some providers for 22/23. Additional technology for the children to complete work their online was funded from the Needs-based funding awarded for 21/22.
	2.2 Work with schools and colleges to support staff to implement a trauma-informed ethos, enabling young people to feel safe to disclose abuse.	VAWDASV Whole School Approach group	A meeting was held in April 2021 to look at training and support available to schools when implementing the new RSE curriculum. A significant change in delivery is required, focussing on relationships and sexuality as well as the more traditional “sex ed”. The Regional VAWDASV Team are working with School Beat (NWP) and LA education leads to ensure a consistent message is being delivered. The Regional VAWDASV Team are also taking part in the regional group looking at delivery in schools.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>2.3 Develop and deliver programmes to educate, inform and challenge young people about healthy relationships, abuse and consent and work with further/higher education colleges to develop an approach to working with young people as bystanders to promote VAWDASV prevention and further social change</p>	<p>VAWDASV Whole School Approach group</p>	<p>There is still a lack of consistent provision, but a good coverage of work in schools and colleges, including Spectrum (Hafan Cymru) in primary and secondary schools, and Stepping Stones and RASASC working in FE and HE colleges. The RSE Curriculum will help to encourage schools to take up offers of provision but there is still a lack of capacity to deliver specialist follow-up support is children disclose following awareness raising activities. The Regional VAWDASV Advisor is working with WG on this issue.</p>
<p>VAWDASV Objective 3</p>	<p>3.1 Commission evidence-based perpetrator programmes and whole-family interventions with a focus on encouraging and creating behaviour change at the same time as protecting their victims/ families from further abuse.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>The Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group have commissioned Choose2Change and Red Snapper to provide behaviour change interventions (both group work and on-line individual provision). Choose2Change has the added benefit of partner support built in to protect the wider family. ADAPT is in place across all areas now for high risk/high harm perpetrators and we have also commissioned Safe Lives to deliver an intensive 4 day training package to support frontline professionals to engage with families in which there is an abusive partner still residing. (Due to start in 22/23). In Gwynedd and Anglesey, Caring Dads has been commissioned to work with fathers who are abusive to their partners.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>3.2 Work with HMP Berwyn to ensure that custody to community support is seamless for the perpetrator and their family (if appropriate and correct risk assessments are in place). Robust pathway from assessment to programme within prison and then continuation in the community following release</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>Regional Advisor to meet with HMP Berwyn personnel early 22/23 to move this forwards.</p>
	<p>3.3 Ensure that perpetrators of VAWDASV are always held to account for their actions</p> <p>Provide training for all frontline staff to have a consistent response to perpetrator and victim disclosures. Training should enable staff to make an assessment of risk.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Training Group</p>	<p>The Regional Advisor is working with WG, the OPCC, NWP, NPS and other outside partners to develop a cohesive, whole systems approach to working with perpetrators, which enables perpetrators to engage with support (to ensure the safety of their families) regardless of where they are in their journey. The Safe Lives training will support professionals to understand how an abusive partner can manipulate professionals as well as understanding what to do following a disclosure of perpetration of violence.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
VAWDASV Objective 4	4.1 Pilot the IRIS programme, working with IRISi (roll out of specialist support provision within GP surgeries, as well as other primary health provision where appropriate).	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners and BCUHB	The IRIS pilot has now started in South Denbighshire, with a number of surgeries already starting on the training and others booked in to start. The Regional IRIS Steering Group has been established and are currently meeting monthly. We still have concerns around continuation of funding following the pilot, as there has been no commitment from the Health Board or other commissioners to continue this funding past the pilot phase.
	4.2 Maximise safe disclosure points and opportunities for early help-seeking in local communities for survivors (adults and children) and for perpetrators, through the embedding of Ask and Ask across North Wales. Ensure that all frontline staff understand the need to provide a safe and secure environment to enable disclosure.	Regional VAWDASV Training Group	Roll out of Ask and Act progressing across North Wales See 1.3 2022/23 will see more focus on the roll-out of Group 3, titled, “Enhanced Understanding of VAWDASV for Organisational Champions”, for senior operational employees within Local Authorities.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>4.3 Build-up capacity and sustainable funding for intervention work with children and young people</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>Increased numbers of CYP workers across the region are delivering 1-2-1 support in schools, other safe locations and virtually where necessary</p> <p>Programmes being delivered for children and young people include Break4Change, parent to child bonding sessions and gender based group work.</p> <p>Support packages for children and young people include emotional support, safety planning, therapeutic interventions, healthy relationship work, support with educational needs, work around feelings and addressing issues such as stress, anxiety, fear, worry, sleep problems and looking at coping strategies. Interventions in place around 'safety', self-harm and suicidal ideation, and linked with CYP networks such as school welfare.</p> <p>Additional children's workers have been commissioned under the 22/23 WG funding, although waiting lists are still high in some areas due to the large increases in referrals following the pandemic.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>4.4 Continue to work with the criminal justice system to reduce short term prison sentences for women and engage them in diversionary activities. Support the diversionary work currently being done by the Local Criminal Justice Board and their partners, and further develop this support.</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>Working with WG to support the Female Offending Blueprint.</p>
	<p>4.5 Ensure that families identified and needing support for living with VAWDASV have early access to specialist support to mitigate the trauma associated with adverse experiences in childhood and as adults.</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>All programmes delivered by the specialist sector are trauma informed and all staff have had extensive training in this area.</p>
	<p>4.6 Work with specialist providers to inform the development of ACE awareness and how it can be used to respond to victims and survivors of VAWDASV.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>Specialist services are all trained in ACEs and a number offer ACE Recovery as part of their suite of services. All specialist services in North Wales work in a trauma informed, victim focused way.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>4.7 Work with specialist providers to ensure that survivors have access to evidence based recovery programmes, to support them in building resilience and strengthening their family/friend support network.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>Therapeutic Group Programmes and Peer Support Activities: Providers across North Wales are delivering several therapeutic group programmes allowing opportunities for service users. To increase their resilience, recover from trauma, and leave services better equipped to lead their future lives free from abuse. The programmes help service users to understand their experience of abuse and to recognise the early warning signs so that they are empowered to make informed choices about future relationships. This also help service users to challenge their beliefs about their experiences, help them to understand their rights, and develop their self-esteem and confidence.</p> <p>Freedom programme continues to be delivered. Other programmes such as Own my Life and Break for Change are being rolled out this year.</p>
<p>VAWDASV Objective 5</p>	<p>5.1 Ensure that specialist service providers are able to support victims and survivors experiencing multiple disadvantage by providing recovery based, trauma informed training for all specialist service providers and partner agencies.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Training Group</p>	<p>All specialist sector accessed additional training throughout the pandemic to upskill the workforce. Some of this was very specific and based on their specialism, but there was also more general themes of self-care and vicarious trauma.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	<p>5.2 Improve the training provided for professionals who come into contact with perpetrators to ensure that disclosures are managed appropriately, giving them an understanding of the need to involve internal disciplinary/misconduct procedures, as well as criminal justice procedures.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Training Group</p>	<p>Ask and Act training supports professionals to engage appropriately and make suitable referrals in VAWDASV has been disclosed by a victim and the new Safe Lives training will ensure the same knowledge is disseminated if perpetration of abuse is disclosed.</p>
	<p>5.3 Work with criminal justice partners, to ensure that adequate training is provided in supporting victims of VAWDASV through the use of civil remedies.</p>	<p>Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners</p>	<p>Regional Advisor working with HMCTS to look at training for magistrates and court staff. This has been delayed due to Covid.</p>
	<p>5.4 Work with regional commissioners (drug and alcohol services, homelessness services, health and children’s services) integrate VAWDASV into mainstream contracts to embed support for victims and their families in generic services.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>See VAWDASV 1.5</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
VAWDASV Objective 6	<p>6.1 Ensure that there is long-term support in place for all survivors of VAWDASV to recover from their experiences, using recovery based, trauma-informed interventions.</p> <p>Specific support should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist support for those who have experienced FGM, HBV, FM and/or have no recourse to public funds • Housing support, promoting victims being supported to remain in their homes and the perpetrator being removed • Sexual violence support 	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>The Housing Support Grant is in place, providing refuge accommodation and support, floating support, intervention work and other specialist support. Additional funding from WG and the OPCC covers the regional IDVA provision and WG fund the perpetrator interventions, as well as other areas, based on current need, such as Children’s Workers, Caring Dads programme and SV Counsellors.</p> <p>Funding has been awarded for BAWSO to continue providing their specialist support for those experiencing FGM,HBV,FM across the region.</p> <p>RASASC NW and Stepping Stones have received funding to recruit an ISVA post and an SV trained Live Fear Free Helpline worker. These new posts work closely together to ensure that survivors in North Wales receive the best trauma informed service to meet their needs.</p>
	<p>6.2 Ensure that victims of VAWDASV have appropriate support throughout the criminal justice process, from disclosure to prosecution. Provide consistent IDVA/ISVA provision across North Wales, offering the same service to victims of VAWDASV, regardless of where in North Wales they are based.</p>	<p>Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group</p>	<p>The regional IDVA provision is managed by DASU and Gorwel and funded by the Joint Commissioning Group. The provision ensures consistent 24/7 provision across the region, and links into the North Wales Police rota system to ensure that Domestic Abuse Officers are always aware of which IDVA/s is on call. The ISVA provision is managed by the SARC and there is also an ISVA based with RASASC and Stepping Stones, to support those not wishing to engage with criminal justice partners.</p>

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
			Remote evidence facilities are now in place in Llangefni, Dolgellau and Wrexham. Cases are already being heard in Wrexham. These facilities will enable safe support for witnesses in criminal and family court cases.
	6.3 Provide standardised MARAC process, with regular virtual case discussions as well as monthly meetings to consider more complex cases. Each area to be monitored regularly on governance and implementation of processes.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	All areas now have weekly MARAC discussions, as well as the monthly MARACs, for the most complex cases. The governance of the MARAC is monitored by the Regional MARAC Steering Group, which meets on a quarterly basis. Recent changes to the weekly MARAC process have been piloted, to ensure that complex cases are moved to monthly meetings and weekly meetings are kept timely.

