

## CABINET

**Date :** Wednesday, 10 December 2025  
**Venue :** 1st Floor Committee Room, Ellesmere Port Library,  
Civic Way, CH65 0BG  
**Time :** 10.00 am

### Agenda

#### PART A - Open to the Press and Public

##### 1 Welcome and Introductions

##### 2 Apologies for Absence

##### 3 Declarations of Interest

Members to declare any interest in relation to items on the agenda under the following categories:

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)
- Other Registerable Interests (ORI)
- Non-Registerable Interests (NRI)

##### 4 Leaders Communications

##### 5 Minutes

To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2025, attached.

##### 6 Public Question Time/Open Session

A total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to address the Cabinet on any matter relevant to items of business on this agenda.

Members of the public wishing to address the Cabinet are required to register their intention with the Director of Governance no less than two clear working days prior to the meeting, via the officer contact details at the foot of this agenda. Any questions which are not relevant to items on the agenda may be submitted in writing.

(Pages 5 - 16)

Individual members of the public may speak for up to five minutes at the discretion of the Chairman.

## **7 Notification of Request to Speak by Visiting Members**

Visiting Members are asked to register their intention to speak in relation to an item on the agenda no less than two clear working days in advance of the Cabinet meeting, via the officer contact details at the foot of this agenda.

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO**

### **8 Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2030**

(Pages 17 - 120)

Report of the Executive Director of Children and Families, attached.

## **INCLUSIVE ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PORTFOLIO**

### **9 The Council's Digital Ambition and Data and Insight Strategies 2025-2028**

(Pages 121 - 162)

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive, attached.

## **TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (INCLUDING WASTE) PORTFOLIO**

### **10 Fleet Maintenance Service, New Contract Award**

(Pages 163 - 170)

Report of the Director of Transport and Highways, attached.

### **11 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Cabinet may decide that the press and public be excluded from the remaining part of the meeting pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that discussions may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the provisions of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

## **PART B - Press and Public Excluded**

## **Accessibility Protocols**

(Pages 171 - 172)

The room this meeting is being held in has been assessed in accordance with Cheshire West and Chester Council's Accessibility Protocol, which all participants are encouraged to read.

The room is classed as being accessible with a hearing loop, wide opening doors and access via a lift (when required).

**A summary of the Accessibility Protocols for this meeting, are attached.**

Any further queries regarding Accessibility should be forwarded to the officer named on the agenda.

**For further information, please contact:**

Lyn Brown, Democracy and Elections Officer  
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Date of Publication: 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025

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**CABINET****12 NOVEMBER 2025  
(10.00 am - 12.06 pm)****PRESENT:** Councillor Louise Gittins (Chair)Councillors Stuart Bingham, Lisa Denson, Paul Donovan,  
Carol Gahan, Adam Langan, Sheila Little, Nathan Pardoe,  
Karen Shore and Christine Warner

Visiting Members: Councillors Simon Eardley and Charles Hardy

Officers in attendance:	Natalie Abraham	– Assistant Chief Executive / Director of Transformation and Strategy
	Prof Helen Bromley	– Director of Public Health
	Maria Byrne	– Director of Environment and Communities
	Delyth Curtis	– Chief Executive
	Anne Greenwood	– Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer
	Debbie Hall	– Director of Finance
	Amanda Perraton	– Executive Director of Children and Families
	Simon Riley	– Chief Operating Officer
	Lyn Brown	– Democracy and Elections Officer

**72 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of the Council, welcomed participants and online viewers to the Cabinet meeting and introductions were made.

**73 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence from Cabinet Members.

**74 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**75 LEADERS COMMUNICATIONS**

Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of the Council, reported that Cheshire West and Chester Council and volunteering groups across the borough had won a number of awards in the recent RHS North West in Bloom Awards 2025.

The following five green spaces were given Gold Awards:

- Alexandra Park, Westminster Park and Whitby Park, for formal landscaping and community engagement, and
- Marbury Park and Rivacre Valley, for outstanding countryside management, biodiversity enhancement, and volunteering

In addition, the Council was also awarded the prestigious 'Best Large City' title for the whole borough, which recognised outstanding commitment to environmental excellence, horticultural achievement and community pride. Councillor Gittins reported that teams had delivered exceptional results in challenging times, maintaining and enhancing parks and green spaces with dedication, passion and skill. She thanked the many staff whose hard work had contributed to Cheshire West and Chester winning these awards.

Councillor Gittins also highlighted the fantastic achievements of a number of volunteering groups who had received some great results in the 'It's Your Neighbourhood' category, including twelve 'Level 5 Outstanding awards' and four 'Level 4 Thriving awards'. She congratulated everyone involved and thanked them sincerely for their efforts.

Finally, Councillor Gittins also reported that Brio Leisure had received two major honours at this year's UKActive Awards, including 'Outstanding Organisation of the Year'. She explained that the awards celebrated excellence across the UK's fitness and physical activity sector and Brio had been recognised for its innovation, impact and commitment to helping people across the borough to lead healthier and more active lives. In addition, Brio had also won the 'Education Programme of the Year' award for its Teacher Training Academy, providing training and support for new swimming teachers and helping to address the national shortage of instructors.

Brio was also a finalist in the 'Digital Transformation Award', highlighting its work to improve digital services through a new website, mobile app and use of technology to enhance customer support. She felt that to be shortlisted was, in itself, a fantastic achievement, and recognition of the progress made by Brio in improving its digital offer. She commended everyone at Brio for these successes and for their continued hard work.

## **76 MINUTES**

### **DECIDED: That**

the minutes of the last meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2025 be approved as a correct record.

## **77 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME/OPEN SESSION**

There had been no requests to speak in public speaking time and no questions had been submitted in advance.

## **78 MID YEAR REVIEW OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2025-26**

Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance which set out the financial performance of the Council at the mid year review of the 2025-26 financial year, covering the six month period from 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025. The report summarised the key headlines for financial performance, covering revenue and capital budgets.

Cabinet noted that Cheshire West and Chester, along with councils nationally, continued to face unprecedented financial challenges. At mid year the Council

was forecasting an underlying overspend of £14.4 million (compared to £13.4 million at first review) and the report explained that significant financial pressures were in Adult Social Care.

Members were informed that previous pressures in children's social care were not being flagged for 2025-26 with the number of children who required support described as stable and budgeted forecasted numbers of Children in Care being higher than the actual children requiring care, although the high cost placements forecast was above the budgeted figure. Due to volatility in this area, this remained a key risk area for the Council and monitoring would continue closely.

Cabinet Members were also informed of mitigating actions in-year across all Directorates and council-wide budgets to offset overspend pressure, including alternative funding sources as well as deliverable actions such as vacancy management and a reduction of non-pay related spend. After mitigation, there remained a £9.6 million overspend pressure (compared to £9.9 million at first review). Immediate action was being taken to reduce this forecast pressure as failure to do so would seriously impact council financial resilience. Management Board and Directors would review high risk savings proposals and also agreed actions to ensure delivery of those proposals as well as identifying other funding streams and mitigations including future in-year budget savings which could potentially be brought forward. Further mitigation was also planned, including a reduction of agency staff, a review of in-year expenditure of all departments and enhanced monitoring to ensure pay spend did not exceed agreed budgets. Adult Social Care weekly sessions would also be held to review the financial position and to ensure actions were being taken to reduce pressure.

Members noted that if the current overspend of £9.6 million was not mitigated, this would reduce reserves to £15.6 million which would take the Council below the risk-assessed range and plans would then be required to be put in place to replenish reserves in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Members acknowledged the highest expenditure for the Council was Adult Social Care, with an underlying overspend of £12.7 million which comprised 80% of the council's overall debt position. Significant work had been undertaken to address expenditure, with the Council Client Finance team allocating staff to focus on Adult Social Care debt and this debt was beginning to stabilise as the Council moved forward.

Councillor Carol Gahan, Cabinet Member for Finance and Legal, led the discussion on the item as proposer and the item was seconded by Councillor Nathan Pardoe, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy, Regeneration and Digital Transformation.

Visiting Members: Councillor Charles Hardy spoke in relation to the item.

Members welcomed the comprehensive report and acknowledged the challenging financial situation for councils at both local and national level. Members recognised the statutory requirement to protect vulnerable adults and older people and highlighted the borough's increasing ageing population and the difficulties in quantifying the number of older people who may require future social care.

Members acknowledged that whilst the number of young people in children's social care had decreased slightly, children with complex needs requiring high-cost placements was still a significant budget demand. Members were reminded that unforeseen and urgent demand, for example a family suddenly falling into crisis, would result in significantly increased expenditure in childrens social care almost overnight, with this having been extremely difficult to predict but essential that the care needed for that family was delivered.

Staff were thanked for their continued diligence and hard work to deliver savings in such a challenging financial environment.

**DECIDED: That**

Financial Performance:

- 1) the forecast revenue and capital outturn of the Council as set out in this report be noted;
- 2) the Council remains within all Prudential Indicators set for itself for the year (see paragraphs 4.91 to 4.92 and Appendix L) be noted;
- 3) the significant financial challenges facing the Council and the need to identify further in year mitigations to reduce the forecast overspend be noted;

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL:**

- 1) **The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme is adopted and implemented for 2026-27 financial year with no changes (paragraphs 4.89 to 4.90); and**
- 2) **In-principle approval be given for any additional capital receipts achieved in 2025-26, above the base target of £7.1m required to fund the capital programme, be made available to support transformation work for the Council (paragraphs 4.22-4.25).**

**Reason for Decision**

To ensure the Council remains a well-managed authority, recognising and responding to emerging cost pressures and complying with current accounting requirements.

Alternative Options

The report sets out various recommendations. Members could choose not to approve the recommendations. However, this is not recommended as this would adversely impact the Council's financial position.

**79 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026-30**

Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Finance which outlined the strategic approach that the Council was taking to



manage its financial matters. It set out the specific financial challenges facing the Council over the next four years and how it plans to meet these.

Members were informed that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sought to achieve a balanced budget to enable the Council to be fit for the future and have a roadmap to financial sustainability. It provided an update on the approach to setting the Council's four-year revenue budget and four-year capital programme for the period 2026-30.

Members noted that the MTFS had been prepared against a backdrop of increasing volatility and challenge for local authorities in respect of inflation, uncertainty over the level of change in national level funding which included the Fair Funding Review that was due, increased demand and society changes. Members were reminded that many councils were reporting financial difficulties with an increased number in receipt of exceptional financial support.

Members acknowledged that there had been ongoing and significant cost and demand pressures in Adult Social Care. In addition, the detail of the Local Government Finance Settlement was not yet known and funding allocations were not expected to be announced until late December 2025. Members further noted that, based on the latest information, the council was facing an estimated funding gap over the next four years of in the region of £356 million. It was noted the gap would need to be bridged from generated additional income and savings proposals. A significant programme of council transformation was also reported as underway which sought better outcomes as well as increased financial sustainability. A review of the overall shape and scale of the council would also be undertaken to address budget gaps in a sustainable manner.

Councillor Carol Gahan, Cabinet Member for Finance and Legal, led the discussion on the item as proposer and the item was seconded by Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of the Council.

Visiting Members: Councillor Charles Hardy spoke in relation to the item.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and acknowledged the significant challenges that the Council faced, both nationally and locally. They recognised that the Council was in a relatively strong position compared to other local authorities, however this was increasingly difficult with demand-led pressures across social care.

Members noted the difficulty in councils being expected to deliver a balanced budget when the final financial settlements were not expected until late December. This required Finance officers to make educated assumptions, although it was recognised that officers had consistently delivered good financial management to date. A review of Fair Funding was due to be concluded shortly which would assess how local authorities were funded in different areas and this included areas such as how local schools were funded compared to those nationally. It was hoped that this would ensure that the borough received a 'fairer deal'. The introduction of a multi-year settlement was welcomed and would result in service areas being able to plan for the longer term which would give more sustainability and allow the council to deliver more proactive solutions rather be reactive to issues that arise.

**DECIDED: That**

- 1) The Medium Term Financial Strategy as detailed in this report, including the development of a budget package for the period 2026-30 and a full review of existing reserves and balances, be noted;
- 2) The latest estimated funding gap for the Council for the period 2026-30 (paragraphs 4.15 – 4.20) be noted;
- 3) The stakeholder engagement process currently taking place on the Council's budget plans for 2026-30 (paragraphs 4.28 – 4.29) be noted; and
- 4) The Council's position in relation to its financial resilience (paragraphs 4.36 – 4.44) be noted.

**Reason for Decision**

- 1) In approving the recommendations laid out in this report, the Council will continue to ensure resources are well managed and reflect the key priorities of the residents of Cheshire West and Chester borough.
- 2) It is not considered appropriate to seek approval for a Medium Term Financial Strategy at this stage, given the significant changes to the national funding landscape (Fair Funding Review and business rates reset) and continued cost and demand pressures to the Council's financial position that could arise between now and the time the budget is set in February 2026. This report is therefore being presented as an update to the Cabinet at this stage and the plan is that the Medium Term Financial Strategy will instead be approved by Council as part of the Budget Report in February 2026.

Alternative Options

No other option is being proposed as it is considered good practice that the Council sets out medium term financial forecasts in this way and outlines the approach that it will take in managing its resources over the next four years.

**80 MID-YEAR SUMMARY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025-26**

Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which outlined the Council's performance in relation to the missions set out in the 'Play your part in a stronger future' Borough Plan 2024-2028. The report focused on performance over period two of the financial year, from 1 August to 30 September 2025 and the accompanying appendices linked to the missions. The report had been considered by Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

Members noted graph 1 in paragraph 4.2 which showed that for this mid-year period, 80 indicators were reporting as green, 21 were amber and 23 were red in relation to overall performance. Members' attention was also drawn to graph 2 in paragraph 4.3 which showed overall performance against targets and graph 3 in paragraph 4.4 which showed performance against activity.

Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of the Council, led the discussion on the item as proposer and the item was seconded by Councillor Adam Langan, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

In introducing the report, Councillor Gittins welcomed this improving position from period one and highlighted some areas of positive performance in the Tackling Hardship and Poverty mission, including a reduction in the number of homeless and households in temporary accommodation from period one. She highlighted an improving picture in the Starting Well mission and, although the mission was facing challenges, she felt that early intervention and prevention work was starting to come to fruition. The rate of children in care and children subject to a child protection plan was reducing, attainment of all Key Stage 2 children was improving, and the percentage of Education Health and Care Plans agreed within 20 weeks was slowly increasing. Other areas of strong performance included resilient people living their best lives, measures against physical activity, opportunities in a fair economy, town centre and market town regeneration and employment, training and business support.

Visiting Members: Councillor Charles Hardy spoke in relation to the item.

Members welcomed the comprehensive report and the improving position from period one, and thanked officers, in particular Bev Wilson and Morgan Jones, for their hard work in producing the report and appendices.

Cabinet Members took the opportunity to highlight some of the key headlines, achievements and areas of positive performance and work to be celebrated within their individual portfolios as set out in the report. Briefly this included boroughwide regeneration and good progress with Ellesmere Port and Northwich markets, on track for completion in 2026; results of the Adult Social Care Survey showing higher rates of satisfaction with care and support in the borough compared to the England average; positive work around the waste strategy; highways defects were lower at this point compared to previous years; and a fall in street care complaints. Members extended their thanks to all teams across the council for their hard work in relation to focusing more on prevention and continuing to drive improvements.

**DECIDED: That**

- 1) the performance of the Council at mid-year (1 August to 30 September 2025) against the missions set out in the 'Play your part in a stronger future' Borough Plan 2024-28 be noted; and
- 2) the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees be provided with the performance information set out in the report so that they can understand and challenge performance and consider using it to inform scrutiny work programmes across all committees.

**Reason for Decision**

To ensure that up to date performance information is available to enable the Cabinet, other Members, senior Council officers and the public to understand progress against the Borough Plan. This includes work being undertaken to address any areas of challenge, and to support any necessary discussions about

reallocating resources to better achieve the missions set out within the Borough Plan.

### Alternative Options

The report includes recommendations. Members could choose not to approve the recommendations. However, this could adversely impact future performance.

## **81 CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY**

Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Economy and Housing concerning the production of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Members were informed that the LNRS was a statutory policy document under the Environment Act 2021 and that there was a legal requirement for local authorities to have a LNRS as part of their enhanced biodiversity duty.

Members noted that the LNRS reflected extensive collaborative between local authorities, farmers, landowners, businesses, residents and other key stakeholders and built on the council's commitment to tackle the climate emergency. The LNRS set out clear priorities and identified areas to create or restore habitats, to provide the most benefit for nature and the wider environment. In addition, it was a blueprint to help nature recover by providing greener communities, stronger ecosystems and a fairer local economy.

Councillor Christine Warner, Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning, led the discussion on the item as proposer and the item was seconded by Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of the Council.

Visiting Members: Councillor Simon Eardley spoke in relation to the item.

Members welcomed the report and the LNRS and highlighted the need to ensure the proposals in the Strategy were embedded into all aspects of local decision-making going forward. Members hoped the Strategy would now be widely promoted in order to inspire and encourage communities to become involved in nature recovery. They were also keen to build on the fantastic work with local schools and Chester Zoo on green corridors and welcomed the potential conversion of landfill sites into grassland areas to restore them back to nature. They acknowledged that water sustainability and management was crucially important moving forward and that planning applications could embrace nature recovery.

Members looked forward to implementation of the LNRS and embedding it into future thinking and planning in order to enhance the borough and make it a better place for nature recovery.

### **DECIDED: That**

the Cheshire and Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including both the Statement of Biodiversity Priorities and Local Habitat Map appended to this report (see appendices) be approved.

## **Reason for Decision**

- 1) To ensure the Council complies with the requirement to publish a LNRS under section 105(1) of the Environment Act 2021 ("the EA").
- 2) Help the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting its duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity in accordance with section 40 of the Natural Environment Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 3) Provides an evidence base for development to be carried out in a way that supports the requirement for developers to deliver a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity value as set out in Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 ('Biodiversity Net Gain') and support the provision of Biodiversity Net Gain across the wider sub- region.
- 4) Provides consistency with previous decisions, such as the declaration of a Climate and Nature Emergency in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

### Alternative Options

There is the option of not approving the LNRS but if the cabinet does proceed to do this, the risks outlined in section 13 above could materialize such as loss of potential funding, lack of resource to deliver on the proposals within the document alongside potential investigation by the Office for Environmental Protection and legal proceedings.

## **82 LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4 - CORE STRATEGY ADOPTION**

Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Transport and Highways concerning the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) Core Strategy, a key policy document which set out the long-term vision for transport across the borough to 2045. It will guide how transport investment and planning would support wider strategic goals, including tackling the climate emergency, reducing poverty, improving public health and enabling inclusive economic growth.

Members noted that the Core Strategy had been developed following extensive public and stakeholder engagement and consultation which had enabled the development of a vision which would deliver a fair and sustainable transport system that supported a stronger, thriving future, aligned to the priorities of the Borough Plan. Members also noted the cross-party input into the development of the Core Strategy via a Scrutiny Task Group and the Transport Board.

Members were informed that, subject to adoption of the Core Strategy by Full Council, a medium-term Implementation Plan would then be developed, focused on translating strategy into delivery. This would be updated on a rolling basis to be responsive to ever-changing and future transport needs within communities, as well as the adaptation of government priorities to meet those changing community needs, including rural transport and bus franchising. Members recognised that the Strategy required a flexible approach to accommodate changes. Developing technology would also need to be recognised within the framework, such as meeting the demand for EV vehicles, environmentally friendly car use and drone technology used to deliver parcels, prescriptions and medicines to communities.

Members identified that resident engagement had shown that fairness in transport accessibility should be a key priority to ensure that all residents had good access to transport, including in rural communities, and good transport networks for new housing developments. Capped fares had also been suggested and was recognised as a possible future Devolution opportunity, as well as better active travel accessibility.

Councillor Karen Shore, Cabinet Member for Transport and Highways, led the discussion on the item as proposer and the item was seconded by Councillor Stuart Bingham, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Neighbourhood Pride.

Visiting Members: Councillor Simon Eardley spoke in relation to the item.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Highways Officers, in particular Jack Mayhew, for their thoroughness, diligence and responsiveness to questions raised through Scrutiny and the Transport Board. Members commended the high level of public engagement in relation to development of the Strategy and felt it was apparent that officers had been very mindful to the ever-changing and rapid technologies which the Strategy would need to reflect in its approach going forward. They also thanked all the residents, stakeholders, businesses and communities who had contributed, as well as elected Members of the Transport Board and the Scrutiny Task Group. Members recognised the importance of this Strategy taking a wholistic approach to all Transport and Highway needs including day-to-day maintenance of highways and footways to ensure residents felt confident in using active travel modes.

Members also recognised the need to deliver a sustainable transport system for the future which would contribute to combatting climate change. In addition, they felt it was important that it remained a flexible policy to ensure all communities could engage in their evolving transport needs in order to access employment, services and wider opportunities to ensure residents could continue to live their best life.

#### **RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:**

**That the Local Transport Plan 4 Core Strategy (attached at Appendix 1) be adopted.**

#### **Reason for Decision**

- 1) The Borough's Local Transport Plan is part of the Council's Policy Framework set out within the constitution. Amendments to the Policy Framework require approval by Council. The LTP4 Core Strategy replaces the current LTP strategy, adopted in 2011 and refreshed in 2017.
- 2) Adoption of the LTP4 Core Strategy represents a significant advancement in the Borough's adopted transport strategy, refocusing transport priorities to maximise delivery against the missions set out in the Borough Plan. The Core Strategy has been developed on the basis of extensive technical appraisal and a wide-reaching process of consultation and engagement. It acts as the first statutory part of the Council's Local Transport Plan, the "LTP Strategy".

- 3) The second statutory part of the Local Transport Plan, the Implementation Plan, is being developed separately and will follow for Full Council consideration at a later date. A series of non-statutory policy papers will also be developed and considered by Cabinet in due course.
- 4) A graphically designed version of the LTP4 Core Strategy will be produced for public-facing purposes, using the approved text. Opportunities to enhance accessibility, such as through summary or simplified formats similar to those used during consultation, will be considered as part of this.

#### Alternative Options

Alternative approaches, such as retaining the existing Local Transport Plan or delaying adoption of the Core Strategy, would not reflect current evidence, public feedback, or the Council's strategic priorities. The recommended approach ensures alignment with statutory duties and the Borough Plan and enables timely progression of supporting policy and delivery plans.

Date of publication: 14<sup>th</sup> November 2025

Chairman .....

Date .....

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# Cheshire West and Chester

## Report to Cabinet

<b>Date</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> December 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Amanda Perraton – Executive Director of Children and Families
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Adam Langan – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
<b>Report Title:</b>	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026 - 2030
<b>Is this a Key Decision?</b> [(one that affects finances over £1m or significantly affects two or more wards)]	No
<b>Exempt Report:</b>	No

### 1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026–2030. The strategy sets out the borough’s vision, priorities, and action plan for preventing and responding to domestic abuse, in line with the Council’s statutory duties and local needs. It has been developed collaboratively with partners including Health, Police, Probation, and voluntary sector organisations, and shaped by the voices of survivors of domestic abuse.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026–2030 (attached at Appendix 1).

### 3 Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a legal duty on local authorities to provide support and safe accommodation for those harmed by domestic abuse. The strategy ensures compliance with these duties and aligns national and local priorities.

- 3.2 The strategy is evidence-based having been informed by the 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and shaped by engagement with survivors and partner organisations including Health, Police, Probation and community and voluntary sector. It sets out a clear vision and priorities to improve outcomes for individuals, families, and communities affected by domestic abuse.

## **4 Report Details**

- 4.1 Domestic abuse is a significant societal issue affecting individuals, families, and communities across Cheshire West and Chester. The strategy outlines a trauma-informed, whole-system approach, prioritising safety, empowerment, and justice.
- 4.2 Domestic abuse remains a pervasive and deeply harmful issue across the UK, affecting an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 and over in the year ending March 2024 1.6 million women and 712,000 men. Despite a slight decrease in police recorded domestic abuse related crimes, with 1.35 million incidents and crimes logged in 2023/24 in England and Wales, it is thought that the true scale of abuse is significantly underreported due to fear, stigma, and barriers to disclosure affecting people who are harmed by domestic abuse.
- 4.3 In 2024 Cheshire West and Chester has seen an 8% increase in domestic abuse calls to police, with Ellesmere Port experiencing the highest rise at 22%. The borough faces particular challenges in areas of deprivation, with higher rates of domestic abuse crime and underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups in service access. The strategy is informed by the findings of the 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment commissioned by the Council which highlights rising demand, gaps in services provided, and barriers for older adults and minoritised communities.
- 4.4 The strategy reflects the provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the UK Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, which prioritise prevention, support for victims, holding perpetrators to account, and strengthening multi-agency systems. By embedding these national priorities and responding to local data, the strategy aims to deliver a coordinated, trauma-informed response that addresses both immediate and long-term impacts of domestic abuse in Cheshire West and Chester.
- 4.5 The Council's vision is for Cheshire West and Chester to be a borough where domestic abuse is never tolerated, a borough united in compassion, safety, and justice. Through trauma-informed practice and strong, collaborative partnerships, the Council will protect and empower those affected, prevent harm before it happens, and hold those harming others to account.

- 4.6 By prioritising safety, inclusion, and empowerment for all residents, the strategy directly supports the Council Borough Plan's missions, particularly those focused on safeguarding children and young people, tackling hardship and poverty, promoting resilient and healthy communities, and fostering neighbourhood pride. The strategy's commitment to early intervention, equitable access to services, and multi-agency collaboration ensures that the Borough Plan's goals of prevention, partnership, and community engagement are embedded in the local response to domestic abuse, helping to build a safer, more inclusive, and resilient Cheshire West and Chester.
- 4.7 The strategy is driven by five key priorities that form the foundation of its whole-system, trauma-informed approach. These priorities are: assessing risk to ensure timely identification and response to those at risk of harm; intervening earlier through prevention, education, and outreach to stop abuse before it escalates; providing high-quality, accessible services for those harmed, including safe accommodation and specialist support; supporting children and young people with tailored, age-appropriate interventions that recognise their unique needs; and challenging those who harm, holding perpetrators to account while offering support for positive change.
- 4.8 Together, the priorities ensure a coordinated, compassionate, and effective response to domestic abuse, that reflects relevant legislation and the ambitions of the Borough Plan.
- 4.9 The strategy was presented to the Council's People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2025 and the Committee approved a dedicated task group to review its content in detail. The task group met on two occasions and is scheduled to report its findings and recommendations back to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025 with a recommendation for Cabinet to approve the strategy.
- 4.10 Engagement with survivors, communities, and partners was undertaken to inform the development of the strategy. The process was led by the multi-agency statutory Domestic Abuse Board and included collaboration with statutory partners, voluntary sector organisations, health professionals, police, community groups, and survivor voice panels. Direct engagement with survivors was a central element, ensuring that lived experience shaped the strategic direction and priorities.
- 4.11 The 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment commissioned by the Council provided a robust evidence base, with partners contributing data, insights, and expertise to identify local trends, service gaps, and barriers to access. As a result of this engagement, the strategy's five key priorities are firmly rooted in the needs and experiences of those affected by domestic abuse, and reflect a shared commitment across agencies to prevention, safety, and equitable support for all residents.

## **5 How does the decision contribute to the Borough Plan?**

- 5.1 The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester is designed to directly support the borough's mission as set out in the Borough Plan by embedding principles of prevention, partnership, and community engagement across all aspects of its approach. The strategy aligns with the six key missions of the Borough Plan, including safeguarding children and young people, tackling hardship and poverty, promoting resilient and healthy communities, supporting inclusive economic opportunity, fostering neighbourhood pride, and advancing greener communities. More information on the missions in the Borough Plan can be found [here](#).
- 5.2 The strategy also directly supports the [Community Safety Partnership Priorities](#), including reducing repeat experiences of domestic abuse, preventing exploitation, and tackling serious violence through coordinated, multi-agency action. It also aligns with the [Police and Crime Plan](#) 2024–2028, which sets out a vision for a safer Cheshire by prioritising prevention, protecting vulnerable people, and holding perpetrators to account.
- 5.3 Furthermore, the approach reflects the trauma-informed principles and safeguarding priorities of both the Cheshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Local Safeguarding Adults Board, ensuring that the Council's work protects those most at risk and promotes safety, dignity, and recovery across all age groups.

## **6 What engagement has taken place with partners?**

- 6.1 The development of the Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Strategy was underpinned by engagement with a wide range of partners, including Health, Police, Probation, and the voluntary sector ensuring a collaborative and evidence-based approach. The strategy was shaped through the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Board, which brought together statutory services, voluntary organisations, health professionals, police, community groups, and survivor voice representatives. Direct engagement with survivors was a central feature, with their lived experiences informing both the strategic direction and service priorities. The 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment played a pivotal role in this process, providing a comprehensive analysis of local trends, service gaps, barriers to access, and demographic shifts.
- 6.2 This collaborative process has resulted in a strategy that reflects the voices of those affected by domestic abuse and the expertise of partners across the borough, supporting a united commitment to prevention, safety, and lasting change.

## **7 What are the financial implications?**

- 7.1 The implementation of the strategy can be delivered within existing resources and there are no immediate resource or financial implications.
- 7.2 The strategy does highlight the need to ensure sustainment of resources and responding to rising demand along with ongoing service improvement. This will require ongoing consideration to ensure all legal duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 continue to be met. Any growth will be subject to separate approval.
- 7.3 The Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment for 2024/25 has identified a requirement to increase the provision of Safe Accommodation spaces from 34 to 37. The additional units will be secured by the commissioned Safe Accommodation provider in collaboration with local registered housing providers. The associated costs for these properties will be met through the funding allocations already provided to the local authority under the provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

## **8 What are the legal implications?**

- 8.1 The Strategy is shaped by legal duties arising from relevant legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the Housing Act 1996. Implementing the strategy should ensure that the Council complies with statutory requirements to provide safe accommodation and tailored support for people harmed by domestic abuse, recognising automatic priority need for those made homeless by domestic abuse. It also mandates trauma-informed, survivor-centred responses and multi-agency collaboration.
- 8.2 Failure to comply with the Council's legal duties in relation to domestic abuse could leave it vulnerable to legal challenge and claims.

## **9 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

- 9.1 Please see risks associated with not having a robust strategy in place and mitigations:-

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Rising demand for domestic abuse services may exceed current capacity	Expand service provision, strengthen partnerships with third-sector organisations, and invest in early intervention.
Barriers to access for older adults, ethnic minority groups, and deprived areas	Improve data collection, targeted outreach, and partnership working with

	community groups to address unmet needs.
Underreporting of domestic abuse, especially in certain communities	Raise awareness, provide training for professionals, and embed survivor voice in service design and evaluation.
Inconsistent multi-agency collaboration	Formalise partnership structures, share best practices, and ensure regular communication and joint training.
Financial constraints impacting service quality or sustainability	Secure funding from statutory, voluntary, and third-sector partners; prioritise resources based on need.
Failure to meet statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act	Maintain robust governance via the Partnership Board, monitor compliance, and update policies in line with legislation.
Data gaps and poor information sharing between agencies	Improve inter-agency data sharing, coding practices, and performance monitoring.

## **10 How does the decision contribute to the “All Together Fairer” priorities?**

- 10.1 The strategy is closely aligned with the “All Together Fairer” approach, which brings together public, private, and third sector organisations across Cheshire and Merseyside to reduce health inequalities, as championed by Professor Sir Michael Marmot.
- 10.2 The strategy supports these aims by prioritising trauma-informed, equitable access to domestic abuse services, addressing barriers faced by marginalised groups, and embedding the findings of the Strategic Needs Assessment. Through partnership working and a commitment to prevention, safety, and inclusion, the strategy contributes to the shared vision of “All Together Fairer” ensuring that every resident has the opportunity to live free from harm and thrive within a healthier, more just community.

## **11 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity issues?**

- 11.1 There are no direct implications from the proposed recommendations in this report in relation to health inequalities and equality and diversity issues.
- 11.2 The strategy is designed to address barriers faced by underrepresented and vulnerable groups, with a focus on equity and inclusion.

## **12 What are the implications of the decision on climate change?**

- 12.1 There are no direct implications from the proposed recommendations in relation to climate change.

### **13 Are there any other options?**

- 13.1 While there are alternative approaches to addressing domestic abuse such as relying solely on existing statutory services, focusing only on crisis intervention, or limiting provision to basic refuge accommodation, this strategy recognises that these options would not fully meet the Council's ambitions for prevention, equity, and long-term recovery of victims.
- 13.2 This strategy, with a whole-system, survivor centred framework, and commitment to safe accommodation, is designed to deliver the strategic vision ensuring safety, empowerment, and lasting change for all residents.
- 13.3 An option is to not approve this strategy but for the reasons set out above this option is not recommended.

#### **For further information:**

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#### **Background Documents:**

- 1) Strategic Needs Assessment Executive Summary
- 2) People Overview & Scrutiny Task Group Report 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025

#### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Date</u>
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	24 <sup>th</sup> September 2025 26 <sup>th</sup> November 2025

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## **Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2030**

### **Strategic Foreword**

Welcome to the Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2030.

Domestic abuse is a significant societal issue that affects individuals, families, and communities across the borough. It cuts across age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, leaving lasting impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing, safety, and life chances. As a borough committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all residents, we must adopt a bold, coordinated, and compassionate approach to addressing domestic abuse in all its forms.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is committed to working collaboratively with statutory services, voluntary organisations, strategic partners, and community groups to build on the foundations of the previous Domestic Abuse Strategy. Our shared ambition is to create a borough where every person—regardless of background or circumstance—can live free from the fear and harm that domestic abuse causes.

We recognise that domestic abuse is a deeply personal and traumatic experience. Our approach is rooted in compassion, safety, and empowerment. By listening to survivors of domestic abuse, valuing lived experience, and fostering trust across our systems, we aim to create environments where people feel seen, heard, and supported.

Together with our partners, we will challenge the conditions that allow abuse to persist, strengthen protective factors, and ensure our services respond with sensitivity, respect, and cultural awareness. This strategy represents a collective call to action and a shared commitment to healing, justice, and lasting change.

Domestic abuse has no place in Cheshire West and Chester. We stand together to prevent harm and hold abusers to account through trauma

informed united action. Together we must recognise domestic abuse, respond with compassion and build a safer future for all.

This strategy has been shaped by the findings of the 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (DANA), which included direct engagement with survivors. It has been developed collaboratively through the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Board, which convened to agree the strategic direction and establish the key priorities.

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## **Executive Summary:**

### Executive Summary

Domestic abuse is a pervasive and deeply harmful issue affecting individuals, families, and communities across Cheshire West and Chester. This strategy sets out the borough's bold and compassionate commitment to becoming a place where domestic abuse is never tolerated.

Rooted in trauma-informed principles and shaped by the voices of those who have experienced domestic abuse, the strategy outlines a whole-system approach that prioritises safety, empowerment, and justice. It builds on strong multi-agency partnerships and aligns with national legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and strategic frameworks such as the UK Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan and the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

The strategy is driven by five key priorities:

1. Assessing Risk
2. Intervening Earlier
3. Providing Services for Those Harmed
4. Supporting Children and Young People
5. Challenging Those Who Harm and Supporting Change

It is informed by a comprehensive Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment, which highlights rising demand, service gaps, and barriers to access—particularly for older adults, ethnic minority communities, and those in areas of deprivation such as Ellesmere Port.

The strategy also sets out the borough's Safe Accommodation Model, including refuge, dispersed properties, and Sanctuary Schemes, ensuring those experiencing domestic abuse have access to safe, appropriate housing and support.

Governance is provided by the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, which oversees delivery, accountability, and continuous improvement through engagement with people who are harmed, performance monitoring, and strategic alignment with safeguarding and community safety priorities.

This strategy is a call to action. Every service, community, and individual has a role to play in recognising abuse, responding with compassion, and helping to build a safer future for all.

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## **Our Vision**

In Cheshire West and Chester, we recognise that domestic abuse can have long-lasting and deeply personal impacts on physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing. We are committed to creating safe, inclusive, and accessible services that respond sensitively to the diverse needs of all individuals affected by abuse regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, or background. Central to our approach is strong partnership working, we collaborate closely with our statutory partners and voluntary sector organisations to ensure that support is coordinated, person-centred, and rooted in compassion and respect. Together, we strive to build a system that promotes healing, safety, and empowerment for everyone impacted by domestic abuse.

Our approach is rooted in trauma-informed principles, which means:

- We will prioritise safety and trust in every interaction.
- We will empower people who have been harmed by listening to their voices and respecting their choices.
- We will collaborate across agencies to ensure a holistic response that meets complex needs.
- We will challenge harmful behaviours, hold those that harm to account and support them to change.

Through strong multi-agency partnerships, we continue to build a system that not only responds to harm but actively works to prevent it ensuring that everyone in our community can live free from domestic abuse related fear and violence.

Our vision is ambitious and requires commitment and collaborative working, domestic abuse is everyone's business.

## **Vision Statement**

Our vision is for Cheshire West and Chester to be a borough where domestic abuse is never tolerated — a borough united in compassion, safety, and justice. Through trauma-informed practice and strong, collaborative partnerships, we

will protect and empower those affected, prevent harm before it happens, and hold those harming others to account.

## **Call to Action**

Together, we must act. Every service, every community, every individual has a role to play. Recognise the signs. Respond with empathy. Stand with those harmed. By working together, we can build a future free from domestic abuse — a safer, stronger borough for all.

Our vision will be delivered through 5 priorities:

- Assessing Risk
- Intervening Earlier
- Providing Services for those who are harmed
- Providing services for children and young people
- Challenging those who harm and support them to change

## **Definition and National Context**

Domestic abuse remains a pervasive and deeply harmful issue across the UK, affecting an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 and over in the year ending March 2024—1.6 million women and 712,000 men<sup>123</sup>. Despite a slight decrease in police-recorded domestic abuse-related crimes, with 1.35 million incidents and crimes logged in England and Wales, the true scale of abuse is significantly underreported due to fear, stigma, and barriers to disclosure<sup>1</sup>. Women continue to be disproportionately affected, experiencing higher rates of repeat victimisation, coercive control, and sexual violence<sup>3</sup>. Abuse often begins or escalates during pregnancy, and young people aged 16–24 are among the most affected age groups<sup>3</sup>. The impact of domestic abuse is not only personal but societal, with an estimated £66 billion annual cost to the economy, including

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2024>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/latest>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan>

lost productivity and healthcare costs<sup>3</sup>. These figures underscore the urgent need for trauma-informed, survivor-centred responses and multi-agency collaboration to address both the immediate and long-term consequences of domestic abuse.

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, domestic abuse is defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

The Act recognises the following types of abuse:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

The legislation places a duty on local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation to those harmed and their children and established the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

### **Legal Duties**

This section provides a summary of how three key pieces of legislation—the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021—interconnect to shape the duties of local housing authorities in England.

Legislation	Key Provisions	Impact on Local Housing Authorities	Connection to Other Acts
Housing Act 1996 (Part 7)	Defines homelessness,	Provides the core framework	Forms the legal foundation

	priority need, intentionality, and duties of local authorities.	for assessing and responding to homelessness.	amended by both the HRA 2017 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Introduces prevention and relief duties; expands support to all eligible applicants.	Requires early intervention and personalised housing plans for those at risk of homelessness.	Amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to broaden duties beyond priority need.
Domestic Abuse Act 2021	Defines domestic abuse in law; grants automatic priority need to victims; introduces safe accommodation duty.	Requires provision of safe housing and support for individuals fleeing domestic abuse.	Further amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996; complements the HRA 2017 by enhancing protections for vulnerable groups.

### **Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 – The Foundation**

- This is the **core legal framework** for homelessness duties in England.
- It defines who is considered homeless or threatened with homelessness and outlines the responsibilities of local authorities.
- It was **amended by both the HRA 2017 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021** to expand and clarify these duties.

### **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – Early Intervention**

- The HRA **amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996** to introduce:



- A **prevention duty**: support for those at risk of homelessness within 56 days.
- A **relief duty**: support for those already homeless to secure accommodation.
- It **requires local authorities to work with all eligible applicants**, not just those in priority need

### **Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – Enhanced Protection**

- This Act **further amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996** to:
- **Automatically grant priority need** to victims of domestic abuse who are homeless as a result.
- Introduce a **statutory definition of domestic abuse** that housing authorities must use when assessing homelessness applications
- It also includes a **safe accommodation duty**, requiring local authorities to ensure support and refuge for victims in safe housing environments.

### **How They Connect Practically**

- **Local housing authorities** must now:
- Identify and support individuals **at risk of homelessness early** (HRA 2017).
- Recognize **domestic abuse victims as having priority need** (Domestic Abuse Act 2021).
- Provide **safe accommodation and tailored support** for those fleeing abuse.
- These duties are **interwoven** in the **Homelessness Code of Guidance**, which helps authorities interpret and apply the legislation cohesively

### **National Strategy**

This strategy aligns with the statutory duties and strategic priorities outlined in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) and the [UK Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan 2022](#). It reflects the four pillars of the national plan:

- Prioritising Prevention through education, awareness campaigns, and early intervention.
- Supporting Victims with trauma-informed, accessible services tailored to diverse needs.
- Pursuing Perpetrators via enforcement, behaviour change programmes, and safeguarding protocols
- Strengthening the System – through multi-agency collaboration, data-driven commissioning, and continuous improvement.

### **National VAWG Agenda**

Domestic abuse remains a deeply rooted societal issue, intricately linked to broader cultural norms and systemic inequalities. It's a public health crisis that affects individuals, families, and communities. Recent high-profile national cases of violence against women and girls have deeply resonated with communities across the UK and beyond, highlighting the urgent need for sustained, compassionate action.

On average, one woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK. This devastating statistic reflects the scale and severity of gender-based violence and reinforces the need for a coordinated, trauma-informed response.

The UK Government's [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) Strategy](#) provides a national framework for addressing these harms. It focuses on five key areas:

- Prioritising prevention
- Supporting victims and survivors
- Holding perpetrators to account
- Strengthening partnerships
- Improving data and evidence

## Local Context

### Strategic Priorities (Missions) in the [Cheshire West and Chester Borough Plan 2024-2028](#)

The six missions within the borough plan are underpinned by principles of prevention, partnership, community engagement, and data-driven decision-making. Shown below, they align closely with the aims of this Domestic Abuse Strategy and reflect the shared goals particularly in areas such as safeguarding, housing, health, and inclusion.

Mission	Focus
The Best Possible Start for Our Children and Young People	Focus on early years, education, safeguarding, and youth support.
Tackling Hardship and Poverty	Addresses financial insecurity, housing instability, and access to essential services.
Resilient People Living Their Best Lives	Promotes physical and mental health, wellbeing, and independence. Includes trauma-informed services and community-based support.
Opportunity in a Fair Local Economy	Supports inclusive growth, employment, and skills development.
Neighbourhood Pride	Focuses on safe, clean, and connected communities. Encourages civic engagement and local identity.
Greener Communities	Tackles climate change, promotes sustainability, and improves environmental quality. Includes energy-efficient housing and green infrastructure.

This Strategy is firmly embedded within the wider strategic landscape of Cheshire West and Chester. It directly supports the [Community Safety Partnership Priorities](#), including reducing repeat experiences of domestic abuse, preventing exploitation, and tackling serious violence through coordinated, multi-agency action. It also aligns with the [Police and Crime Plan 2024–2028](#), which sets out a vision for a safer Cheshire by prioritising prevention, protecting vulnerable people, and holding perpetrators to account. Furthermore, our approach reflects the trauma-informed principles and safeguarding priorities of both the Cheshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Local Safeguarding Adults Board, ensuring that our work protects those most at risk and promotes safety, dignity, and recovery across all age groups. By working in close partnership across these frameworks, we are building a borough where domestic abuse is never tolerated and where every individual can live free from fear and harm

### **Strategic Needs Assessment**

In line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Cheshire West and Chester Council is required to undertake a comprehensive Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment every three years. The initial assessment, completed in June 2021, informed the development of the borough's Safe Accommodation Model and shaped the previous Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021–2025. The 2024 Needs Assessment marked the next phase in this statutory cycle and has underpinned this strategy, ensuring it remains responsive to emerging needs and lived experiences. The needs assessment not only evaluated the availability and suitability of safe accommodation but also sought to identify and address the barriers that prevent individuals, particularly those with complex needs from accessing support. It is a key mechanism for strengthening our trauma-informed response and ensuring that services are inclusive, accessible, and survivor-centred.

By embedding the findings of the Needs Assessment into strategic planning, we ensure that our local response is evidence-based, collaborative, and

focused on preventing harm, empowering survivors, and holding perpetrators to account.

### Overview

The 2024 Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (DANA) provides a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of domestic abuse across Cheshire West and Chester. It highlights rising demand, service gaps, and opportunities for trauma-informed, equitable, and coordinated responses.

### Key Findings

- Domestic abuse calls to police increased by 8% across the borough (2024 vs. previous year).
  - Ellesmere Port saw the highest increase (22%), while Northwich & Winsford remained stable.
- Recorded domestic abuse crimes decreased by 3%, suggesting improved triage and scrutiny.
  - Chester: ↓5%
  - Ellesmere Port: ↑6%
  - Northwich & Winsford: ↓3%
- Ellesmere Port has the highest rates of domestic abuse crime and deprivation.
  - 27 recorded domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population.
- Chester has the lowest rates (12 per 1,000), but underreporting may mask hidden abuse.
- Northwich & Winsford show moderate rates but strong engagement from primary care.
- Rising Demand:
  - Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals increased by 7% overall, with 38% growth in Ellesmere Port.

- IRIS referrals more than doubled (from 85 to 169 in two years).
- Domestic Abuse referrals rose by 51% since 2020, higher than the rate of Domestic Abuse incidents and crimes.
- Sanctuary Scheme activity increased from 51 properties.
- Demographic Shifts:
  - Cheshire West and Chester population is projected to grow by 8% by 2033, with a 22% increase in the 65+ age group.
  - 9% of the population is from ethnic minority groups, with underrepresentation in service access, especially in Ellesmere Port.
- Underreporting & Barriers:
  - Older adults and ethnic minority communities face significant barriers to disclosure and support.
  - 46% of police records lacked ethnicity data.
  - Domestic abuse is underreported among older women (up to 90% underreporting rate).
- Housing & Homelessness:
  - Cheshire West and Chester has high rates of homelessness due to domestic abuse, with 87% of cases falling under relief duty rather than prevention.
  - Challenges persist in converting joint tenancies to sole tenancies for survivors.
- Safe Accommodation:
  - Cheshire West and Chester requires at least 37 safe accommodation spaces (based on 1 per capita of the population). Current provision is:
    - 8 communal flats
    - 20 dispersed properties

- 11+ Sanctuary Scheme homes
  - Refuge bedspaces remained stable (25–26), but dispersed units increased from 23 to 73.
- Children & Young People:
    - 18.9% of Children’s Front Door (iART) contacts relate to domestic abuse.
    - Children in Need episodes involving domestic abuse rose by 16%.
    - Young people require tailored, age-appropriate support.

## **Recommendations**

Fifteen recommendations have been identified through the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment. They are designed to strengthen Cheshire West and Chester’s response to domestic abuse and ensure services are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to emerging needs. The recommendations have been incorporated into the five priorities set out in this strategy and can be seen in a draft action plan in appendix 1. The action plan will be further developed by the Domestic Abuse Board and will underpin the delivery of our vision and priorities set out in this strategy.

### **1. Adapting services to meet the increase in demand**

Cheshire West and Chester should assess whether current services can manage the increased caseload without impacting service quality. Strengthen partnerships with third-sector organisations to alleviate pressure on statutory services and ensure coordinated, seamless support. Expand early intervention through education and outreach.

### **2. Planning services with a focus on ethnicity**

Improve data collection and ethnicity recording across all relevant datasets. Collaborate with third-sector groups to address barriers faced by minoritised communities in accessing domestic abuse support.

### 3. Potential unmet need in the older population

Prioritise older people in domestic abuse responses. Enhance training for health and adult social care professionals. Explore best practices such as the DASH Risk Indicator Checklist for older people.

### 4. Increase preventative measures around homelessness approaches

Investigate whether earlier support could reduce the number of domestic abuse-related homelessness cases requiring main duty decisions. Strengthen prevention pathways.

### 5. Exploring options for managing tenancies of those affected by domestic abuse

Develop standardised tenancy management guidelines with housing providers. Improve data recording on joint tenancies involving perpetrators. Ensure consistent and survivor-focused housing responses.

### 6. Different approaches for tackling domestic abuse based on locality

Tailor services to reflect locality-specific needs and deprivation levels. Recognise that domestic abuse may be hidden in more affluent areas and ensure awareness and access across all communities.

### 7. Investigate the findings of Cheshire East's evaluation of their Whole Housing Approach

Review Cheshire East's Whole Housing Approach evaluation to inform CW&C's housing response for survivors of domestic abuse.

### 8. Improve the response of housing providers and RSLs concerning domestic abuse

Encourage appropriate MARAC referrals from housing providers. Promote training and ensure reporting of target hardening interventions to the Partnership Board.

### 9. Detailed analysis to help identify potential unmet needs



Address gaps in service access, particularly in Ellesmere Port. Engage GPs to improve IRIS referrals and healthcare-led domestic abuse support.

#### 10. Gaps in MARAC / unmet need

Use SafeLives benchmarks to identify underserved groups. Develop communication and engagement plans for communities with unmet needs, including those with neuro-disabilities.

#### 11. Replicate good primary care response in Northwich and Winsford across CW&C

Strengthen collaboration between social prescribers, IDVAs, and primary care. Share best practices from Winsford to improve consistency across the borough.

#### 12. Better coordinate the response of third-sector and voluntary groups

Embed voluntary sector organisations in domestic abuse governance and service delivery. Formalise partnerships, provide joint training, and secure joint funding.

#### 13. Widen the availability of recovery support for children

Enhance trauma-informed support for children and young people. Consider a Young Person IDVA role and improve referral pathways between Gateway and Jigsaw programmes.

#### 14. Further develop a lived experience engagement framework

Establish an ongoing framework to ensure lived experience informs strategy, service design, and evaluation. Embed survivor voices in all aspects of domestic abuse response.

#### 15. Strengthen health services data collection and sharing

Improve inter-agency data sharing and coding practices in health settings to better capture domestic abuse indicators and inform strategic planning.

## **Safe Accommodation**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed a legal duty on all Local Authorities to provide safe accommodation for any person who is harmed by domestic abuse. There is a clear definition within the Act of what constitutes safe/relevant accommodation and accommodation support

Households at risk of domestic abuse often have to leave their homes because of the risk of repeat incidents of abuse. Refuges and other forms of safe accommodation can provide a safe and supportive environment for households fleeing domestic abuse. .

In brief, safe/relevant accommodation can include refuge, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes, or move on/second stage accommodation. Temporary accommodation such as hotels does not constitute safe accommodation.

A Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency person centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of domestic abuse to remain safely in their own homes by installing a 'Sanctuary' in the home and through the provision of support to the household. A 'Sanctuary' comprises enhanced security measures designed to enable households to remain safely in their homes. Alongside these physical safety measures specialist domestic abuse support will be provided.

### **Cheshire West Safe Accommodation Model**

The safe accommodation model in Cheshire West and Chester is:

- Refuge
- Dispersed properties
- Sanctuary Scheme

Refuge/Dispersed:

Cheshire West and Chester has commissioned safe accommodation provision for many years. This is made up of a group living refuge and dispersed properties. Although the Act acknowledges the critical role of refuge in providing

safety and support, particularly to those victims at high risk of serious harm, the government recognises that those harmed by domestic abuse may need to live in a variety of different forms of relevant safe accommodation. Dispersed properties are homes across the borough ranging from one-bedroom flats to three-bedroom family homes. The model ensures that there is provision for men fleeing domestic abuse and those with protected characteristics.

#### Sanctuary Scheme:

Many people do not wish to leave their homes or choose to return to their homes after a short stay in temporary accommodation despite the risks. Sanctuary Schemes are an additional accommodation option for people at risk of domestic abuse which can, where suitable and appropriate, offer households the choice of remaining in their homes.

A Sanctuary Scheme is where we have provided target hardening to enable someone to remain in their own home and feel safe from harm whilst receiving ongoing support. It supports the prevention of homelessness and the upheaval of moving home, away from family/friends/support networks. It can avoid and reduce repeat victimisation by improving home security. It can also reduce the fear of crime for the person harmed by domestic abuse. It also acts as a deterrent to the person who harms.

It is important to note that the Homelessness duty begins as soon as someone is accommodated in safe accommodation. In some cases, a homelessness prevention duty may commence as soon as someone is at risk of homelessness (within 56 days, a s195 prevention duty). This would of course potentially be in place before the someone was homeless and before the offer of Safe Accommodation is made and or accepted.

## **Governance and Accountability**

Cheshire West and Chester Council has a well-established Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, fulfilling the statutory requirement under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Board brings together representatives from across the local authority, health services, police, voluntary and community sector organisations, and survivor voice panels. It operates as a sub-group of the Community Safety Partnership, ensuring strategic alignment with wider community safety priorities.

The Board is responsible for supporting the Council in meeting its duties under Section 57 of the Act, ensuring that all individuals harmed by domestic abuse—regardless of gender—have access to adequate and appropriate support within safe accommodation. It also plays a broader role in advising and working in partnership with the Council to improve outcomes for those harmed and those who harm in the context of domestic abuse.

The Board oversees the delivery of the Domestic Abuse Strategy through the implementation and monitoring of an Action Plan, supported by a range of subgroups and task-and-finish groups.

Board members are expected to:

- Provide expert advice, data, and insight to inform needs assessments and commissioning decisions.
- Represent their sector or organisation and ensure two-way communication.
- Support engagement with survivors and ensure services reflect the complexity of their needs.
- Contribute to the monitoring of Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) action plans.
- Ensure performance data is shared quarterly and that services reflect best practice.

- Promote awareness and education through internal and external communication channels.

The Board also has a statutory duty to report annually under Section 59 of the Act, with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place, including key performance indicators, survivor feedback, and alignment with guidance from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

## **Glossary of Terms (A–Z)**

### Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

A statutory body that brings together local agencies to reduce crime and improve safety, including tackling domestic abuse.

### DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence Risk Assessment)

A checklist used by professionals to assess the risk of harm in domestic abuse cases.

### Dispersed Accommodation

Safe housing units located throughout the community, offering privacy and flexibility for survivors who may not require communal refuge settings.

### Domestic Abuse

Any incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading, or violent behaviour—including sexual violence—between individuals aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

### Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Legislation that defines domestic abuse in law, grants automatic priority need to victims, and places duties on local authorities to provide safe accommodation.

### Domestic Abuse Commissioner

An independent national role established under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to monitor and improve responses to domestic abuse across England and Wales.

### Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Legislation that introduced prevention and relief duties for local authorities to support individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

### IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor)

A specialist professional who supports survivors of domestic abuse, particularly those at high risk, by advocating for their safety and access to services.

### IRIS (Identification and Referral to Improve Safety)

A programme that trains primary care professionals to identify and refer patients experiencing domestic abuse to specialist support services.

### Joint Tenancy

A housing arrangement where two or more individuals share legal responsibility for a property. Survivors may face challenges in removing perpetrators from joint tenancies.

### MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

A meeting where multiple agencies share information about high-risk domestic abuse to develop coordinated safety plans for survivors.

### Needs Assessment

A statutory review conducted every three years to evaluate the demand, gaps, and barriers in domestic abuse services, particularly safe accommodation.

### Prevention Duty

A legal obligation to support individuals at risk of homelessness within 56 days, aiming to prevent them from becoming homeless.

### Refuge

Communal living spaces offering immediate safety and support for survivors of domestic abuse, often used by those at high risk.

### Relief Duty

A legal obligation under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to help individuals who are already homeless secure accommodation.

### Safe Accommodation

Housing that meets the statutory definition under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, including refuges, dispersed properties, sanctuary schemes, and second-stage accommodation. It excludes temporary housing such as hotels.

### Sanctuary Scheme

A multi-agency initiative that enables survivors to remain safely in their homes through enhanced security measures and ongoing support.

### Survivor Centred

An approach that places the needs, voices, and choices of those harmed by domestic abuse at the heart of service design and delivery.

### Trauma-Informed Approach

A framework that recognises the impact of trauma and prioritises safety, trust, empowerment, and collaboration in service delivery. It seeks to avoid re-traumatisation and supports recovery.

### VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls)

A national strategy addressing gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, and harassment.

### Whole Housing Approach

A coordinated housing response to domestic abuse that includes prevention, crisis intervention, and long-term recovery support.

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# Cheshire West and Chester

## DOMESTIC ABUSE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY v4.1

January 2025



# VERSION CONTROL

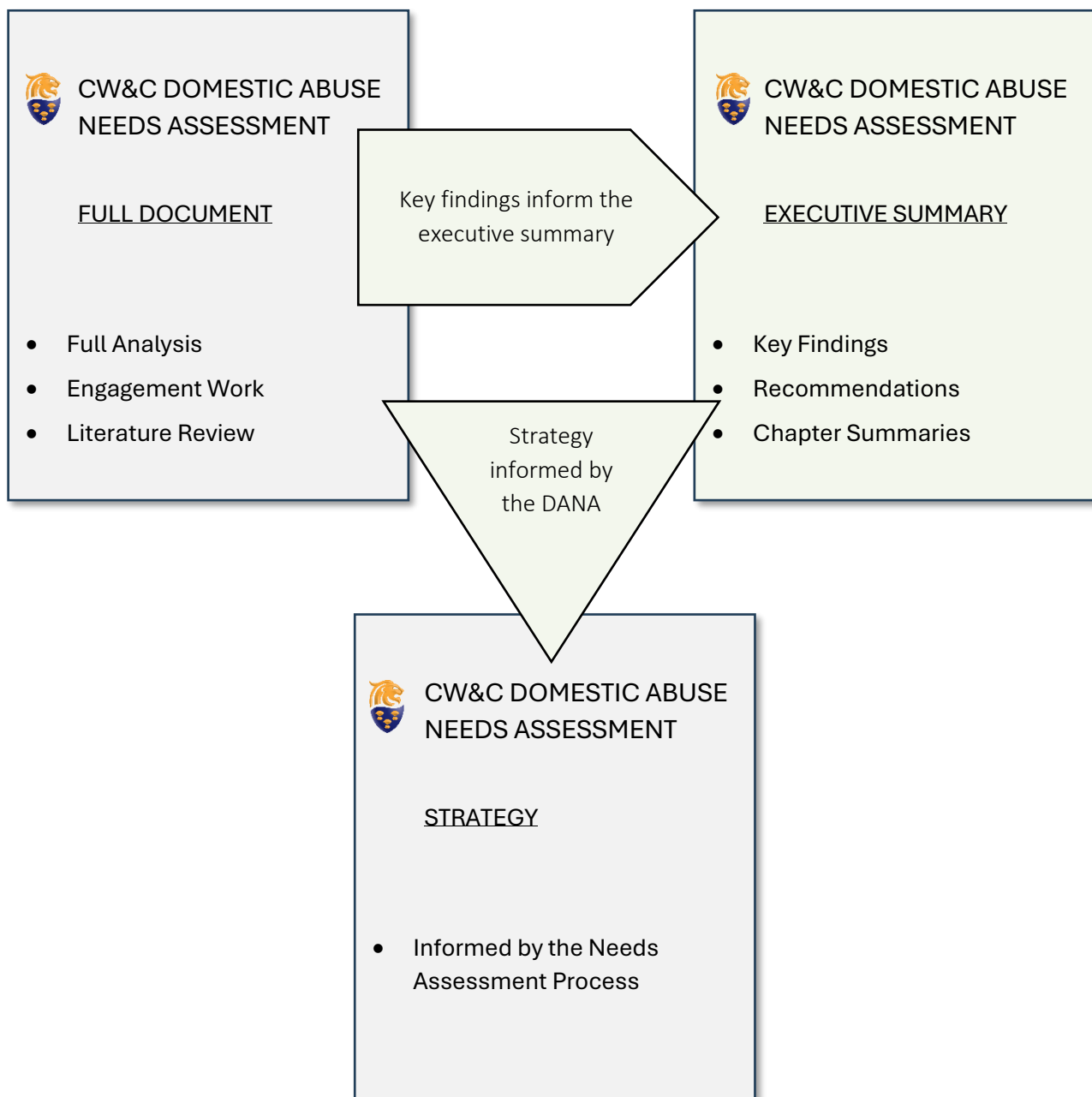
Version	Date	Changes
1.2	19 <sup>th</sup> of March 2025	Updated population projections.
1.3	20 <sup>th</sup> of March 2025	Updated prevalence tables using police incident data.
1.4	24 <sup>th</sup> of March 2025	Updated Rec X from 100,000 to 10,000 population.
1.5	27 <sup>th</sup> of March 2025	Consolidated C&YP Recs. Updated Safe Accommodation info
1.6	30 <sup>th</sup> of March 2025	Formatted.
2.1	31 <sup>st</sup> of March 2025	Checked.
3.1	9 <sup>th</sup> of May 2025	Updated based on comments prior to presentation at Board
4.1	1 <sup>st</sup> of July 2025	Updated based on comments from Board

# INTRODUCTION

The Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (DANA) provides a comprehensive picture of domestic abuse in Cheshire West & Chester (CW&C).




This Executive Summary is a condensed version of the DANA and contains:

- Key Findings and Recommendations
  - This chapter provides the evidence arising from the Needs Assessment and suggested recommendations.
- Additional Key Findings and Summary
  - This chapter provides additional key points from the DANA.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations arising from the Needs Assessment Process are presented in the following format:

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: <i>[The number of the recommendation]</i>	
TITLE: <i>[Summary of the recommendation]</i>	
	KEY FINDING
<i>[Key finding relating to the recommendation]</i>	
	RELEVANCE TO CW&C
<i>[The impact of the key finding is on CW&amp;C]</i>	
	RECOMMENDATION
<i>[A detailed description of the recommendation]</i>	

# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

REC	PG.	RECOMMENDATION TITLE
1	6	Adapting services to meet the increase in demand.
2	11	Planning services with a focus on ethnicity.
3	16	Potential unmet need in the older population.
4	19	Increase preventative measures around homelessness approaches.
5	21	Exploring options for managing tenancies of those affected by domestic abuse.
6	23	Different approaches for tackling domestic abuse based on locality.
7	25	Investigate the findings of Cheshire East's evaluation of their Whole Housing Approach.
8	26	Improve the response of housing providers and RSLs concerning domestic abuse.
9	27	Detailed analysis to help identify potential unmet needs.
10	32	Gaps in MARAC / unmet need.
11	34	Replicate good primary care response in Northwich and Winsford across CW&C.
12	35	To better coordinate the response of third sector and voluntary groups in CW&C.
13	36	To widen the availability of recovery support for children.
14	38	To further develop a lived experience engagement framework.
15	39	Strengthen health services data collection and sharing to inform domestic abuse response

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 1

### TITLE: Adapting services to meet the increase in demand.



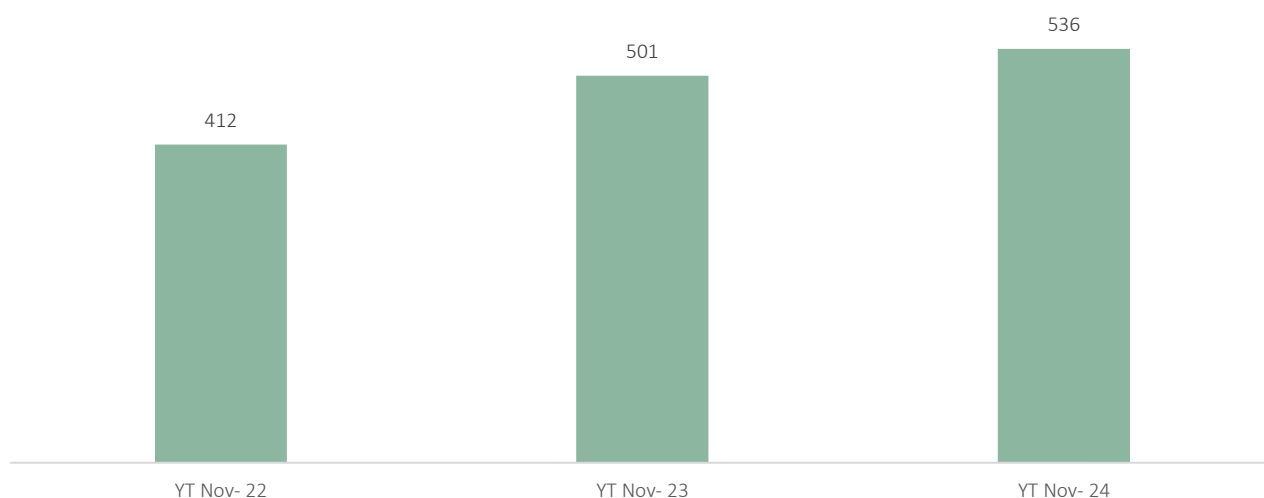
#### KEY FINDING

- Several findings arising from this DANA show an increase in demand.
- The population projections show an increase in the population.
- The 2023-2025 PEEL Inspection of Cheshire Constabulary highlighted several ways it has changed how it deals with domestic abuse incidents. For example, domestic abuse incidents reported online go straight to the control room inbox, bypassing a triage process. A domestic abuse operations group has also been established to ensure all officers have received joint training on evidence-led prosecutions, leading to 'improved performance'.
- DAIPS practitioners believed that the improved police response to those who have experienced domestic abuse has created an increase in referrals to DAIPS and the MARAC process.

#### FINDING 1 – AN INCREASE MARAC REFERRALS

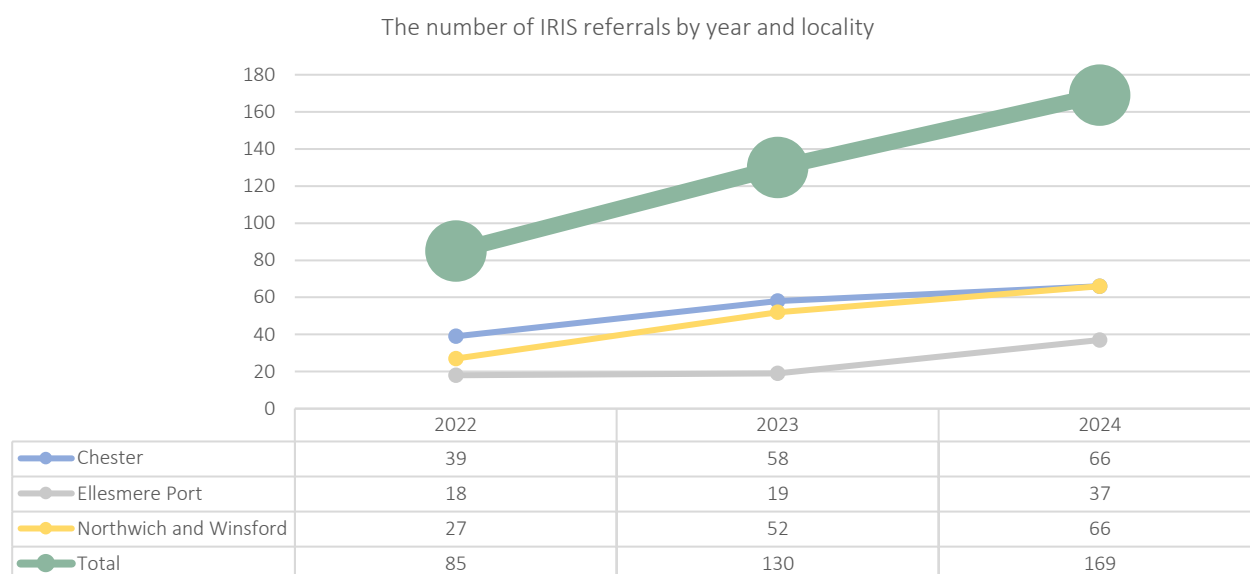
- There have been year-on-year increases in the number of MARAC referrals.
- Across the CW&C area, there has been a 7% increase in MARAC referrals when comparing the 12 months to November 2024 against the previous year. However, a breakdown by locality shows:
  - Chester has seen a **16% decrease**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen an **8% increase**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **38% increase**.
- SafeLives estimates an expected level of 40 cases per 10,000 of the adult female population. This would equate to 608 in CW&C, which means MARAC referrals still potentially have room to increase.
- For cases that require a quicker response, there is a weekly risk management meeting run by the police where early interventions are identified and actioned.

The number of MARAC referrals by year; CW&C



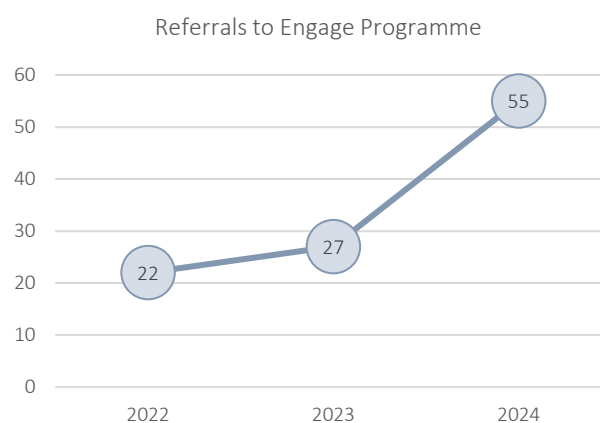
## FINDING 2 – AN INCREASE IN IRIS REFERRALS

- The number of IRIS referrals has more than doubled over the last 2 years (85 to 169).
- Based on the projected figures for 2024-25:
  - CW&C has seen a **30% increase**.
  - Chester has seen a **14% increase**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **95% increase**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen a **27% increase**.
- There is potentially room for an increase in Ellesmere Port. See Recommendation 9.



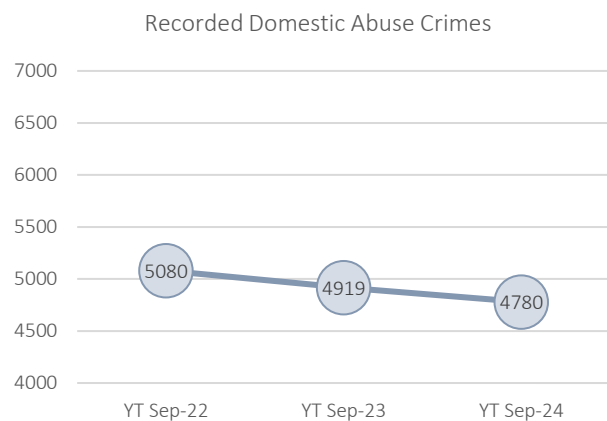
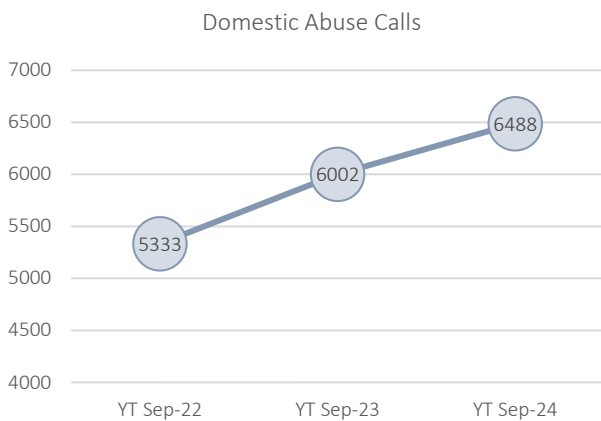
## FINDING 3 – AN INCREASE ENGAGE REFERRALS

- In 2024, there were 55 referrals compared to 27 the previous year.



#### FINDING 4 – AN INCREASE IN CALLS TO THE POLICE

- Although the number of recorded domestic abuse crimes has seen a decrease, the actual number of domestic abuse calls has increased.
  - Feedback from practitioners was that police practices have changed, and domestic abuse is now a key priority for the force. This may be a reason for the increased number of calls.
- For all domestic abuse calls, comparing YT Sep-24 against the previous period shows:
  - CW&C has seen an **8% increase**.
  - Chester has seen a **7% increase**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **22% increase**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen **no change**.
- For recorded domestic abuse crimes, comparing YT Sep-24 against the previous period shows:
  - CW&C has seen a **3% decrease**.
  - Chester has seen a **5% decrease**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **6% increase**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen a **3% decrease**.



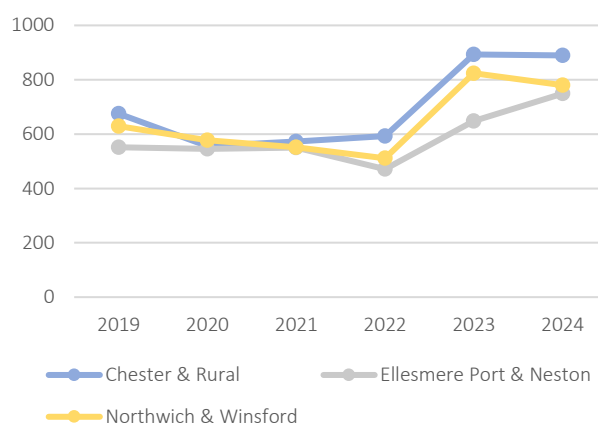
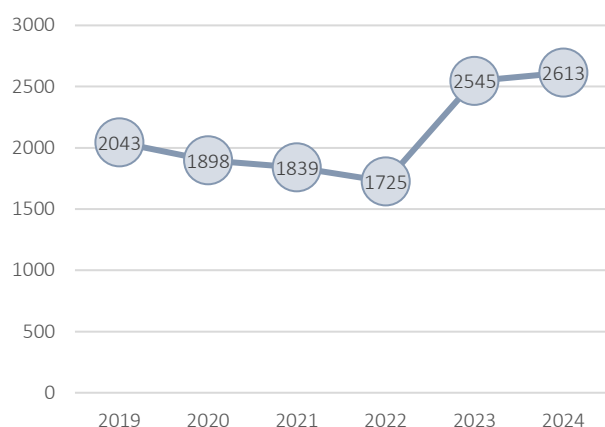
#### FINDING 5 – AN INCREASE IN CONTACTS TO iART

- Across all ages, there were 6,103 contacts in 2024 compared to 4007 in 2002, an increase of 52%.
- All age groups saw an increase:
  - 0-17-year-olds saw an increase of 41% (2,253 to 3,170)
  - The 18-24 age group saw an increase of 40% (211 to 351)
  - The 25+ age group saw an increase of 67% (1,538 to 2,563).



## **FINDING 6 – AN INCREASE IN REFERRALS TO THE DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION & PREVENTION SERVICE (DAIPS)**

- DAIPS provide services for people harmed by domestic abuse who are aged over 16 years.
- In 2024, there were 2613 referrals to DAIPS, an increase of 3% in 2023 and 51% in 2022.
- Comparing 2024 against 2022:
  - Chester has seen a **50% increase**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **59% increase**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen a **53% increase**.

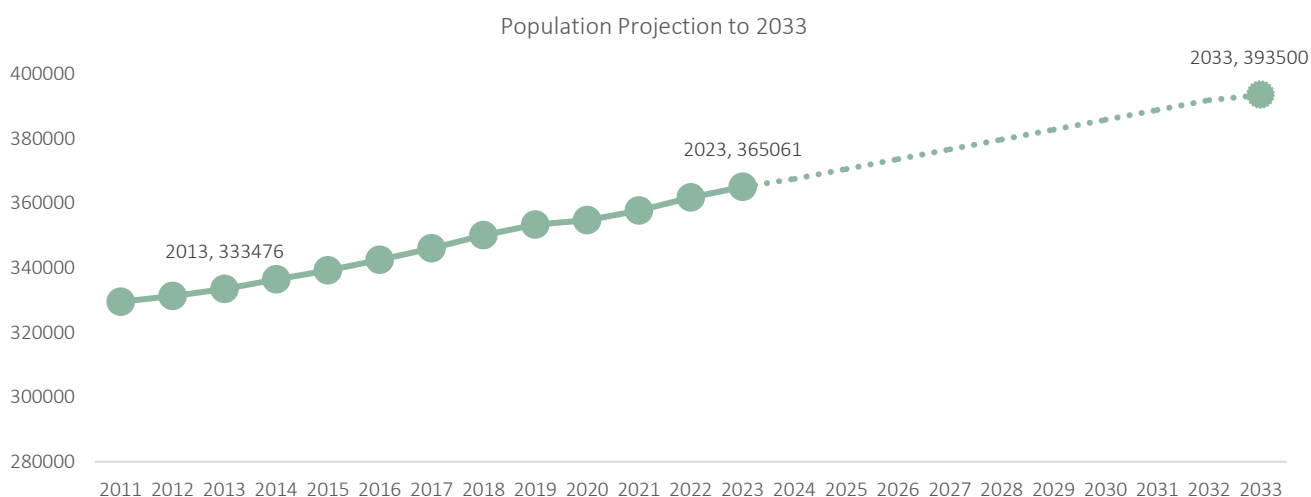




## **FINDING 7 – AN INCREASE SANCTUARY SCHEME ACTIVITY**

- Sanctuary Schemes have increased from 7 in 2023 to 51 in 2024.

## **FINDING 8 – POPULATION PROJECTIONS SHOWS AN INCREASE OF 8% BETWEEN 2023 to 2033.**

- The projections used in the DANA were based on the “Demographic Trends and Forecasts” released by the Cheshire West and Chester Insight and Intelligence Team in January 2025.
- The total population has increased by 9% over the last 10 years. This is forecasted to increase by another 8% by 2033.
- A breakdown by age group shows that the 65+ age group is expected to grow by 22% (17,200).



	RELEVANCE TO CW&C
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The increase in referrals to MARAC, IRIS, Engage, iART, and other domestic abuse services suggests both a greater awareness of domestic abuse and potentially a rise in incidents.</li> <li>• A rise in MARAC, IRIS, Engage, and other referrals means a higher demand for support services, potentially requiring more funding, staffing, and resources.</li> <li>• It is expected that the population in CW&amp;C will continue to increase.</li> </ul>
	RECOMMENDATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CW&amp;C should assess whether current services can manage the increased caseload without impacting service quality.</li> <li>• Closer partnerships with third-sector organisations and voluntary groups that support domestic abuse victims could help alleviate pressure on statutory services. Joint working arrangements should be reviewed and strengthened to ensure a coordinated approach that maximises resources, avoids duplication, and provides a seamless support pathway for victims.</li> <li>• The rise in contacts with the iART suggests a growing need for early intervention measures that address domestic abuse before it escalates. This may require strengthening education, outreach, and support programmes in locations such as schools to provide support sooner.</li> </ul>

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 2

### TITLE: Planning services with a focus on ethnicity.



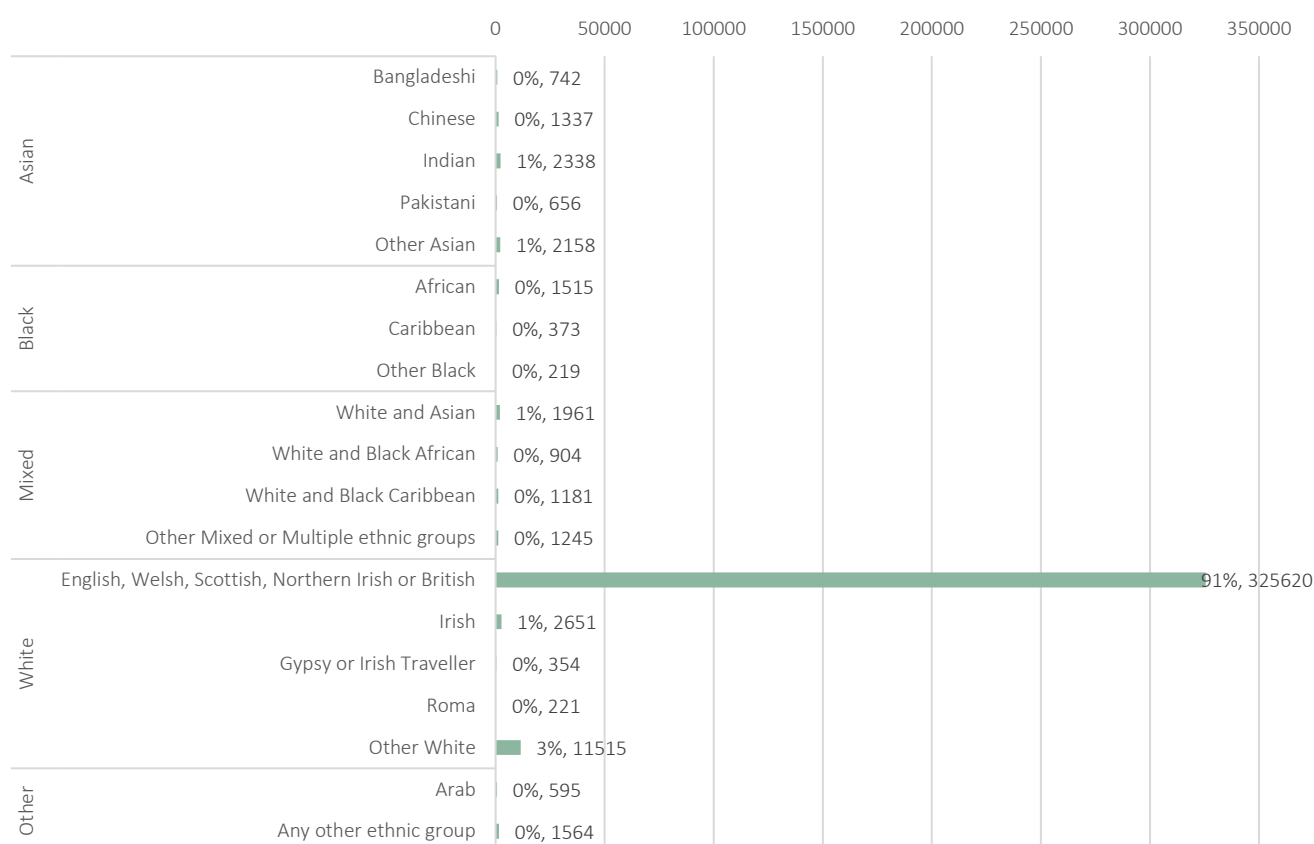
#### KEY FINDING

- There is evidence that minoritised ethnic women can face multiple and additional barriers to seeking help, reporting abuse and leaving abusive relationships<sup>1</sup>.
- Where possible, analysis around ethnicity was conducted; however, the quality was often poor.
- DAIPS are completing work to improve their recording of ethnicity, including filling in any gaps in existing data recording of ethnicity. DAIPS are working with the police to update data gaps on the police's Vulnerable Person Assessments.

#### FINDING 1 – 9% OF THE POPULATION IS FROM AN ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP (2021 CENSUS)

- Those who are non-white British are classified as an ethnic minority group.
- Looking specifically at those from a White Ethnic Group, this cohort accounted for 95% of the total population compared to 97% in the 2011 Census.
- This rate is significantly higher than the North-West (86%) and England (81%).
- There are slight differences by locality, ranging from 7% in Northwich & Winsford to 10% in Chester.

Population of CW&C by ethnicity; 2021 Census.

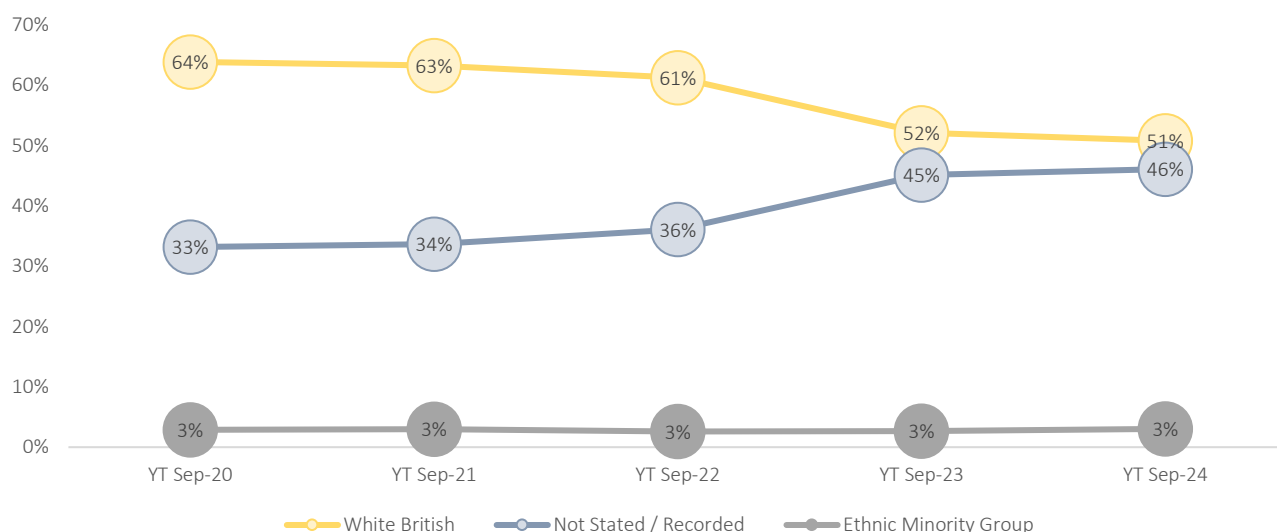


<sup>1</sup> [Minoritised Ethnic Women's Experiences of Domestic Abuse and Barriers to Help-Seeking: A Summary of the Evidence.](#)

## **FINDING 2 – A HIGH RATE OF POLICE RECORDS DID NOT HAVE AN ETHNICITY RECORDED**

- Data from Cheshire Police showed that 46% of those who have experienced domestic abuse for the year to September 2024 either did not have an ethnicity recorded or was not stated.
- This is an increase on previous years.

Breakdown of ethnicity recorded of victim/survivors recorded by Cheshire Police; CW&C.



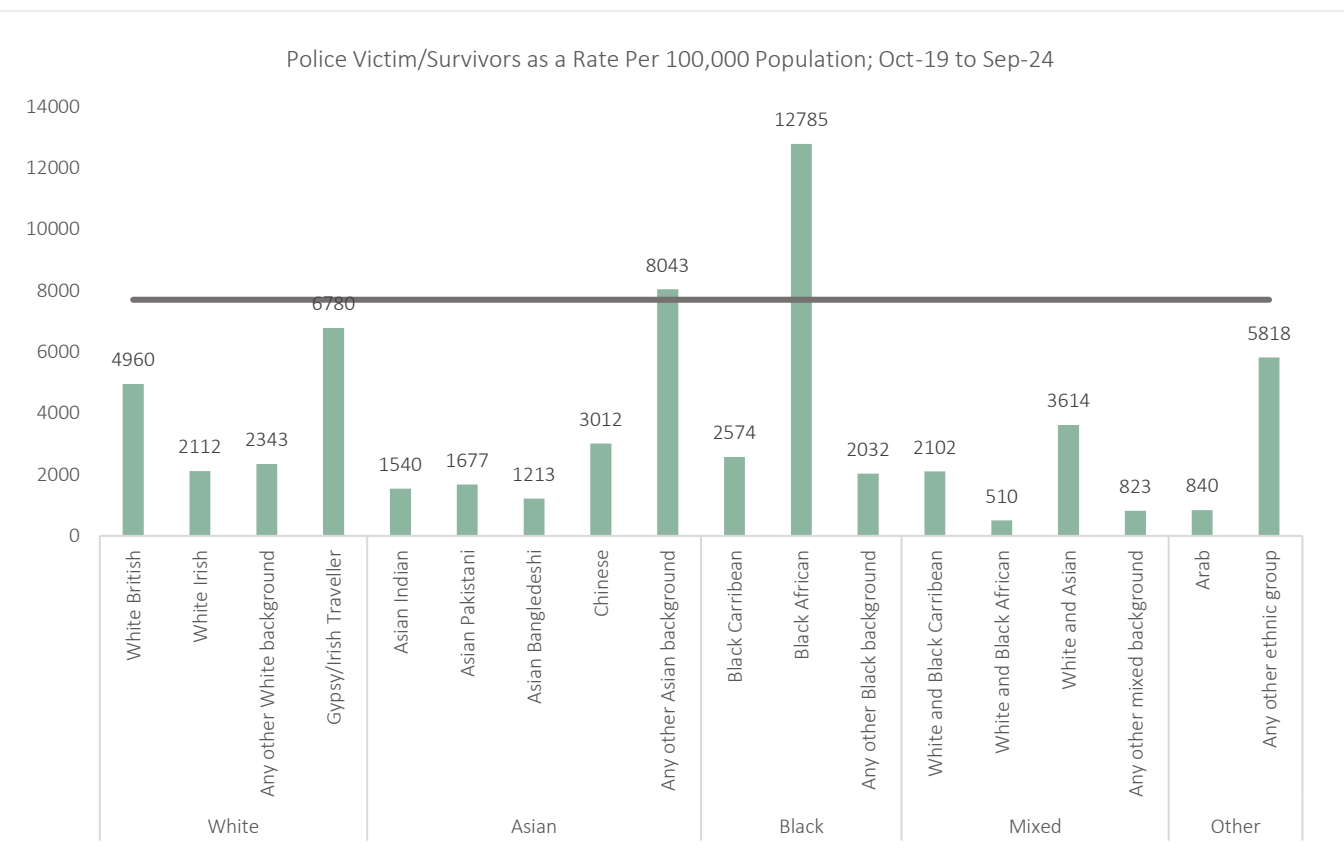
## **FINDING 3 – THERE IS A POOR RECORDING OF ETHNICITY ACROSS A RANGE OF DATASETS**

- Across a range of datasets, the ethnicity recording is poor. Below are the rates where no ethnicity is recorded for those who have experienced domestic abuse.
  - Engage Programme – 44%
  - IRISi – 17%
  - MASH – 19%
  - DAIPS – 44%<sup>2</sup>

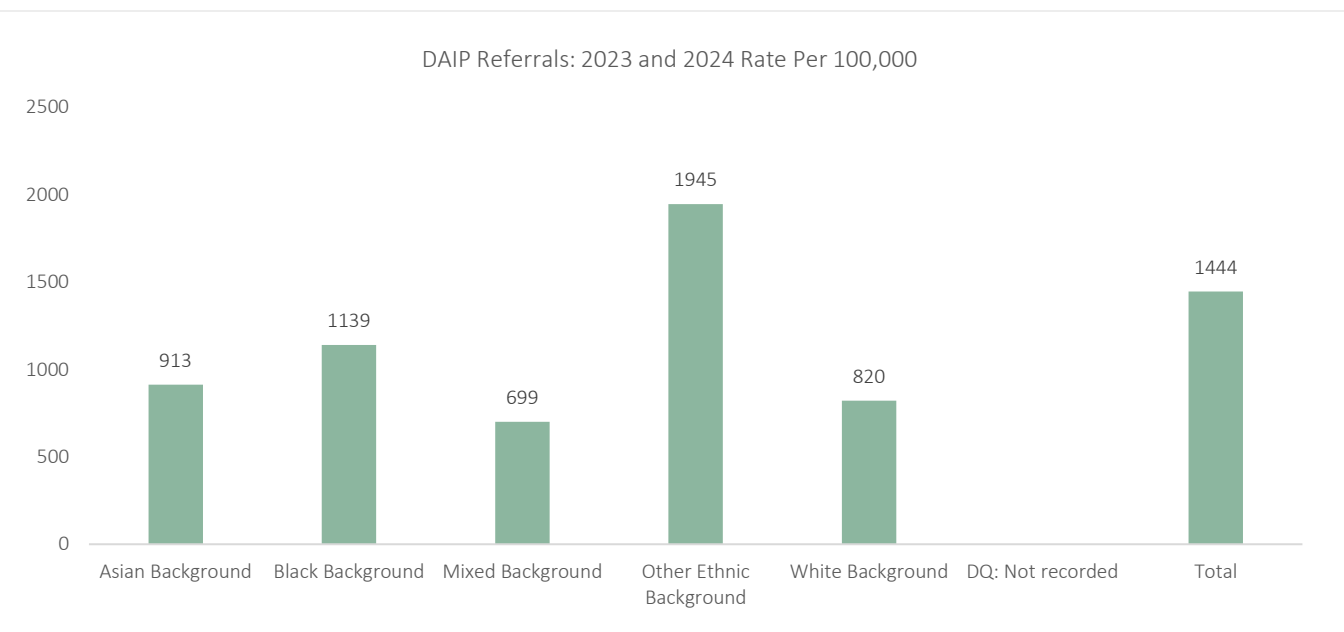
<sup>2</sup> CW&C, (2024), Domestic Abuse Intervention and Prevention Service Annual Report 2023/24

#### FINDING 4 – ANALYSIS OF ETHNICITY SHOWS THERE IS AN OVER AND UNDERREPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

- Where ethnicity is recorded, analysis can be undertaken to identify ethnic groups over and underrepresented.
- Looking at the police data on those who have experienced domestic abuse shows that those from a Black African ethnic group are overrepresented, whilst those from an Asian ethnicity are underrepresented. This could be an indication of an unmet need.

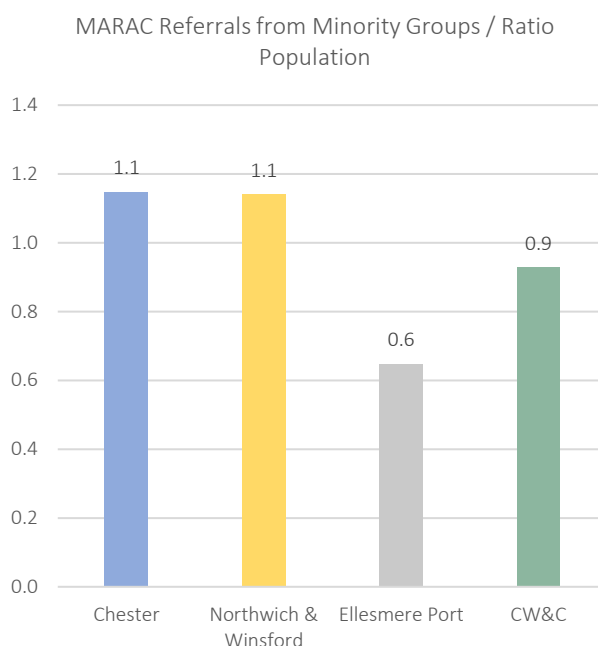


- The DAIP referrals provide a different picture from the police data. Note that 43% of the referrals did not have a recorded ethnicity.



**FINDING 5 – IN ELLESMERE PORT, THE NUMBER OF MARAC REFERRALS FROM AN ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP IS LOWER THAN EXPECTED.**

- SafeLives recommends that the percentage of referrals of victims of domestic abuse who are non-white British reflects the population.
- The chart shows the ratio of referrals from an ethnic minority group as a ratio of the general population.
- In Ellesmere Port, 8% of the population are from an ethnic minority group. However, only 5% of MARAC referrals were.
- This suggests that in Ellesmere Port, those from an ethnic minority group are underrepresented, particularly taking into consideration that both Chester and Northwich & Winsford show good rates.



**FINDING 6 – THIRD-SECTOR GROUPS WORKING WITH THOSE FROM MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS HIGHLIGHT GAPS IN AVAILABLE INFORMATION**

- Interviews with practitioners from Bawso<sup>3</sup>, an organisation that provides support to BME and migrant victims of domestic abuse, highlighted that there is a lack of information about domestic abuse available in languages other than English.
- A Bawso practitioner highlighted that they have to rely on word of mouth to promote their services.
- SaveraUK<sup>4</sup> practitioners said the best way to get people into services is to go out and engage with communities to build trust. To get people into domestic abuse services, they have to know they exist and how services can help them.

<sup>3</sup> The service is based in North Wales and covers Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, and Wrexham. The service sees people from Cheshire West as there is a lot of movement over the border into Wales. People cross over the borders to go to work, worship, and use amenities.

<sup>4</sup> SaveraUK is funded by the OPCC (until March 2025) to work across the four areas of Cheshire, including CW&C, in the area of honour based abuse.



## RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- Ethnicity and nationality play a significant role in shaping experiences of domestic abuse, influencing its prevalence, access to services, barriers to support, and unmet needs. Understanding these factors is crucial for ensuring an equitable response across all communities in CW&C.
- In this needs assessment, we explore how ethnicity and nationality affect domestic abuse needs in CW&C and potential areas of unmet need where services may not be reaching all affected individuals effectively.
- The lower-than-expected MARAC referrals in Ellesmere Port from those of a minority ethnic background suggest an underrepresentation of domestic abuse victims from certain communities. Interviews with specialist third-sector groups suggest that there are some barriers to those from minority ethnic groups in accessing services.
- A high rate of police records and other datasets lack ethnicity information, leading to significant gaps in understanding how domestic abuse impacts different communities. Disparities in how domestic abuse support is accessed cannot be effectively monitored.
- A recent publication by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services stated – “Police forces are still failing to record the ethnicity of victims of crimes in nearly two-thirds of cases, and they should publish more data on ethnicity to help build public confidence.”<sup>5</sup>



## RECOMMENDATION

- There should be improvements in data collection and ethnicity recording across all relevant datasets, including police records, DAIPS, and Engage referrals.
- The Police and CW&C should ensure consistent and complete information is recorded.
- There should be closer working with third-sector groups to address the barriers faced by minority ethnic communities in reporting and accessing domestic abuse support.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/news-feed/police-forces-still-failing-to-record-and-publish-data-on-ethnicity/>

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 3

### TITLE: Potential unmet need in the older population.



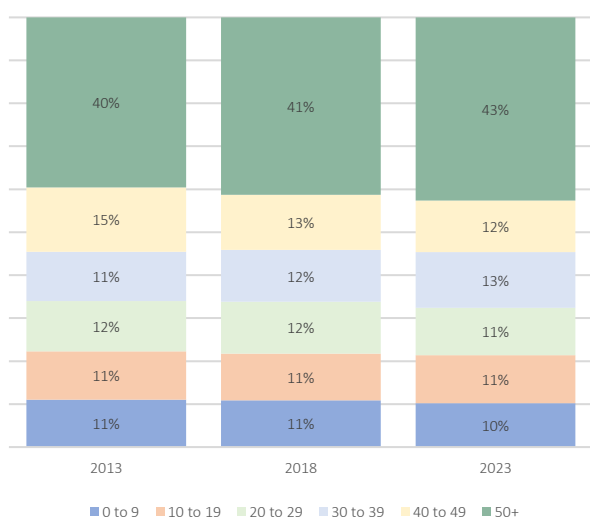
#### KEY FINDING

- Several findings from this DANA suggest that future planning should focus on older age groups.

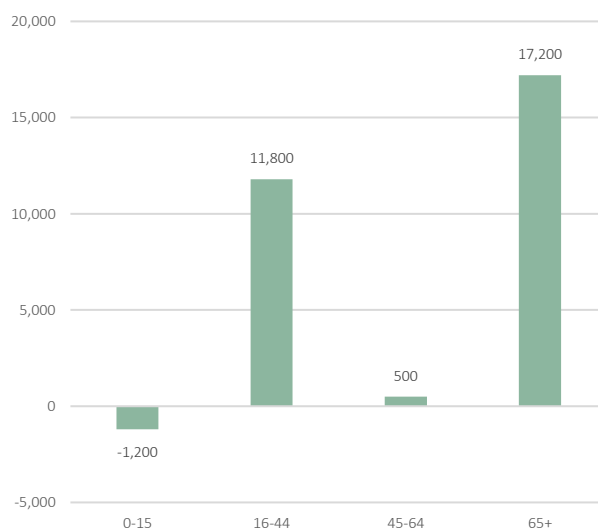
#### FINDING 1 – AN INCREASE IN THE OLDER POPULATION

- There has been a slight shift to an older population (MYEs).
- In 2018, residents over 50 accounted for 41% of the total. This has since increased slightly to 43% in 2023.
- There has been minimal change in the other age groups when comparing 2023 against 2018.
- Based on the local projections<sup>6</sup>, it is estimated that the total population will increase by 8% between 2023 and 2033, with the 65+ age group seeing an increase of 22%.

Change in Age Structure



Change between 2023 to 2033 by Age Group



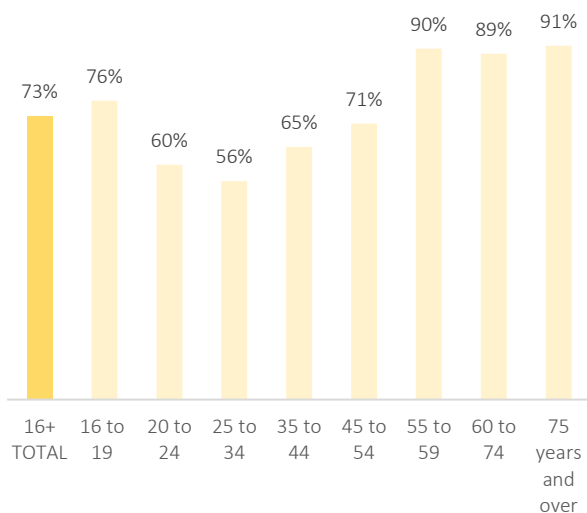
<sup>6</sup> "Demographic Trends and Forecasts" released by the Cheshire West and Chester Insight and Intelligence Team in January 2025



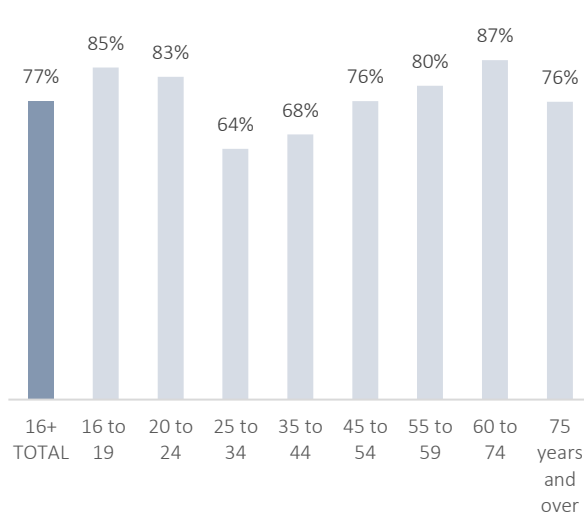
## **FINDING 2 – FOR FEMALES, THE OLDER AGE GROUP ARE EXPECTED TO HAVE THE HIGHEST RATES OF UNDERREPORTING**

- Comparing reported domestic abuse incidents to the police<sup>7</sup> against expected prevalence by age group shows that the highest underreporting rates for females are for the older age groups.
- For males, the underreporting rates by age group show that the older (55+) and the younger (16 to 24) age groups have the highest rates.
- The high underreporting rate for younger males could be attached to stigma.

Underreporting by age group and gender; female.



Underreporting by age group and gender; male.



## **FINDING 3 – THE IRIS DATA SHOWS THAT 9% OF REFERRALS WERE FAMILY / RELATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

- As expected, most cases were partner/ex-partner (61%) and spouse/ex-spouse (26%) relationships.
- Family/relative relationships accounted for 9%. A further breakdown shows 4% where the son and 2% where the daughter was the perpetrator.
- See Recommendation 9, Key Finding 3 for the Iris chart related to relationships.

<sup>7</sup> The police figures use victim data from 2024 and use unique victims; if a victim had two or more incidents recorded in the year, they are counted once. The police data covers calls received and coded as domestic related, and not just those that resulted in a crime.

#### **FINDING 4 – SPECIFIC FACTORS AFFECT HOW OLDER AGE GROUPS PERCEIVE AND RESPOND TO DOMESTIC ABUSE**

- Research indicates that older people may be too frightened or ashamed to report their abuse to the police:
  - "For many older people, domestic abuse has been going on for so long it may just feel unresolvable. Others may be dependent on their abuser financially or for their care. They might face other barriers to reporting such as physical or cognitive disability, or they may be too afraid or ashamed to go to the police and report the abuse they are experiencing."<sup>8</sup>
- Locally, practitioners highlighted the importance of health settings in identifying domestic abuse in older people. DAIPS and MARAC practitioners said they receive many referrals for older people via the Countess of Chester Hospital Safeguarding Team.
- Researchers were provided with a case study for a 61-year-old female patient who had been identified as a victim of domestic abuse in the Countess of Chester Hospital. The case study showed strong joint working arrangements between adult social care, the hospital IDVA, hospital staff, and the police.



#### **RELEVANCE TO CW&C**

- The data analysed shows that older people are less likely to report abuse, often due to:
  - Shame, fear, or dependency.
  - Physical or cognitive disabilities.
  - Long-standing abuse that feels unresolvable.
- As the older population grows, hidden domestic abuse cases could increase unless more proactive measures are in place. Health professionals play an important role in spotting domestic abuse and making referrals. This has been recognised elsewhere in the document. (Recommendation 11). The key role of healthcare professionals suggests a need for enhanced training for frontline healthcare workers to recognise signs of abuse in older patients.



#### **RECOMMENDATION**

- The needs of the older population should remain a priority for healthcare professionals. Commissioned training should be enhanced to better equip them in recognising and responding to signs of domestic abuse in older people.
- Adult Social Care professionals should be trained in understanding and identifying how domestic abuse impacts older people.
- Existing good practices for older people, such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough MARAC Referral Form and DASH Risk Indicator Checklist for Older People, should be explored.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Age UK, (2020), No Age Limit

<sup>9</sup> Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Partnership, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Marac Referral Form and Dash Risk Indicator Checklist for older people (over 60)

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 4

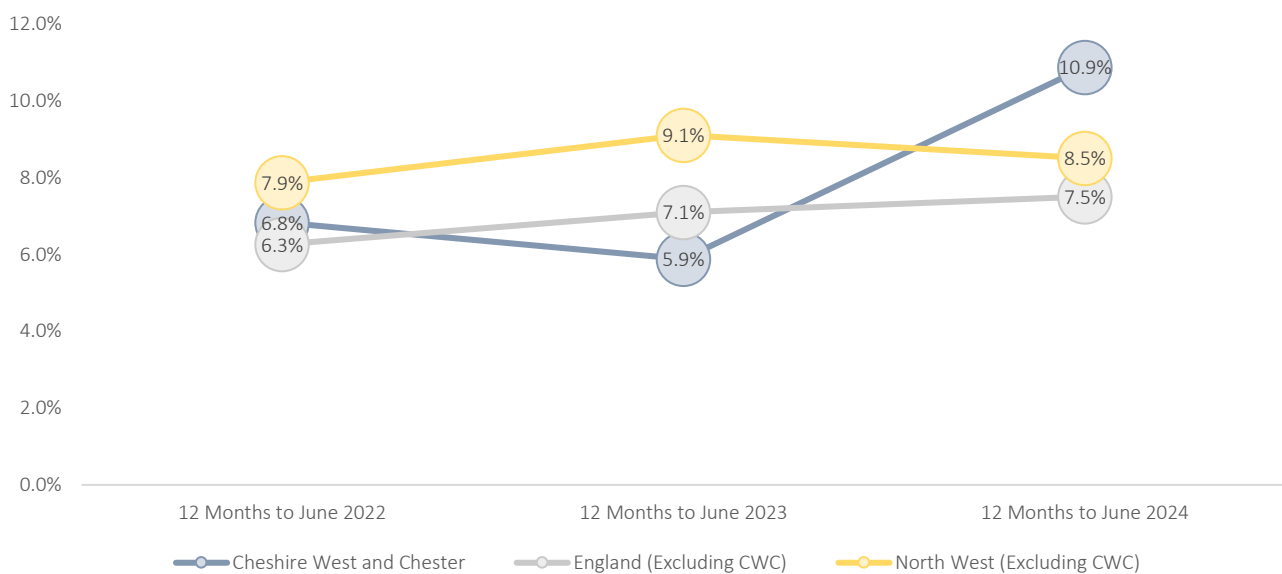
TITLE: Increase preventative measures around homelessness approaches.



### KEY FINDING

#### **FINDING 1 - CW&C HAS HIGH RATES OF MAIN DUTY DECISIONS OF WHICH [HOMELESS + PRIORITY NEED + UNINTENTIONALLY HOMELESS (ACCEPTANCE)] WHERE DOMESTIC ABUSE IS THE PRIORITY NEED.**

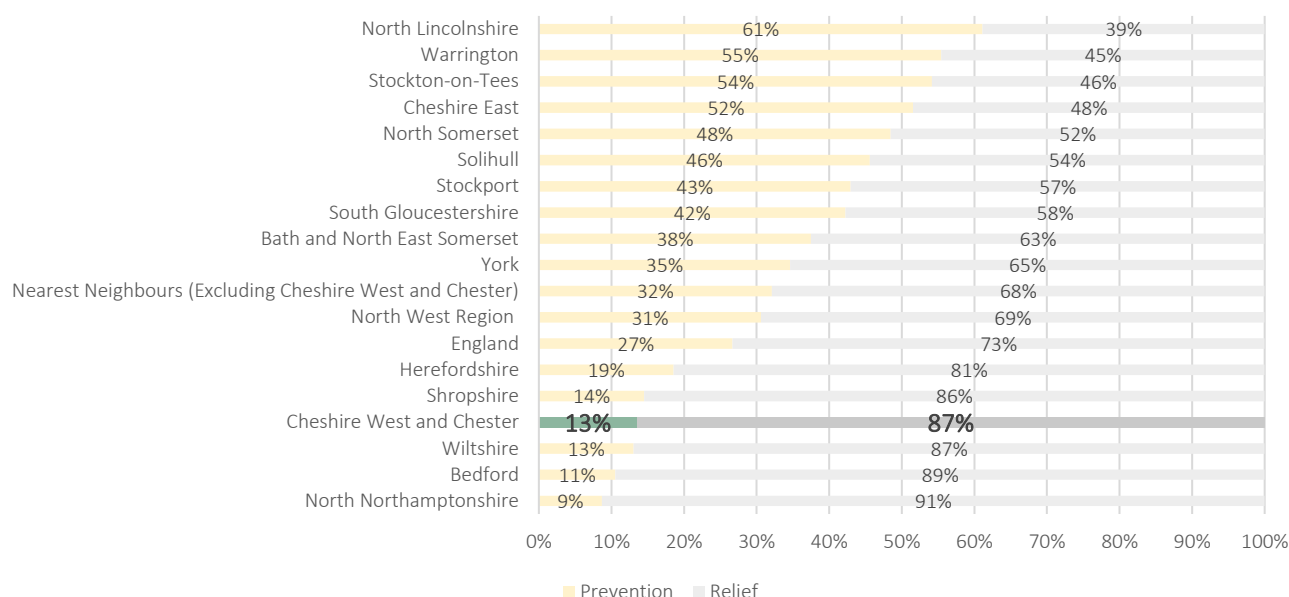
- Compared to the NSN, the rate in CW&C is high. (The table below shows the areas considered to be CW&C's NSN).
- Additional analysis factoring in the 18+ population shows a high rate in CW&C.



## FINDING 2 - SPLITTING HOUSEHOLDS ASSESSED BY PREVENTION AND RELIEF SHOWS THAT CW&C PRESENT LOW NUMBERS OF PREVENTION<sup>10</sup>.

- A breakdown of the two categories shows that CW&C reports low rates for prevention duty and high rates for relief duty.
- For prevention duty, the rates in CW&C have shown a downward trend over the last 3 years.
- A total of 230 households were assessed, with DA being the reason for the approach. 31 (13%) were for prevention, compared to 199 (87%) for relief. The 13% for prevention is low compared to the NSNs.

Proportion of households assessed with duty owed due to domestic abuse; split between prevention and relief; 12 Months to June 2024.



### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- A main housing duty (also known as the main homelessness duty) refers to the legal obligation of a local housing authority under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) to secure suitable accommodation for an applicant who is eligible, homeless, in priority need, not intentionally homeless, and has a local connection (or is referred elsewhere).
- The reasons for the increase in the number of domestic abuse-related main duty decisions are not clear. The increase in numbers may be due to higher levels of need, better reporting, or a more effective and responsive homelessness service. It is also possible that preventative opportunities to help individuals and families before they reach the main duty stage have been missed.



### RECOMMENDATION

- The increase in domestic abuse-related main homelessness duty decisions should be explored further to investigate whether opportunities to help individuals at an earlier stage in their homeless application have been missed. This includes assessing whether individuals could have been supported earlier in their housing application process, reducing the need for a main duty decision.

<sup>10</sup> Prevention Duty: If the person is threatened with homelessness, the authority has a duty to help prevent them from becoming homeless.  
Relief Duty: If the person is already homeless, the authority has a duty to help them secure accommodation for at least six months.

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 5

TITLE: Exploring options for managing tenancies of those affected by domestic abuse.



### KEY FINDING

#### **FINDING 1 – IT IS CHALLENGING FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE TO CONVERT A JOINT TENANCY TO A SOLE TENANCY**

- Local Authorities already have the power to terminate a tenancy and evict the perpetrator. The possession grounds are widely drawn and include where the victim has fled the house as a result of domestic abuse and where serious criminal offences have been committed.<sup>11</sup>
- In practice, individuals who experience domestic abuse while holding a joint tenancy with the perpetrator face many challenges in converting a joint tenancy to a sole tenancy. In cases of domestic abuse, the responsibility typically falls on the victim to pursue legal action to convert a joint tenancy into a sole tenancy. This process can be costly, time-consuming, and overwhelming.
- National research by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance highlights the limitations of the current legal options for those who have experienced domestic abuse to maintain their social tenancy:
  - "If the survivor cannot gain the signed consent of the perpetrator to be removed from the joint tenancy, her only option is to take legal action to have the perpetrator removed from the property and the tenancy. This process is complex, expensive, and often inaccessible."<sup>12</sup>
- Weaver Vale Housing Association is formalising its processes concerning changing the locks on properties where domestic abuse has occurred.
- The Weaver Vale Housing Trust Safeguarding Quality Practice Lead highlighted how the legal options to Registered Providers are "limited and not supportive of enabling us to address matters in a satisfactory manner - either we take action against the person who harms once the victim has left the property or we take action against a tenancy under the criminal grounds which would penalise a joint tenant."

#### **FINDING 2 – FORHOUSING HAVE DEVELOPED A PROCESS TO MANAGE THE TENANCIES OF THOSE IMPACTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE**

- ForHousing has developed a workaround that allows the victim to terminate the joint tenancy and re-sign a new sole tenancy agreement with the housing group. Over the past 12 months, two cases have been resolved using this approach.
- Data was not provided for other housing providers.
- Weaver Vale Housing Trust stated that their approach to joint tenancies was discretionary and not currently written in policy however will be considered as part of the review of our Tenancy Changes Policy.

#### **FINDING 3 – THERE IS A POTENTIAL GAP IN INFORMATION SHARING WITH HOUSING PROVIDERS**

- Interviews with practitioners involved with the MARAC showed a mixed picture concerning the information provided by housing providers to inform the MARAC process. When involved in the MARAC process, housing providers were reported to provide detailed information to the MARAC. However, housing providers are not

<sup>11</sup> Home Office, (2024), Secure tenancies and victims of domestic abuse factsheet

<sup>12</sup> Domestic Abuse Housing Association, (2022), Joint Tenancies & Domestic Abuse Briefing

always informed when a tenant has perpetrated domestic abuse, which can have significant implications for tenancy management and safeguarding.



#### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- In CW&C, as in other areas, those who have experienced domestic abuse who hold joint tenancies may face similar legal and practical barriers to converting their tenancy into a sole tenancy.



#### RECOMMENDATION

- The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB) should explore creating standardised and transparent guidelines for all housing providers, including the full range of registered housing providers, ensuring consistent, effective responses to domestic abuse cases. These guidelines should be written in collaboration with housing providers to ensure achievability.
- There should be a further investigation into the number of joint tenancies where one tenant has been identified as perpetrating domestic abuse and a better recording of data. [Led by the Housing Representative on the DALPB]

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 6

### TITLE: Different approaches for tackling domestic abuse based on locality.

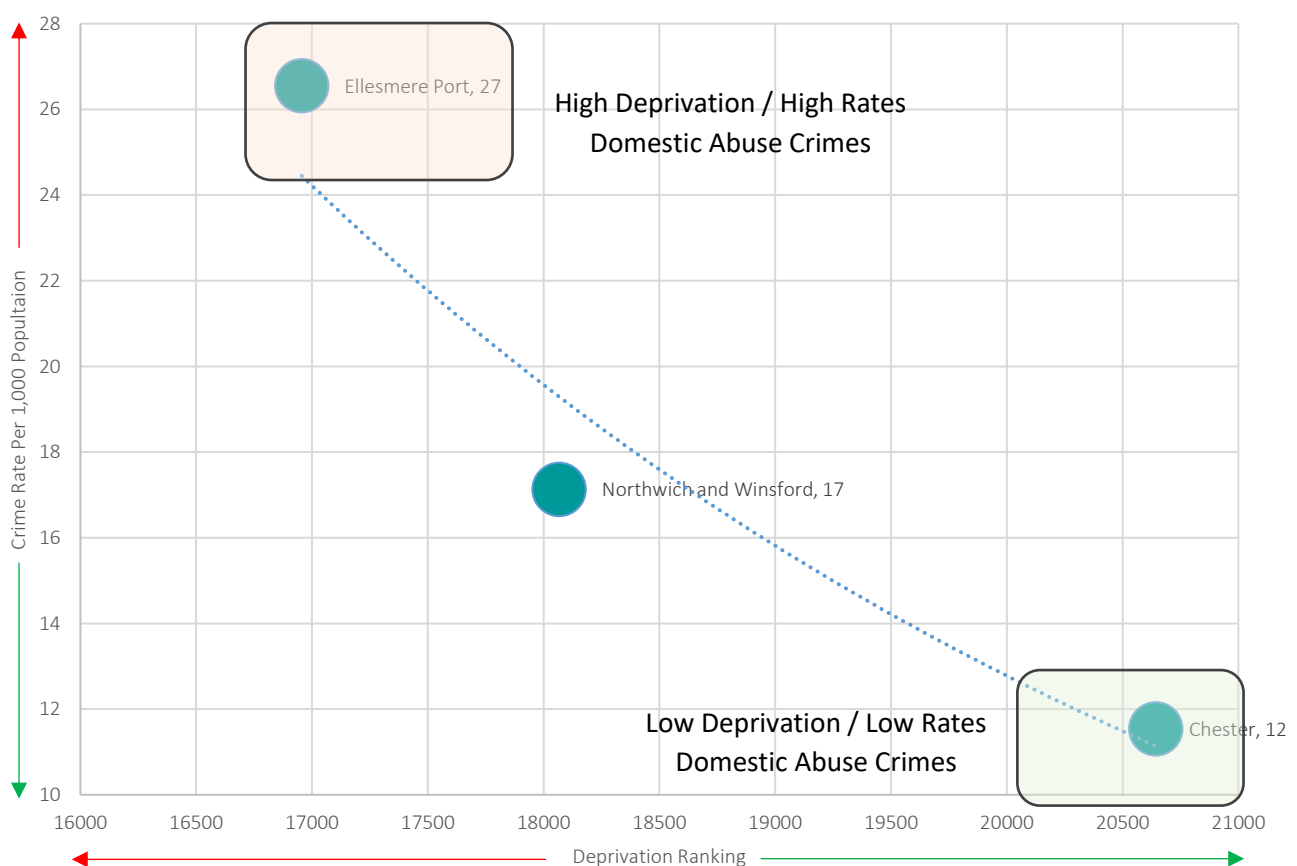


#### KEY FINDING

Where possible, the DANA analysed data at a locality level. The findings found significant disparities in population, rates, and unmet needs. This would suggest that different approaches are required in each area.

#### FINDING 1 – A CLEAR CORRELATION BETWEEN DEPRIVATION AND CRIME RATES

- Mapping the three localities by crime rates and deprivation shows a clear correlation, with Chester showing the lowest deprivation and the lowest crime rates. Ellesmere Port reports the highest average deprivation and the highest crime rates.
- Other datasets show higher rates in Ellesmere Port than in other localities.
- An exception to this is the IRIS data (recommendation 9).
- Although there is a clear correlation between domestic abuse and deprivation, there could be unmet needs in areas of less deprivation.





## RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- The findings above show how deprivation correlates with domestic abuse rates. Ellesmere Port has the highest rates of deprivation and domestic abuse crime rates. This could suggest a greater need for targeted domestic abuse interventions in the area.
- Chester has the lowest deprivation and crime rates, suggesting a safer and more affluent community. However, this does not necessarily mean that serious issues such as domestic abuse are less prevalent. Lower crime rates may indicate a higher level of hidden domestic abuse, where victims feel stigma or social pressure preventing them from reporting their experiences. Raising awareness is crucial to ensuring that victims feel safe to come forward.



## RECOMMENDATION

- Understanding how different types of domestic abuse are prevalent based on factors such as deprivation could help to target unmet needs.
- Services are generally focussed around areas of deprivation as this is a driver of domestic abuse, however, areas of lower deprivation may have a higher prevalence of certain forms of domestic abuse—for example, the high rates of IRIS referrals in Northwich & Winsford.
- Future planning should take into account all forms of domestic abuse which may not be driven by deprivation.



## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 7

**TITLE:** Investigate the findings of Cheshire East's evaluation of their Whole Housing Approach.



### KEY FINDING

- The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) is not used in CW&C.
- The Whole Housing Approach is a framework designed to improve housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse. It recognises that housing is critical in ensuring those who have experienced domestic abuse's safety, stability, and recovery.
- Some of our findings in other recommendations may indicate that the WHA could be explored:
  - Reduce the number of people who are made homeless as a result of domestic abuse
  - Increase tenancy sustainment options so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely in their homes when it is their choice to do so or do not lose their tenancy status if they relocate. This includes social housing landlords taking action to remove perpetrators from properties through enforcement and positive engagement activities.
- Cheshire East has reviewed its WHA and included a comparison with CW&C's housing approach.



### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- Cheshire East is a comparator area for CW&C. The review of its WHA will be useful in informing the development of the housing response to those experiencing domestic abuse in CW&C.



### RECOMMENDATION

- When published, review the evaluation of Cheshire East's WHA (a comparator area for CW&C).

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 8

TITLE: Improve the response of housing providers and RSLs concerning domestic abuse.



### KEY FINDING

#### **FINDING 1 – LOW REFERRAL RATES TO MARAC FROM HOUSING PROVIDERS**

- Housing Services comprise a small proportion (2%) of MARAC referral sources.
- Housing providers provide a lot of information about individuals discussed in the MARAC process, which is extremely valued by DAIPS practitioners.
- Practitioners pointed out that there has only been one ForHousing referral to the MARAC. Other Registered Provider figures were not made available for this needs assessment.

#### **FINDING 2 – HOUSING PROVIDER INTERVENTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN SAFE ACCOMMODATION FIGURES**

- Information on adaptations to properties made by housing providers is not included in Target Hardening performance figures.



### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- The low number of referrals from housing services to the MARAC could indicate a disconnection between housing services and domestic abuse response processes. This limits the coordinated response that potential victims can receive.
- The lack of information on housing provider interventions means that there is an incomplete picture of domestic abuse prevention.



### RECOMMENDATION

- Housing providers should be encouraged to make frequent referrals to the MARAC while ensuring appropriate referrals.
- Housing providers need to publicise better and promote the use of available training resources.
- Housing providers should report on target hardening interventions to the Partnership Board.

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 9

TITLE: Detailed analysis to help identify potential unmet needs.



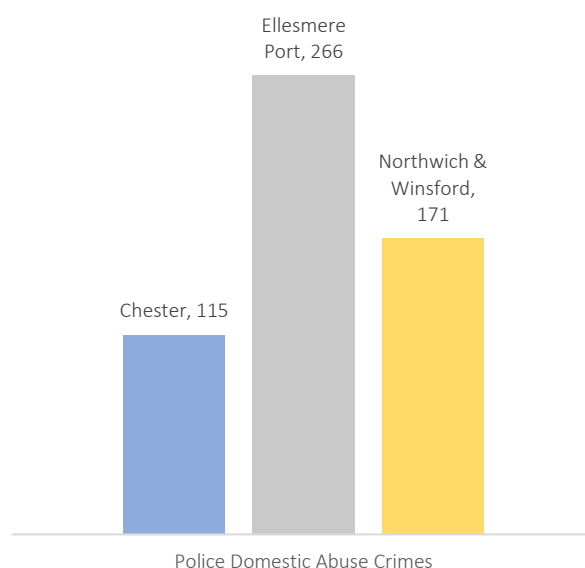
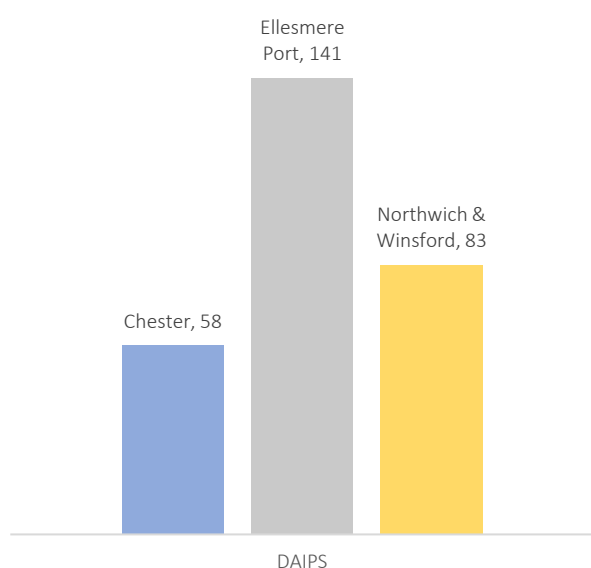
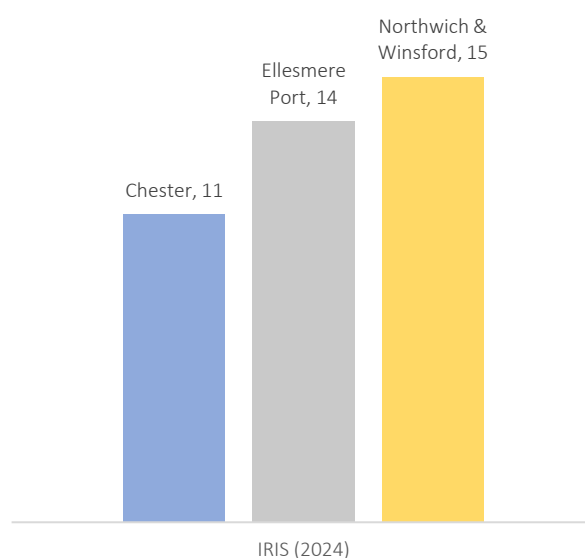
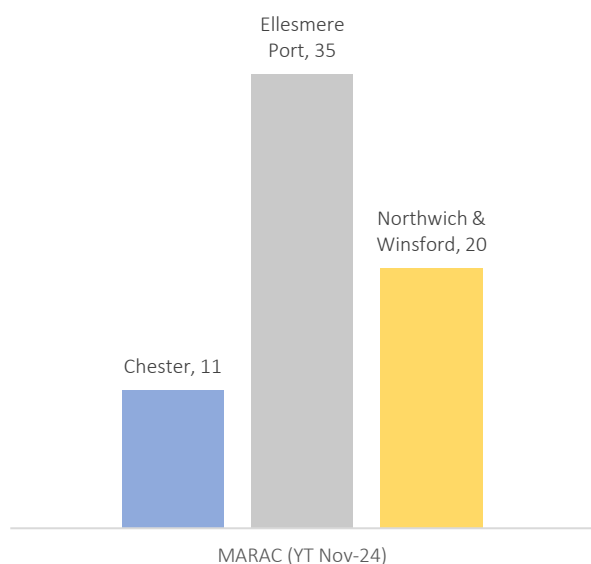
### KEY FINDING

For this DANA, a wide range of analyses was conducted exploring areas of potential unmet need, including geographical and protected characteristics.

Below are examples of the data analysis findings and potential areas for further exploration.

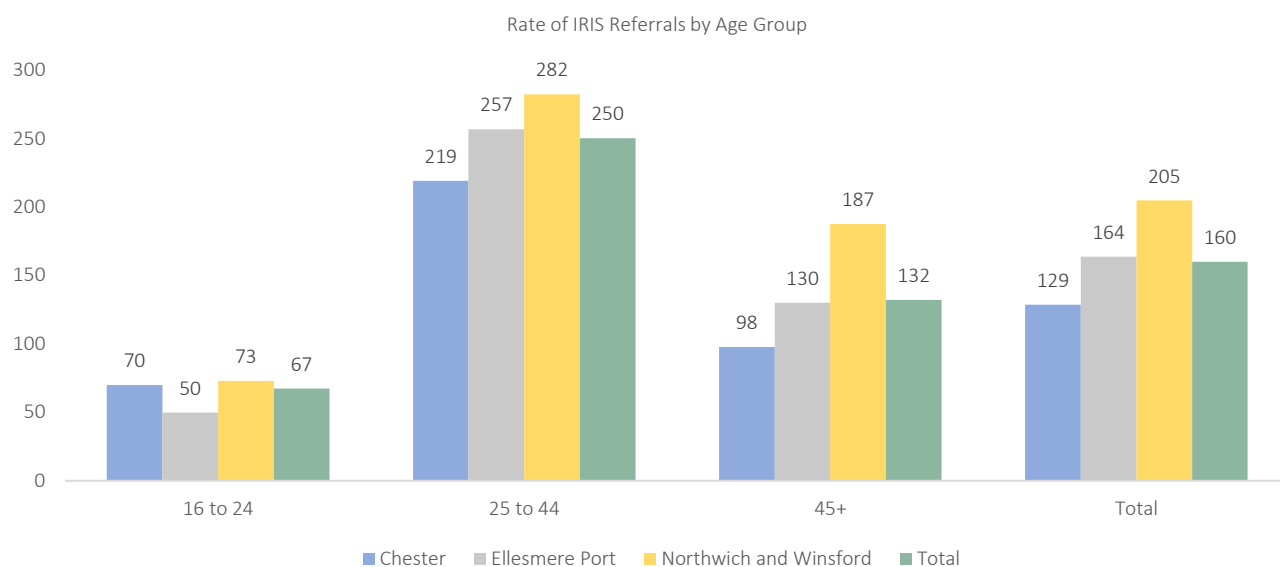
### **FINDING 1 – THE NUMBER OF IRIS REFERRALS IN ELLESMERE PORT IS POTENTIALLY TOO LOW**

- Below is the rate per 10,000 population by locality across three different areas.
- For Police data concerning those who have experienced domestic abuse, MARAC, and DAIPS referrals, Ellesmere Port has significantly higher rates than Chester and Northwich & Winsford. However, looking at IRIS referrals, the rates in Ellesmere Port are lower than that of Northwich & Winsford. DAIPS practitioners mentioned a need for more preventative work in Ellesmere Port across all service areas.



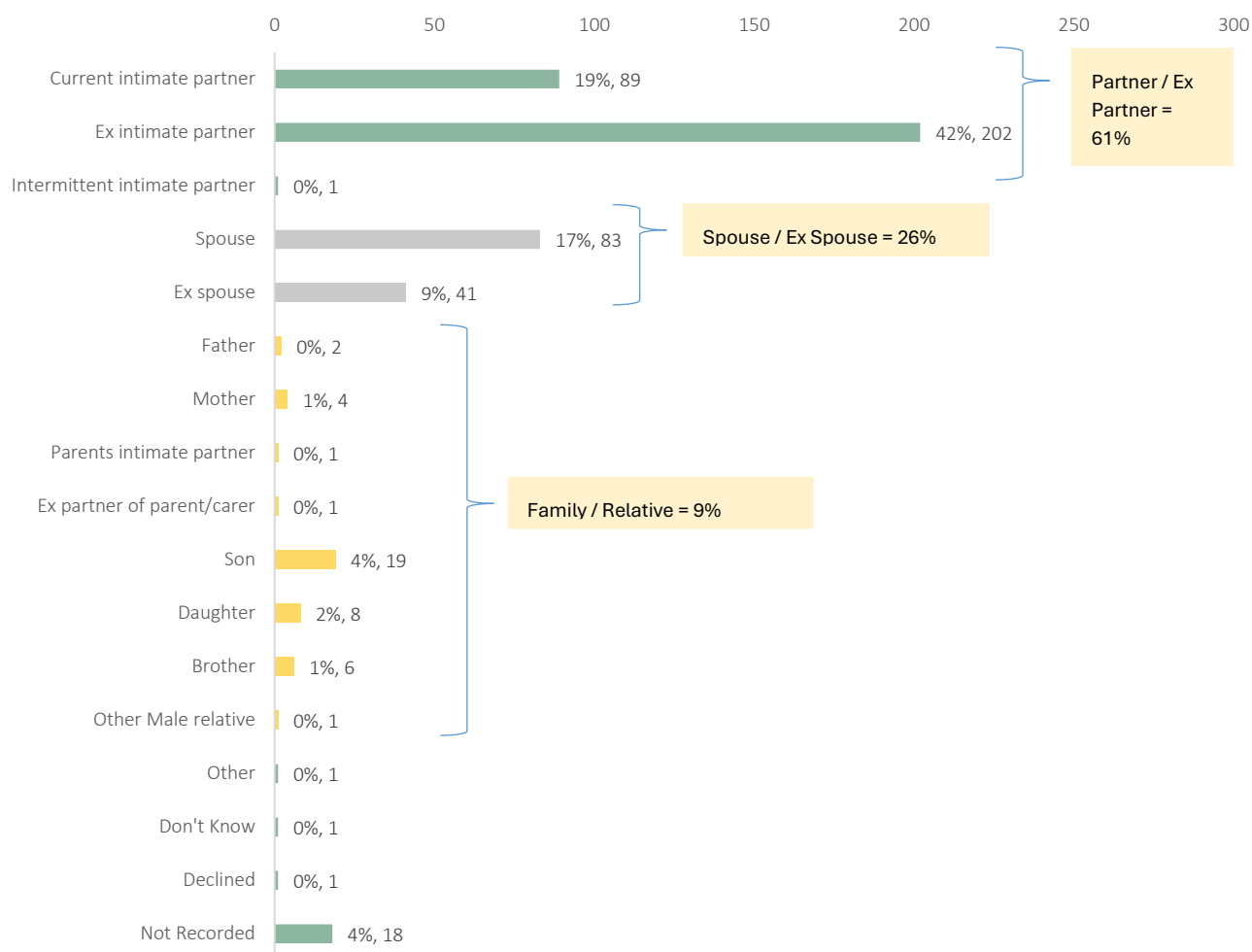
## **FINDING 2 – DIFFERENCES IN RATES OF THE 45+ AGE GROUP (IRIS)**

- Below is the rate of IRIS referrals per 100,000 people by age group.
- Following on from FINDING 1, this chart shows that Northwich & Winsford report high rates for the 45+ age group compared to the other areas.



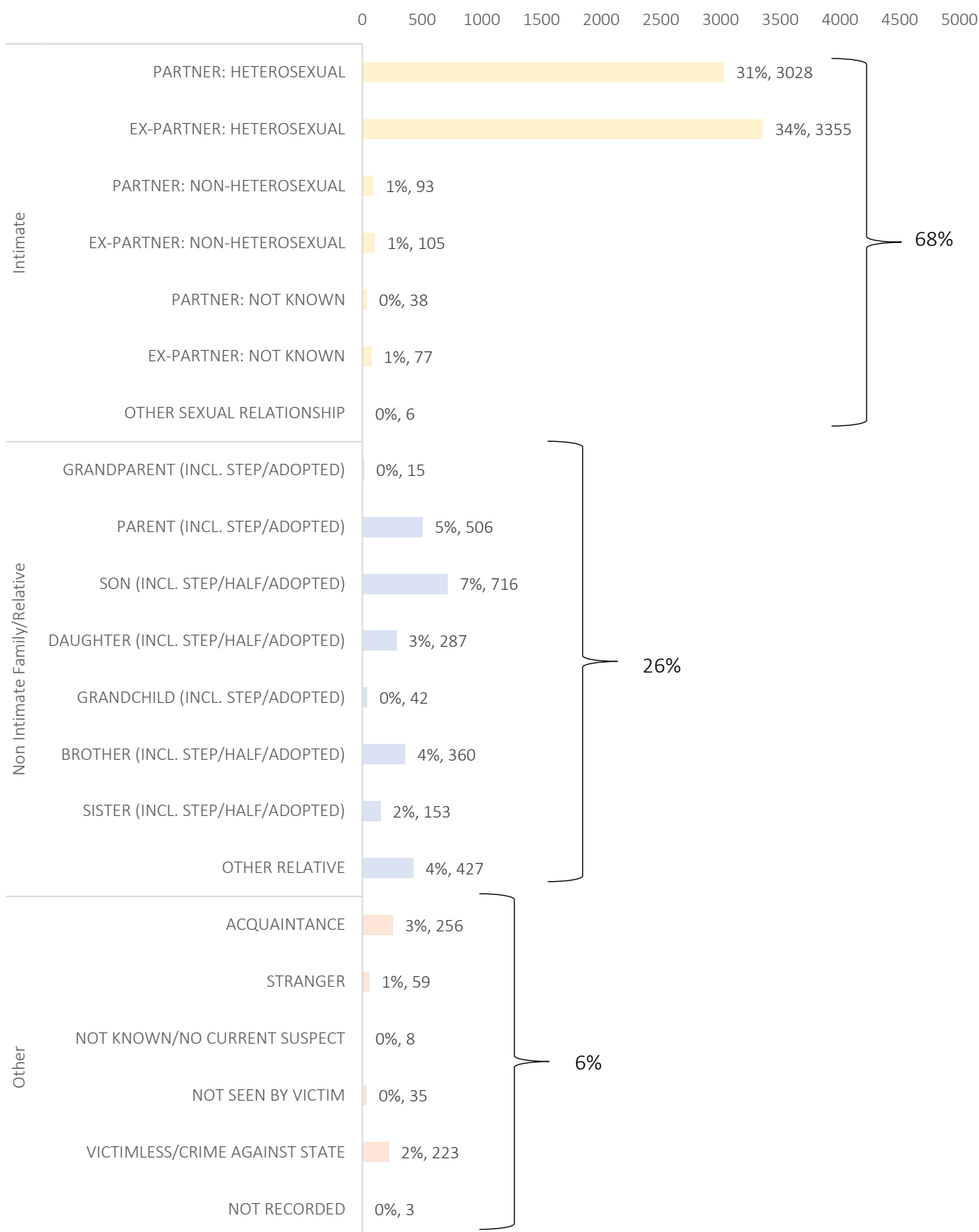
### FINDING 3 – 9% OF IRIS REFERRALS HAVE THE PERPETRATOR AS A FAMILY RELATIVE.



- Domestic abuse is not limited to intimate relationships.
- The analysis of IRIS data shows that 9% of referrals had the perpetrator as a family or relative.
- The low rates in Ellesmere Port could mean those experiencing domestic abuse from a family member are not accessing services.



## FINDING 4 – 26% OF POLICE INCIDENTS HAVE THE PERETRATOR AS A NON-INTIMATE FAMILY/RELATIVE.

- In 2023 and 2024, 26% of the incidents were between non-intimate family/relative members.
- At 65% combined, ex-partner and current partner (heterosexual) account for the majority of incidents.



	RELEVANCE TO CW&C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment highlights potential gaps in service access and geographical differences in reporting and referrals.</li> </ul>	
	RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendation 11 recognises the better engagement of primary care services in Northwich and Winsford compared to other areas in CW&amp;C. This could point towards the need for greater awareness and training for GPs in Ellesmere Port to improve healthcare-led referrals for domestic abuse.</li> <li>• GPs in Ellesmere Port should be assertively engaged regarding using the Iris pathway.</li> </ul>	

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 10

### TITLE: Gaps in MARAC / unmet need.



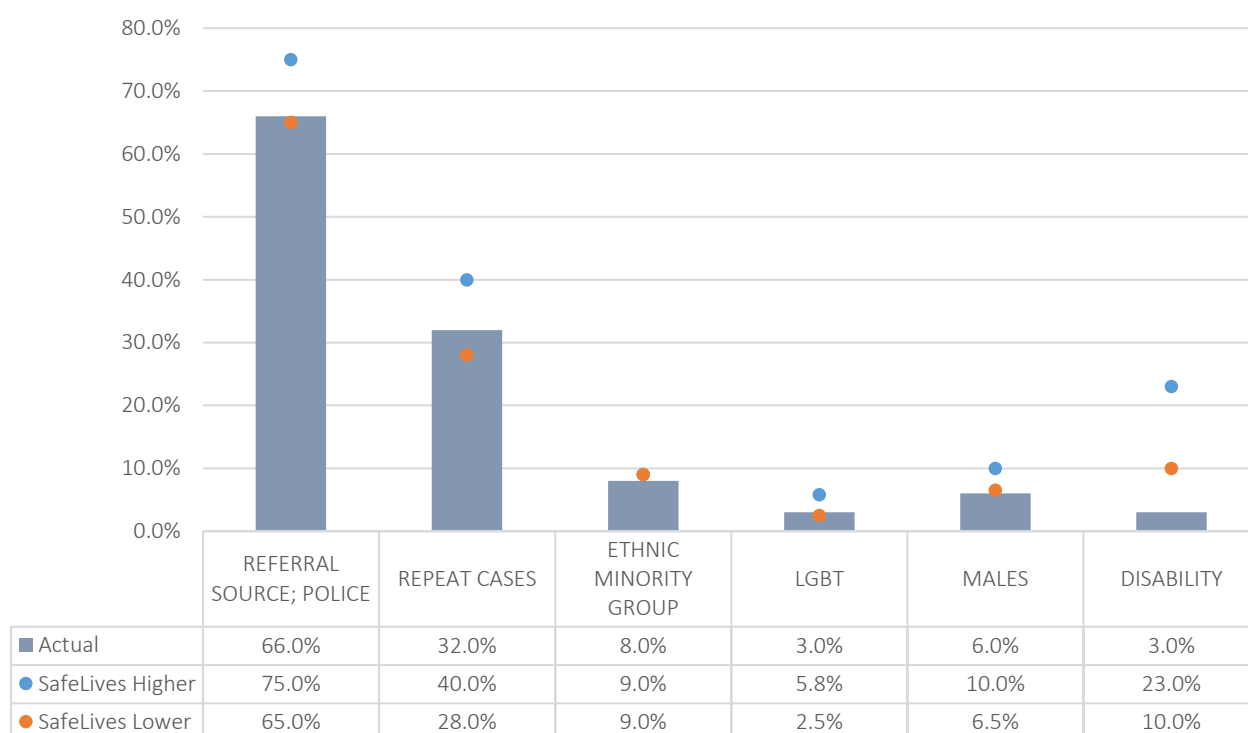
#### KEY FINDING

SafeLives provides expected figures for MARAC figures. The local analysis shows that there are areas for improvement.

In addition to the SafeLives guidance, the local analysis shows areas for further investigation.

#### **FINDING 1 – THE RATES FOR MARAC REFERRALS IN SOME COHORTS ARE TOO LOW.**



- The rates for those with a disability and males who have experienced domestic abuse are lower than expected. This could be related to how disabilities are recorded.



#### **FINDING 2 – VARIOUS ANALYSES HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED, REVEALING DIFFERING PATTERNS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION.**

- Areas for further investigation include:
  - High rates of referrals for the 25-44 age group in Ellesmere Port compared to the other localities.
  - A decrease in male referrals in Ellesmere Port compared to the other localities.



	RELEVANCE TO CW&C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SafeLives figures indicate that the MARAC process in CW&amp;C may underserve some communities.</li> </ul>	
	RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the SafeLives figures serve as a guide, they highlight key areas for future focus by the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board in ensuring equal access for all CW&amp;C residents. The findings from this needs assessment should inform the development of communication and engagement plans for communities with identified unmet needs.</li> <li>• Existing research highlighted in this report, such as the work completed with those with neurodisabilities affected by domestic abuse, should also be used in the development of future communication and engagement plans.</li> <li>• To investigate the areas where the analysis has highlighted outlying patterns.</li> </ul>	

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 11

TITLE: Replicate good primary care response in Northwich and Winsford across CW&C.



### KEY FINDING

#### **FINDING 1 – WINSFORD AND NORTHWICH HAVE A HIGH RATE OF MARAC REFERRALS FROM PRIMARY CARE SERVICES**

- Northwich and Winsford have the highest proportion of referrals to the MARAC from primary care services compared to Chester and Ellesmere Port.

#### **FINDING 2 – NORTHWICH AND WINSFORD HAVE HIGH RATES OF REFERRALS TO THE IRIS PROGRAMME**

- Looking at rates per 100,000 of the population, Northwich and Winsford have the highest rates of Iris referrals compared to Chester and Ellesmere Port.

#### **FINDING 3 – THERE IS GOOD ENGAGEMENT FROM SOCIAL PRESCRIBERS IN DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES IN WINSFORD**

- Engagement with professionals and those with lived experience in Winsford highlighted the importance of the relationship between social prescribers and domestic abuse services.
- At one Open Access Group we attended as part of this needs assessment, we spoke to three women personally accompanied to the Open Access Group by their social prescriber. Those with lived experience of domestic abuse said it was important to be accompanied by someone when making that first step through the door of services.

“The social prescriber called me. If someone didn’t call me back then I wouldn’t have done anything.”

*Participant Winsford OA Group*

- IDVAs working in Winsford said there is good engagement with primary care services in Winsford that is not replicated in other areas of Cheshire West & Chester.



### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- From the feedback from professionals and those with lived experience of domestic abuse, social prescribers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between victims and support services.
- Feedback relating to being personally accompanied to appointments underscores the importance of trust and practical support in encouraging engagement with services.
- There appears to be stronger integration between primary care services and domestic abuse services in Winsford than in other areas of CW&C.



### RECOMMENDATION

- Findings highlight the importance of social prescribers as a connection between victims and domestic abuse support. Collaborative working between social prescribers, IDVAs, and other primary care professionals should be strengthened.
- Good practice in Winsford should be shared with primary care services in other locations in CW&C to ensure consistent support across the area.

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 12

TITLE: To better coordinate the response of third sector and voluntary groups in CW&C.



### KEY FINDING

- In addition to commissioned specialist domestic abuse services, there are a range of other community groups who work with those who have been harmed by domestic abuse.
- There are opportunities to develop further links and work jointly with third-sector/ voluntary groups working in domestic abuse support.
- The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board has created a 'Charities and Voluntary Sector' subgroup of the main board. Feedback received from CW&C practitioners was that it was hard to engage the charities and voluntary sector with the group.



### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- Recognising that in addition to commissioned services, there are community groups involved in supporting those who have experienced domestic abuse who could help CW&C expand its network of available resources. This would help provide a more comprehensive safety net for those affected by domestic abuse.
- Community-based groups often provide culturally specific or peer-led support, which may be more accessible or trusted by certain individuals who might not engage with commissioned services.



### RECOMMENDATION

- The Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board should continue to engage representatives from third-sector organisations and voluntary groups.
- Stronger links between statutory services and third-sector/ voluntary groups can be facilitated in many ways.
  - SafeLives Insights and MARAC Guidance emphasise the importance of multi-agency collaboration, including voluntary sector involvement.
  - SafeLives recommends embedding voluntary groups in MARACs and improving referral pathways.
- Other ways that stronger links can be formed are:
  - Establish formal partnerships with voluntary domestic abuse services.
  - Provide joint training for statutory and voluntary sector workers.
  - Secure joint funding for new initiatives.

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 13

TITLE: To widen the availability of recovery support for children.



### KEY FINDING

#### **FINDING 1 – iART SERVICES RECEIVE HIGH NUMBERS OF REFERRALS WITH A DOMESTIC ABUSE NEED**

- The iART service sees a high number of referrals where individuals and families are presenting due to needs relating to domestic abuse.
- Across the last 12 months, a total of 7916 family contacts were received by iART, of which 18.9% (1495) related to families presenting due to domestic abuse. Of the 1495 families, there were 5336 individuals (2166 adults and 3170 children and young people).<sup>13</sup>
- In the 12 months to the 31st March, 376 families (854 children and 653 adults) progressed into Early Help and Prevention Family Casework teams for support and were subsequently allocated to a worker. Of these, 42.3% (159) were families where DA was the main presenting issue.<sup>14</sup>
- Currently, the Early Help and Prevention Service offer the Jigsaw Recovery Programme to children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

#### **FINDING 2 - YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HIGHEST RATES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE OF ANY AGE GROUP**

- Young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group. They may experience domestic abuse in their intimate partner relationships, or they may demonstrate harmful behaviour towards a family member.<sup>15</sup> Young people require age-appropriate domestic abuse awareness and safety planning to incorporate the very different risks posed to children and young people.

#### **FINDING 3 – THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN CHILDREN IN NEED EPISODES WHERE DOMESTIC ABUSE WAS A FACTOR**

- There were 2,951 Children in Need Episodes with a factor identified at the end of the assessment in 2023-24. This is an increase from the previous year's 2,547 (+16%).
- The Nearest Neighbours (Excluding CW&C) saw a decrease of 23%, whilst England saw no change.

#### **FINDING 4 – YOUNG PEOPLE REQUIRE A TARGETED AND BESPOKE APPROACH**

- Feedback from third-sector and voluntary groups who work with young people was that young people require a targeted and bespoke approach when addressing domestic abuse.

“Young women don’t recognise that they are in an unhealthy relationship.”

*Motherwell Practitioner*

“It is difficult to see young women accessing a service where they don’t see themselves represented. E.g. a service run by older women.”

*Motherwell Practitioner*

<sup>13</sup> CW&C, (2024), Domestic Abuse Intervention and Prevention Service Annual Report 2023/24

<sup>14</sup> CW&C, (2024), Domestic Abuse Intervention and Prevention Service Annual Report 2023/24

<sup>15</sup> SafeLives, (2019), Young people and domestic abuse spotlight

“I think domestic abuse in young people can be dismissed easily. But it can set them up for a stream of unhealthy relationships.”

*Motherwell Practitioner*

#### **FINDING 5 – THERE IS POTENTIAL FOR A PATHWAY FROM THE GATEWAY PROGRAMME TO THE JIGSAW PROGRAMME**

- The Jigsaw Recovery Programme offers support to children aged 5 to 12 who have experienced domestic abuse and are now residing in a safe environment.
- The Programme is a psychoeducational programme delivered by Early Help Workers from Children’s Centres across CW&C.
- Participation in the Jigsaw Recovery Programme requires a referral from professionals within Children’s Social Care or the Early Help and Prevention services.
- Early Help practitioners said they would expect to get more service referrals from individuals referred to the Gateway Programme.



#### **RELEVANCE TO CW&C**

- There is a high demand for support services from families affected by domestic abuse in CW&C. The transition of families into Early Help and Prevention Family Casework teams further underscores the need for specialised intervention and sustained support for families where domestic abuse is a central issue.
- National evaluations of psychoeducational programmes for children affected by domestic abuse have found positive effects on child outcomes, including improvements in parent-child relationships, knowledge and attitudes about domestic violence and abuse, and safety planning.<sup>16</sup>
- The Jigsaw Recovery Programme aligns with the Strategic Framework outlined in the West Cheshire Children’s Trust Children and Young People’s Plan, particularly concerning early help and prevention.
- The Jigsaw Recovery Programme is embedded within existing services, meaning that CW&C can maximise its reach and accessibility for families in need.



#### **RECOMMENDATION**

- The services available for children and young people who have witnessed domestic abuse should be enhanced so that there is a trauma-informed approach from all services, not just the specialist domestic abuse providers. All practitioners working with children and young people should have the confidence to work with those who have witnessed domestic abuse.
- To help ensure a coordinated and targeted response to children and young people, the creation of a Young Person IDVA role could be considered. In other areas we have worked in, a young person’s IDVA has been embedded within a multi-agency safeguarding hub (iART in CW&C), providing client work, education, and support to practitioners.
- The needs of children of parents engaging with the Gateway Programme should be explored further. Communications between the Gateway Programme and the Jigsaw Programme should be developed to allow appropriate referrals to the Jigsaw Programme.

<sup>16</sup> Emma Howarth et al., ‘IMPROving Outcomes for children exposed to domestic Violence (IMPROVE)’, p. 135.

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 14

### TITLE: To further develop a lived experience engagement framework



#### KEY FINDING

- As part of this needs assessment, researchers heard from those with lived experience of domestic abuse.
- Important feedback was received on areas including:
  - Housing
  - Courts
  - Police
  - Children's needs
  - Financial worries
  - Health and mental health



#### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- The views of those with lived experience of domestic abuse provide valuable insights into areas where the response to domestic abuse can be strengthened.
- CW&C can develop a more lived experience-centred approach by addressing areas highlighted by those who have experienced domestic abuse.



#### RECOMMENDATION

- CW&C should continue establishing an ongoing lived experience engagement framework to ensure that the voices of those with lived experience continue shaping policy and service improvements.
- Feedback from those with lived experience should be integrated into the development of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and used for the ongoing evaluation and improvement of services.

## RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 15

### TITLE: Strengthen health services data collection and sharing to inform domestic abuse response



#### KEY FINDING

- As part of this needs assessment, researchers analysed IRISi data.
- There was a limited amount of other health related data provided for this needs assessment (e.g. hospital, mental health, maternity).



#### RELEVANCE TO CW&C

- The lack of broader health data (e.g. A&E attendances, mental health, maternity services) limits the understanding of the full impact of domestic abuse on the health system in the borough.



#### RECOMMENDATION

- The limited amount of health data included in this assessment, points to the need for stronger inter-agency data sharing agreements and improved coding practices in health settings to capture domestic abuse indicators.

# ADDITIONAL KEY FINDINGS AND SUMMARY

## POPULATION

### The population in CW&C has increased by 11% since 2011.

- This is slightly higher than the 9% for England and 8% for the North West Region.
- The increase is mainly due to net internal migration (9,351) and net international migration (+4,604).
- The latest population projections are 2018-based, which would limit future modelling.

### Those from a white ethnic group have decreased slightly since the 2011 Census.

- Those of a white ethnicity made up 97% of the population in 2011 and 95% in 2021.
- The rates for the North West are 86% and for England it is 81%.

### Those from an ethnic minority differ slightly between localities.

- 10% of the Chester population are from a minority ethnic group, compared to 8% in Ellesmere Port and 7% in Northwich and Winsford.



# ENGAGEMENT

As part of this needs assessment, we completed a comprehensive engagement exercise with those who have experienced domestic abuse and practitioners working with those who have experienced domestic abuse. Below is a summary of our engagement exercises.





 COMMUNITY SURVEY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed to key partners for promotion among their service users.</li> <li>• Covered key areas such as experience of service and barriers to services.</li> <li>• 36 responses</li> </ul>
 PRACTITIONER SURVEY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed to key partners in the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.</li> <li>• Covered key areas such as service response, response to those from protected characteristics, and how support is meeting needs.</li> <li>• 18 responses</li> </ul>
 LIVED EXPERIENCE INTERVIEWS AND GROUPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed groups with those with lived experience of domestic abuse.</li> <li>• Completed engagement day at the WHAG Refuge.</li> <li>• We completed interviews and facilitated groups with over 30 individuals with lived experience of domestic abuse.</li> <li>• The engagement gave an understanding of the self-identified needs of those who have experienced domestic abuse and their experiences of services in CW&amp;C.</li> </ul>
 KEY PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS AND GROUPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed 1-2-1 interviews with key practitioners to understand services response to domestic abuse in CW&amp;C and the specialist needs of groups with protected characteristics.</li> <li>• Completed focus groups with staff from specialist services and partner agencies.</li> <li>• Captured information on what works well and areas that need to be developed.</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Overview of engagement exercises



## Focus groups, interviews, and free-text survey responses have been analysed, and key themes have emerged.

- Opportunities for earlier disclosure
- Court support
- Housing
- Children's needs
- Police response
- Proactive professionals
- Health and mental health

Figure 2 below shows an overview of some of the key points raised in the engagement completed with those with lived experience of domestic abuse. The full needs assessment provides more detail and feedback on these areas.

Figure 2: Overview of engagement

## CHILDREN'S NEEDS

### Childcare to access services

Childcare is a massive barrier. Without someone to look after my child, I couldn't come to any groups at Tomorrow's Women or Open Access.

### Advice on schools

I didn't know the area and more advice on schools would have helped.

### IDVA FEEDBACK

Sometimes Children's Social Care practitioners can be very supportive. Other times, women can feel pressured into doing certain things that they are not comfortable with. For example, the abusive partner having unsupervised visits. There is no consistency at all. There is a gap for young people aged 15-25. We have been into colleges to speak about healthy relationships. Student solicitors have come with us and spoken about the legal definition of consent.



## FINANCIAL WORRIES

Loans have been taken out in my name, why are we still paying when they have been convicted of this? How is there not support for women.

I can completely understand people that go back, because of finance, childcare and home.

The man is often the breadwinner here. Once he leaves he stops paying for everything, then uses children as a means of coercive control.

## POLICE RESPONSE

### Risks

Delays in the police response are a safety issue! Delays put people in danger!

### Confusion about processes

When police are called out, they should be given access to all information.

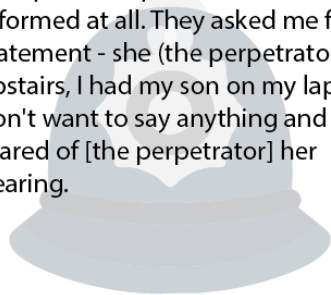
They took him [perpetrator] away, then social care was involved, [there was] no explanation as to why they were there.

I felt like a terrible mum, then I had to make loads of phone calls. If there had been a pack and next steps discussed, this would have been so much more helpful.

The aftermath is so much and hard to absorb. 'What's next!?'

### Trauma-informed support

[The police response] is not trauma informed at all. They asked me for a statement - she (the perpetrator) was upstairs, I had my son on my lap, I don't want to say anything and I'm scared of [the perpetrator] her hearing.



## HOUSING

### Temporary Accommodation

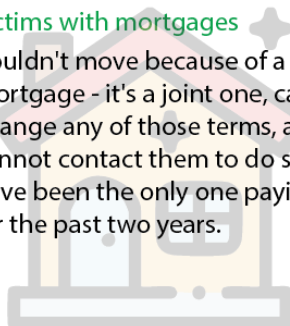
I was moved to a Hostel twice, luckily I could drive.

I have been moved to somewhere full of drugs, more violence, to 'keep me safe'.

So difficult living with a child in that space.

### Victims with mortgages

Couldn't move because of a mortgage - it's a joint one, cannot change any of those terms, and I cannot contact them to do so! I have been the only one paying for the past two years.



## COURT SUPPORT

### IDVA Support

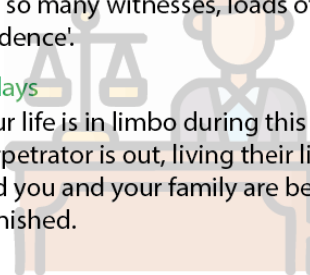
IDVA help with the court process was really helpful. They were able to take notes for me. The whole court process is quite overwhelming. Even down to having someone to walk with to the toilet as I was scared of bumping into the other party.

### Confusing processes

Has been hell for me. it's diabolical, you get told one thing by police, then something else happens. Don't give you a date, then hear nothing. If you promise something, stick to it. I'd rather no timeline, no promises. I finally have a court date, but it will be 4yrs! But they kept saying 'there are so many witnesses, loads of evidence'.

### Delays

Your life is in limbo during this time. Perpetrator is out, living their life, and you and your family are being punished.



## PROACTIVE PROFESSIONALS

The social prescriber called me. If someone didn't call me back then I wouldn't have done anything.

I have had other experiences of people saying they would get in touch but they never did or only called back once and I was not able to take the call.

The first contact with the Northwich Police was lifechanging PC X made the right decision in saying I was in an unsafe environment and his knowledge ensured I was able to live apart from my ex husband who left the premises when PC X accompanied me home.



# HOUSING

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

There is an embedded Housing IDVA located within the Housing Options service.

- The Housing IDVA provides specialist domestic abuse support within housing services, ensuring that those who have experienced domestic abuse receive tailored advice and housing solutions. The Housing IDVA is supported to work with those with domestic abuse needs by an upskilled housing practitioner.
- Housing practitioners provided good feedback on the embedded Housing IDVA in offering support to those approaching the Housing Options Service for reasons of domestic abuse.

“Having dedicated role within Housing team helps [identify people for target hardening measures].”

*Housing Practitioner*

There are high rates of homelessness relief duty compared to homelessness prevention duty.

- In CW&C, 12.2% of households that were assessed and duty owed due to domestic abuse, which is slightly higher than the 11.3% for the NSNs, 11.6% for England, and 11.2% for the North West region. The rate of 12.2% includes both prevention duty and relief duty.
- In CW&C, there were a total of 230 households assessed, with domestic abuse being the reason for the approach. 31 (13%) were for prevention, compared to 199 (87%) for relief. The 13% for prevention is low compared to the NSNs.

## SAFE ACCOMMODATION

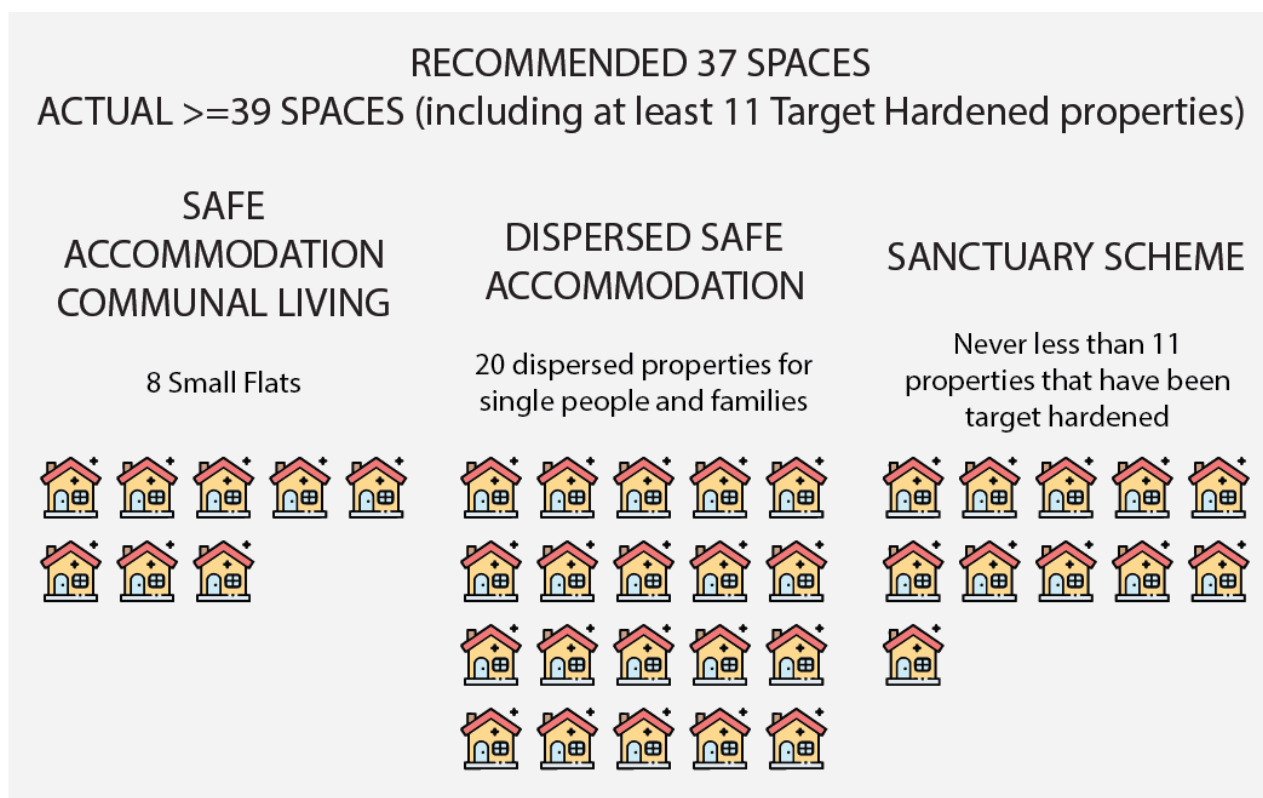
CW&C have a range of safe accommodation services, including communal living facilities, dispersed safe accommodation properties, and a Sanctuary Scheme.

- In CW&C, there are eight flats in a communal living property. There are 20 dispersed safe accommodation properties. There is a Sanctuary Scheme, which always has at least 11 properties that have been target-hardened.
- This makes at least 39 safe accommodation properties, more than the 37 recommended by the Council of Europe.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Using the Council of Europe's minimum recommendation of one space per 10,000 population, 37 specialist accommodation spaces in CW&C are recommended.

Figure 3: Overview of domestic abuse services in CW&C



Getting those in dispersed, safe accommodation to engage in group work is difficult.

- WHAG runs a timetable of activities from their hub in Blacon for residents in dispersed properties.
- Practitioners fed back that it is very difficult to encourage residents of dispersed properties to attend group sessions at the hub.

The number of refuge bedspaces has not seen significant changes. However, the number of dispersed accommodation and sanctuary schemes has increased.

- Domestic abuse refuge accommodation bedspaces remained at 25-26 between 2022 and 2024.
- Bedspaces for dispersed accommodation units have increased from 23 to 73 during the same period.
- Sanctuary Schemes have increased from 7 in 2023 to 51 in 2024.

# POLICE

## Recorded domestic abuse crime numbers are down, and incidents are up.

- Although the number of recorded domestic abuse crimes has seen a decrease, the actual number of domestic abuse calls has increased.
- For all domestic abuse calls, comparing YT Sep-24 against the previous period shows:
  - CW&C has seen an **8% increase**.
  - Chester has seen a **7% increase**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **22% increase**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen **no change**.
- For recorded domestic abuse crimes, comparing YT Sep-24 against the previous period shows:
  - CW&C has seen a **3% decrease**.
  - Chester has seen a **5% decrease**.
  - Ellesmere Port has seen a **6% increase**.
  - Northwich & Winsford has seen a **3% decrease**.
- Feedback from interviews with the Police was that “[a reason for the reduction in recorded crimes]...perhaps we have given crimes more scrutiny [since it became a strategic priority] so data may be more accurate”.

## Ellesmere Port has significantly higher rates of domestic abuse crime than the rest of CW&C.

- In Chester West and Chester, there were 16 recorded domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 (16+) population.
- A breakdown by locality shows a significant difference between the lowest and highest rates, Chester reporting 12 per 1,000 and Ellesmere Port with 27 per 1,000.
- The rates in CW&C are comparable to those in Cheshire East and Warrington.
- Police practitioners reported that all areas of CW&C follow the same governance and structural approach. The different rates of recorded domestic abuse crimes are likely to be representative of the demographics of each area. For example, Ellesmere Port has high rates of deprivation, which is a known driver of domestic abuse.

## There has been an increase in the number of offenders recorded.

- The number of victims has decreased due to a fall in domestic abuse crimes.
- The increase in offenders is thought to be related to better recording and better scrutiny from the police.

## Domestic abuse is a gendered crime.

- Females account for 67% of those who have experienced domestic abuse and 25% of perpetrators.

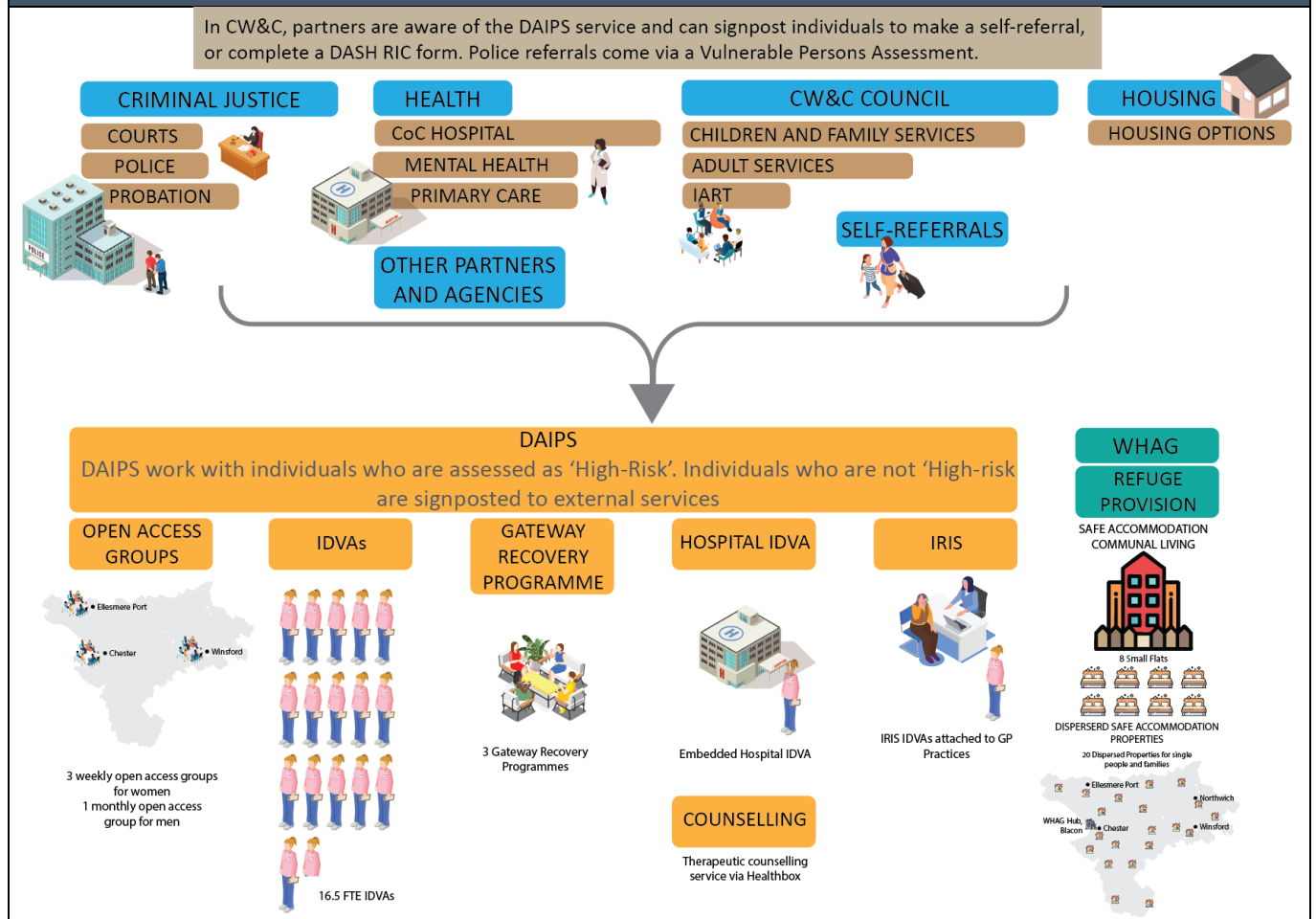
- Males account for 27% of those who have experienced domestic abuse and 71% of perpetrators.

## Recorded crimes are highest in the 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 age groups.

- For both those who have experienced domestic abuse and offenders, the 25 to 34 and the 35 to 44 age groups account for around half of all incidents.
- As a rate per 100,000 population, the difference between the age groups is less significant.
- The long-term trend analysis highlights some emerging patterns.

# SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

Figure 4: Overview of domestic abuse services in CW&C





## SPECIALIST SERVICES

### DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION SERVICE (DAIPS)

- The Local Authority Domestic Abuse Intervention and Prevention Service (DAIPS) provides interventions for people aged over 16 years who have been harmed by domestic abuse, using a trauma-informed response to domestic abuse.
- The team has 16.5 full-time equivalent Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), including Community, Health and Housing leads within the core team.
- As well as providing IDVA support, the team delivers several other initiatives to support those impacted and harmed by domestic abuse:
  - Open Access Groups
  - Gateway Recovery Programme
  - Hospital IDVA
  - Iris
  - Counselling (via Healthbox)





### JIGSAW RECOVERY PROGRAMME & ACORNS

- The Jigsaw Recovery Programme in Cheshire West and Chester is a specialised initiative designed to support children aged 5 to 12 who have experienced domestic abuse and are now residing in a safe environment, such as a refuge or a new home with a non-abusive parent.
- The program's primary goal is to help children process their experiences, rebuild their confidence, and develop healthy coping mechanisms.

### SAFE ACCOMMODATION

- CW&C have a range of safe accommodation services, including communal living facilities, dispersed safe accommodation properties, and a Sanctuary Scheme.

## PERPETRATOR SERVICES

PROGRAMME	ASPIRE TO CHANGE (TLC)	ENGAGE (CW&C)	BETTER CHOICES (Probation)	CARA (MYCWA)
PERPETRATOR CRITERIA	Standard risk programme	Medium risk programme	For adult men convicted of an Intimate Partner Violence offence assessed as being at least a medium risk	Referrals via custody suites
TYPE	Voluntary	Voluntary	Court Mandated	Voluntary
AVAILABLE IN CHESHIRE WEST & CHESHIRE				

PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY	
MARAC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In CW&amp;C, there are three monthly MARAC meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chester</li> <li>Ellesmere Port</li> <li>Winsford</li> </ul> </li> <li>A representative of Cheshire Police chairs the MARAC. The police also chair the MARACs run in Cheshire East and Warrington.</li> <li>For cases that require a quicker response, there is a weekly risk management meeting run by the police where early interventions are identified and actioned.</li> </ul>	
DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEWS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since April 2011, Cheshire West and Chester have received 15 notifications of deaths to consider conducting a review.</li> <li>In 2023/24, one DHR was considered (DHR13). Initially, the DHR Consideration Panel felt it didn't meet the criteria for a DHR, but the Home Office requested that the decision be reconsidered.</li> <li>The panel agreed that there was potential learning and that a DHR should be commissioned. The DHR will take place in 2024/25.</li> <li>All DHRs, once approved by the Home Office DHR Quality Assurance Panel, are published online. The Domestic Abuse Board oversees the completion of the action plans for each review on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership.</li> </ul>	
DOMESTIC ABUSE CHAMPIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic abuse champions are in place at the Countess of Chester Hospital.</li> </ul>	
DOMESTIC ABUSE TRAINING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic abuse training is offered to members of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and is delivered by</li> </ul>	
PRIMARY PREVENTION WORK IN SCHOOLS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship, Health, and Sex Education (RHSE) is completed in primary and secondary schools. Government draft guidance, published in 2024, includes covering domestic abuse as part of RHSE in schools.</li> <li>RHSE is taught across the Cheshire West and Chester schools as part of the National Curriculum.</li> </ul>	
Multi-Agency Tasking & Coordination (MATAC)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MATAC refers to the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination process of identifying and tackling serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.</li> <li>The overarching objectives of the MATAC are to safeguard adults and children at risk of domestic abuse and to reduce the offending of domestic abuse perpetrators.</li> <li>A serial perpetrator is defined as an offender who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is listed as a domestic abuse suspect or offender;</li> <li>Has more than one domestic abuse incident (which incorporates both when crimes are recorded and when they are not);</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

- Has offended against two or more different domestic abuse victims;
- This includes partner/ex-partners, familial relationships, non-violent incidents and nominals aged 16 and over within the last 2 years.
- The Recency, Frequency, Gravity and Victims process has been developed to identify the most harmful perpetrators using an analytical program.
- Data is extracted to identify the most harmful perpetrators of domestic abuse by quantitative analysis using weighted matrices.

## MARAC

In CW&C, MARACs are run monthly in three locations – Chester, Ellesmere Port, and Winsford.

- A representative of Cheshire Police chairs the MARAC. The police also chair the MARACs run in Cheshire East and Warrington.
- For cases that require a quicker response, there is a weekly risk management meeting run by the police where early interventions are identified and actioned.

Overall feedback on the MARAC processes in Cheshire West and Chester was that most partners were engaged.

- It was highlighted that GPs had withdrawn from the MARAC process due to an information-sharing barrier.
- Currently, GPs have to be approached individually to discuss MARAC information, and there needs to be an information-sharing protocol for each GP surgery. GPs do not attend MARAC meetings, which is a gap.

The MARAC referral rates differ significantly by locality, from 106 per 100,000 of the population in Chester to 350 per 100,000 in Ellesmere Port.

- For the 12 months to November 2024, 179 per 100,000 (16+) population had a MARAC referral.
- The rate differs significantly by locality, from 106 in Chester to 350 in Ellesmere Port.

## Police accounted for two-thirds of referrals across the area, with IDVA being the second largest source.

- A breakdown by area and 3-year time analysis shows different trends:
  - In Ellesmere Port, referrals from the Police have gone from 52% to 68%. The 52% was significantly lower than the other two areas, but the increase to 68% is now in line with CW&C.
  - SafeLives gives an expected figure of 60-75%.
  - The voluntary sector referral rates are higher in Ellesmere Port than in the other two areas.

## There has been an increase in repeat MARAC cases.

- The number of repeat cases has gone from 22% YT Nov-22 to 32% YT Nov-23.
- SafeLives gives an expected figure of 28-40%.
- All three localities exhibit the same pattern.

## Various analyses have been conducted, revealing differing patterns for further investigation.

### AGE

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- The 25-44 age group accounts for the majority of MARAC referrals.
- Ellesmere Port has particularly high rates for the 25 to 44 age group compared to the other areas.

### ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

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- The rate and number of cases from an ethnic minority group have doubled when comparing the 12 months to November 2024 against the previous year.
- All areas have seen an increase in the rate of cases where those who have experienced domestic abuse are from an ethnic minority group.
- Chester has the lowest rate per 100,000 (ethnic minority population), as referral numbers are generally low for this locality.

### LGBT

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- Cases where those who have experienced domestic abuse were from an LGBT group accounted for 2-3% of the total.
- There has not been any significant change over the last 3 years.

### MALES

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- Males who have experienced domestic abuse accounted for 6% of the total for YT Nov-24, up from 5% from the 21 YT Nov-22.
- In terms of actual numbers, the increase is from 21 to 34.

- Chester and Northwich & Winsford have seen notable increases, whilst Ellesmere Port has decreased.

## DISABILITY

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- The number of cases with a disability recorded has decreased from 12% for YT Nov-22 to 3% for the latest period.

## THOSE HARMING OTHERS AGED 17 OR BELOW

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- There are less than 5 recorded each year.

## Information on MARAC referrals involving children.

### CLIENTS WITH CHILDREN

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- For the YT Nov-2024, 60% of cases had children recorded. This is down from the previous two years.
- All three localities report a decrease, with Ellesmere Port experiencing the largest reduction.

### CHILD IN NEED

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- There has been a significant decrease in the number and rate of cases where a child in need was recorded.
- A breakdown by locality shows that Chester is the only area which has remained stable.

### CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

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- The number of cases with a Child Protection Plan has more than halved over the last few years.
- All localities have seen a reduction.

### LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN








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- Following an increase for YT Nov-23, all localities show a reduction in cases with Looked After Children in the last year.

## THIRD SECTOR/ VOLUNTARY RESPONSE

In addition to commissioned specialist domestic abuse services, there are a range of other community groups who work with those who have been harmed by domestic abuse.

- As part of this assessment, we completed interviews with representatives from the various groups. Also, we asked them to provide data on the number of individuals that they work with who have a domestic abuse need.
- The organisations engaged with as part of this needs assessment are listed on the table on the next page.
- There are opportunities to develop further links and work jointly with third-sector/ voluntary groups working in domestic abuse support.
  - Establish formal partnerships with voluntary domestic abuse services.
  - Include third-sector representatives in MARACs (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences).
  - Provide joint training for statutory and voluntary sector workers.
  - Improve referral pathways between agencies.
  - Secure joint funding for new initiatives.

	Bawso	Motherwell	Paladin	RASASC	SaveraUK	Tomorrow's Women	Women's Aid
							
DESCRIPTION	Practical and emotional prevention, protection and support services to BME and migrant victims of Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Honour Based Violence, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.	A charitable organisation dedicated to encouraging, inspiring, and empowering women and girls to improve their mental health and challenge associated stigmas.	A trauma-informed service established in 2013 to assist high-risk victims of stalking in England and Wales.	A registered charity committed to supporting people who have been affected by rape or sexual abuse.	Working to end 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) and all harmful practices through direct interventions and safeguarding, advocacy, education, engagement, awareness-raising and campaigning for policy, attitude and behaviour change.	Offer support for women aged 18+ with a range of issues, including mental health, substance misuse, confidence & self-esteem, money, exercise, and social isolation.	Supports victims of domestic abuse predominantly through access to an emergency grant.
Geographical LOCATION	North Wales but has worked with CW&C residents who have fled domestic abuse.	Hub in Winsford and Ellesmere Port	National charity that only accepts self-referrals	Rasasc has hubs in Northwich, Chester, and Ellesmere Port. The RASASC head office is in Warrington.	SaveraUK is funded by the OPCC (until March 2025) to work across the four areas of Cheshire, including CW&C.	Tomorrow's Women has a hub in Chester	Chester Women's Aid provides emergency grant support to CW&C residents.
DOMESTIC ABUSE WORK	No figures were provided on the number of CW&C residents worked with, but it was acknowledged that the last two women to be placed in the Bawso refuge in Flintshire were CW&C residents.	35-40 women and girls are engaging in the Believe Project. An estimated 90% of these had experienced domestic abuse.  No figures were provided for the other projects run by Motherwell.	In the last 12 months, Paladin received five referrals from CW&C residents	Data did not explicitly capture domestic abuse.  April to December 2024, RASASC received 546 referrals. Of these, the following perpetrators were recorded, which could indicate domestic abuse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family member 155, 28%</li> <li>Partner/ husband/ boyfriend 27, 5%</li> <li>Ex-partner/ husband/ boyfriend 88, 16%</li> </ul>	April 2023 to March 2024 – 8 referrals from CW&C  April 2024 to March 2025 (YTC) – 7 referrals from CW&C		Between April 2024 and January 2025, 115 women affected by domestic abuse were provided with an emergency grant of up to £150.

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## IART

The iART is the primary point of contact for concerns about a child's welfare. The number of contacts for all ages has increased by 52% over the last two years.

- 0-17 year olds account for 52% of all contacts in 2024.
- The second largest group was 25+.

Over 6 years, there is an even split between males and females.

- For the 0-17 age group, it is roughly a 50/50 split between males and females.

For the 0-17 age group, 19% of contacts in 2024 had no ethnicity recorded.

- 76% of contacts were from a White ethnic group, 72% White British and 4% Other White.

Analysis of the rate per 100,000 population highlights significant differences.

- Those from a White Gypsy/Roma Background and those from a Traveller of Irish Heritage exhibit the highest rates.
- Those from a Chinese and Arab background exhibit the lowest rates.

VPA domestic abuse high classification has increased from 15% of the total in 2019 to 20% of the total in 2024.

- At 39% of the total in 2024, the most prevalent classification is VPA Domestic Abuse Medium. This is similar to the previous two years.

In 2024, 73% of referrals were from the police.

- The 73% is up slightly from the 69% in 2023.
- Education / School is the second largest referral source, accounting for 6%.
- There were, in total, 46 different referral sources.



## Around half of the outcomes were for Information, Advice and Guidance.

- In 2024, children's social care was the second largest outcome at 28%, followed by early help (Non-IDVA) at 19%.

### CHILDREN IN NEED DATA

The needs assessment analysed data from “Characteristics of Children in Need: Statistics on children referred to and assessed by Children's Social Services for the year ending 31 March 2024.”<sup>18</sup>

- The analysis looks at the “factors identified at the end of assessment by local authority”:
  - “Domestic Abuse Child” - Domestic abuse: concerns child is a victim
  - “Domestic Abuse Parent” - Domestic abuse: concerns parent is a victim
  - “Domestic Abuse Person” - Domestic abuse: concerns another person is a victim

## Domestic abuse concerns around the parent were higher than around the child and ‘other person’.

- Of the 2,951 assessments in 2023-24, there were:
  - 275 (9%) where there were domestic abuse concerns around the child
  - 982 (33%) where there were domestic abuse concerns around the parent
  - 138 (5%) where there were domestic abuse concerns around other person

## Domestic abuse concerns around the parent as a percentage of assessments have seen year-on-year decreases since 2018-19.

- In 2018-19, around 45% of assessments had domestic abuse concerns around the parents. This was significantly higher than the rates for the Nearest Neighbours and England.
- Since then, CW&C has seen year-on-year decreases and is in line with the Nearest Neighbours and England.
- Domestic abuse concerns around the child have also decreased and are now lower than the Nearest Neighbours and England.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-in-need>

## The rates in CW&C are comparable to those of the Nearest Statistical Neighbours and England.

- Comparing the rates as a percentage of assessments, CW&C is comparable to the Nearest Statistical Neighbours and England.
- As a rate per under-18 population instead of assessments, concerns around the parent are slightly higher in CW&C.

### SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN

Below are the main forms of support for children taken from the Women's Aid Report, Domestic Abuse Services for Children<sup>19</sup>.

- In CW&C commissioned support for services for children and young people consists of the Jigsaw Programme, a psychoeducational programme for children aged 5 to 12.
- A pilot is running, extending the programme to those over 12. CW&C also offer support to those under five via the Monkey Bob resource.
- Support for children and young people is offered to those in the refuge provision by WHAG.

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<sup>19</sup> Women's Aid, (2021), [Domestic abuse services for children](#)

## FORMS OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE

### PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

A recent evidence review found that the most common domestic abuse programme to be delivered in the UK is group-based psychoeducation, either for children and their non-abusive parent or just for children.

In CW&C, psychoeducational support is provided via the Jigsaw Programme.

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Barnado's: Be Free Service

### THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT

Therapeutic support differs from psychoeducation in that it is structured specifically as a treatment for the particular needs of an individual. It is delivered by a trained professional following some form of assessment to define the individual's needs, and a plan for the work is created around this.

There is no commissioned therapeutic support service

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Action for Children: 1-2-1 Counselling



Barnado's: Mandala Therapy

### SUPPORTING THE NON-ABUSIVE PARENT AND CHILD TO STAY TOGETHER WHEN SAFE TO DO SO, AND PARALLEL SUPPORT FOR NON-ABUSIVE PARENT AND CHILD

Qualitative research has shown that following experience of domestic abuse, young people need to enhance their relationship with their non-abusive parent. A synthesis of studies found that young people affected by domestic abuse identified spending time with their mothers as a benefit of interventions. An ideal picture of provision for children would, where it is safe to do so, prioritise the relationship between the child and the non-abusive parent.

There is no commissioned parallel support service

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

women's aid

Women's Aid: You and Me, Mum



NSPCC: Domestic Abuse Recovering Together (DART)



Barnado's: Opening Closed Doors

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIOLENCE AND ABUSE ADVISORS

Young People's Violence Advisors (YPVAs) are specialist advisors who work specifically with young people to help them rebuild their lives after experiences of abuse. They take in the specific needs that young people have in order to support young people in the way they require.

There is no commissioned young people's violence and abuse advisor

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES



West End: Domestic Abuse Peer Educators

### CHILDREN'S ADVOCATES

The children's advocates support the children while their mother is in support meetings with her key worker.

There is no commissioned children's advocates

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Reigate and Banstead Women's Aid: Children's Advocates

### INTERVENTIONS FOR PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The children's advocates support the children while their mother is in support meetings with her key worker.

The Monkey Bob resource is used for pre-school children

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES



MyCWA: Monkey Bob

## The 25-44 age group shows the highest rate per 100,000 population.

- Regarding actual numbers, the 25-44 and the 45+ age groups have roughly the same number of referrals.
- However, as a rate per 100,000 population, the 25-44 age group is the highest.
- Northwich and Winsford's profile is slightly different with more 45+ age group referrals than 25-44.

## Females account for 82% of those who have experienced domestic abuse.

- 82% of those who have experienced domestic abuse are female, 8% are male, and 10% are not recorded.
- 65% of perpetrators are male, 9% are female, and 26% are not recorded.

## Around 1% of those who have experienced domestic abuse are recorded as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

- Between April 2021 and December 2024, less than 10 individuals were recorded as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
- 15% were not recorded, not asked, or preferred not to say.

## 12% of those who have experienced domestic abuse are recorded as an ethnic minority group.

- The 12% is higher than the 8.8% of the population for CW&C.
- This rate could be higher as 17% of records were not recorded.
- Analysis of offenders' ethnicity is limited because 60% were not recorded.

# THOSE WITH PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

## NEURODISABILITY

Third-sector group Disability Positive fed back several ways in which those with disabilities are impacted by domestic abuse.

- Communication
  - People with neurodisabilities often cannot process complex processes (housing, legal, service access) due to information not being provided in a suitable way and service not making reasonable adjustments to the information they provide.
  - Participants in the focus groups reported having sensory overload from the amount of information they were expected to process when a domestic abuse incident was disclosed. The involvement of multiple professionals also impacted participants.
  - Professionals need to be aware of how each individual communicates.
- Representation
  - People tend not to have just one need. Individuals may have neurodisabilities and a co-occurring mental health need, particularly if they have been victims of domestic abuse. Services don't seem to adapt to individual needs.
- Processes
  - Key learning from the engagement showed that processes for other services, such as housing, must be changed to address the needs of those with learning disabilities.

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# Scrutiny Review of the Council's new Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2030 (Pre-Decision Scrutiny Review)

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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26 November 2025

## **FOREWORD**

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested the opportunity to scrutinise the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2026-30, prior to it going to Cabinet for approval in December 2025. The focus of the review was to provide members with assurance that:

- the strategy and strategic priorities have been developed with lived experiences, national legislation and best practice in mind and that the strategy has clear pathways for those harmed by domestic abuse to access help.
- there are the resources available to deliver the strategy.
- the draft strategy has been done with Multi-Agency input and response in mind, with clear communication and accountability between different services and agencies.
- the strategy includes elements around addressing and challenging those who cause harm.

### **[OVS Committee Report DA Strategy September 2025.pdf](#)**

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee also wanted assurance that:

- the Strategy included the right strategic priorities, aims and objectives for 2026–2030 and that they are affordable.
- the strategy has been developed with service user's needs in mind (past and present), resources are available and it has had the input of partners including: police, health and housing.
- the Strategy met the key requirements that Council's must have a domestic abuse strategy (Councils in the UK need a domestic abuse strategy for several key reasons, many of which are driven by legal obligations, community needs, and the goal of improving public health and safety for vulnerable residents)
- best practice has been taken into account when drafting the strategy.



## **TASK GROUP DETAILS**

### **COUNCILLORS**

Councillor Patricia Parkes – Chair of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Margaret Parker  
Councillor Michael Garvey  
Councillor Alan Smith

### **OFFICERS:**

Zara Woodcock Assistant Director Early Support & Family Help  
Michelle Nicholson - Senior Manager Domestic Abuse Intervention Prevention Service (DAIPS)

### **SCRUTINY:**

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## 1.0 **BACKGROUND – WHY DID SCRUTINY UNDERTAKE THIS SCRUTINY REVIEW?**

- 1.1 A domestic abuse strategy is a formal plan developed by local authorities and partners to prevent domestic abuse, support victims and survivors, hold those who cause harm to account, and coordinate services. Councils are legally required to have one to meet their duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and to protect their communities. The current West Cheshire's Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy for 2021-2025 needs updating, with the next one being from 2026-2030. This new strategy is programmed to be approved by the Council's Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

The Domestic Abuse Act has led to a definition for domestic abuse being enshrined in law and it emphasises that domestic abuse is not just physical or sexual violence, but can also be emotional, coercive, or controlling, and economic abuse.

Prior to Cabinet receiving the new Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2026 – 2030 scrutiny wanted the opportunity to scrutinise it.

## 2.0 **WHAT WAS SCRUTINY ASKED TO DO?**

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to scrutinise the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2026-2030 so that it could be assured that:

- the strategy and strategic priorities have been developed with lived experiences, national legislation and best practice in mind and that the strategy had clear pathways for victims to access help.
- resources have been identified and are available to deliver the strategy.
- the drafting of the strategy has been done in partnership with multi-Agency input and response in mind, and that there was clear communication and accountability between different services and agencies.
- the strategy included elements around addressing and challenging those who cause harm.
- best practice has been taken into account when drafting the strategy.

## 4.0 **SCRUTINY'S ACTIVITIES AND VISITS**

The Task Group of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet twice to scrutinise the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2030 on the below dates. The Task Group received presentations from officers on the drafting and development of the strategy, priorities, and action plan.

- 30 September 2025
- 10 October 2025

## 5.0 SCRUTINY'S FINDINGS

5.1 The Task Group received two presentations which provided an overview of domestic abuse including its definition, the Council's legal duties (including providing safe accommodation for those harmed) and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Along with what support is currently provided to those harmed and where improvements were needed. Local Councils have a duty to provide safe accommodation for victims and the Task Group learnt what format this takes including that some were provided in other area's and accessible to Cheshire West residents outside the borough:

- Refuge
- Dispersed properties
- Sanctuary scheme

The Task Group were informed about the how Council supports those harmed to remain in their own homes through Sanctuary Schemes by providing target hardening as well as what further support can be provided for those harmed through the criminal justice system. The Task Group were assured that the Council was meeting its requirements regarding Sanctuary Schemes. Officers advised that the current Safe Accommodation provided by Women's Housing Action Group (WHAG) was up for re-commissioning and that they would ideally like two refuges in the borough.

The Council's Domestic Abuse Intervention & Prevention Service (DAIPS) provides short term recovery support to those harmed and the Task Group learnt what self-help those harmed could provide themselves. The Council also supported the courts and judges with specific training around domestic abuse, but they were also required to commission this themselves.

Despite the under reporting of domestic abuse crimes the numbers of domestic abuse referrals to DAIPS have increased in the borough by 8%, with the highest numbers being in Ellesmere Port. The most affected age groups being 16-24 years old with those causing the harm mainly being males. The number of Sanctuary Schemes the Council has provided has also increased. The DAIPS team works closely with Adult Social Care to support those who are open and eligible to Adult Social Care intervention, especially those who don't report incidents to the police.

The Task Group learnt how the new Domestic Abuse Strategy harmonises with the Council's Borough Plan along with the impacts and costs it has on

Accident and Emergency Units, police, the Council and the wider economy. Homelessness is also more prevalent in cases of domestic abuse.

Officers advised the Task Group that they were reaching more people harmed by domestic abuse through new initiatives with Primary Care Partners and General Practitioners. Children and young people can be harmed by domestic abuse and be impacted by domestic abuse, with their mental health being affected, the Task Group were aware of the current long waits for mental health services.

The new refreshed strategy include the following five priorities which remain unchanged from the current 2020-2025 strategy:

1. Assessing Risk – Improve early identification and risk assessment.
2. Intervening Earlier – Expand education, outreach, and early support.
3. Providing Services for Those Harmed – Ensure inclusive, trauma-informed, person-centred support.
4. Supporting Children and Young People – Deliver age-appropriate, trauma-informed interventions.
5. Challenging Those Who Harm and Supporting Change – Enforce accountability and offer behaviour change programmes.

The Task Group felt that robust partnership working needed to be better reflected within the strategy, and the Task Group were advised that the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board would be responsible for delivering the strategy and priorities, once approved. The Task Group agreed that it would welcome more engagement with minority groups in the borough to reduce domestic abuse and that domestic abuse should be a continual feature on the Council's Member Training and Induction Programme. The Task Group was alarmed to hear that social media can influence young people to undertake abusive behaviour towards their partners and Members agreed to endorse particularly the below two priorities which related to early intervention actions to help discourage young people from engaging in such behaviours.

- ✓ Intervening Earlier – Expand education, outreach, and early support.
- ✓ Supporting Children and Young People – Deliver age-appropriate, trauma-informed interventions.

The Task Group also agreed with the importance of educating young people to spot the signs of any potential domestic abuse behaviours. Domestic abuse is not just about physical harm but also about coercion and control: (for example young people's partners not liking their friends, wanting to see text messages and knowing passwords is a form of domestic abuse). Educating young people needs to be delivered in language which is appropriate for them.

### **Minority Groups:**

The Task Group agreed that more support and services should be directed to minority groups where required. They were advised that in some groups, family members could be classed as additional risk rather than a protective factor, especially in cases of honour based abuse. Reporting is an issue in minority groups though the numbers heard at MARAC have increased recently and are in line with census data. Honour based referrals are always treated as high risk and different appropriate cultural questions are asked as part of risk assessing. Attendance at Open Access Groups is made up of people from diverse demographics including people of varying ages and ethnicities.

### **Lived Experiences:**

The Task Group were particularly keen to understand how lived experiences had been taken into account during the drafting of the strategy. They were assured that lived experiences had taken place through:

- ❖ Voices of survivors and from Open Access Groups all fed into the drafting of the Needs Assessment which informed the development and priorities within the strategy.
- ❖ Survivor Voice Group remained a strong feature of the Domestic Abuse Board.
- ❖ Two survivors were part of the Commissioning evaluation panel for the Needs Assessment.

A Domestic Board (which is multi-agency) away day was held on 18 August 2025 where all members of the Board were invited to participate in the development of the strategy and the Needs Assessment was shared. The Task Group requested that the details of the away day along with the Multi Agency approach and how lived experience contributed to the drafting of the strategy should feature in the Strategy's Foreword.

### **Resources:**

The Task Group learnt that funding for Domestic Abuse services was often short term, including some from government funded grants, health and the Police and Crime Commissioner. Officers work with the funding is available to deliver their high-risk initiatives and intensive support to those harmed, including Open Access Groups. The services are delivered by qualified IDVAs. However, to change the behaviour of those who cause harm officers need to do more than focus on high risk initiatives. Through the delivery of the strategy's priorities, the Task Group supported the importance of the Cabinet Member to exploring ways of working with partners to ensure that they are using their resources for Domestic Abuse effectively. This will be done through the Community Safety Board and Domestic Abuse Board.

The Task Group learnt that Health colleagues, contribute to additional support for GP practices to refer direct to DAIPS regardless of risk level. Primary care is one of the most recognised ways for identifying domestic abuse disclosures – such as in hospitals (A&E and Maternity) and GPs. There is an IDVA from the DAIPS team based at the Countess of Chester Hospital who work within the hospital setting to identify potential undisclosed domestic abuse.

### **Monitoring The Strategy's Outcomes:**

The Task Group were keen for scrutiny to have the opportunity to scrutinise the delivery of the priorities and effectiveness of the Domestic Abuse Strategy. The Strategic Needs Assessment which needs to be completed every three years must also undergo an Annual Refresh and this could be brought to an Annual Scrutiny Task Group linked with the reporting of the outcomes achieved from the Domestic abuse strategy. The updates to include some case studies and lived experiences including the actions taken to support and protect young people.

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that it would like to receive an update on the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy and actions in 12 months' time – March 2027. The annual refresh of the Strategic Needs Assessment, and the reporting of the outcomes achieved from the Domestic Abuse Strategy to be brought to an Annual Scrutiny Task Group so that scrutiny can have oversight and scrutinise them. The Cabinet Member is asked to explore options on how to report these outcomes measures to scrutiny such as through the annual reports and delivery of the priorities through measures that could include the reduction in the number of high risk domestic abuse discussed at MARAC, increased reporting, or decreasing in numbers and severity of harm, people losing their lives to domestic abuse, or the number of safe accommodation provided.

### **Supporting Young People:**

Designated children's lead within schools, work with Children's Services to spot and support children whose parent could be suffering from domestic abuse. Police also alert schools to any domestic abuse incidents where a child is involved.

Through mechanisms such as Youth Clubs where young people can be taught the dangers and risks around domestic abuse.

At the end of the two Task Group meetings, Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet approves the Domestic Abuse Strategy, along with the 10 additional recommendations.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cabinet to approve the Domestic Abuse Strategy
2. The Cabinet Member to consider how the Councillors [through their social media channels and ward work] can positively promote the new Domestic Abuse strategy and Action Plan, along with the services available to residents.
3. The Council's Communication and Engagement Plan to include mechanisms to engage with minority groups, especially highlighting the risks around honour-based abuse.
4. The Task Group support the need for more training, awareness and education for young people to spot the signs of potential domestic abuse including signs of behaviour associated with coercion and control.
5. Scrutiny specifically endorses the priorities relating to early intervention actions to help discourage young people from engaging in abusive behaviours and the work around changing behaviours to reduce harm in the first instance
6. Domestic abuse to continually appear on the Council's Member Development Plan including its Member Induction programme in 2027.
7. How partnership working is woven through all 5 priorities to be clearly identified in the action plans that will be developed to deliver the priorities.
8. Details of the engagement with survivors and their voices, along with the work of the Multi Agency Away Day held on 18 August which helped with the drafting of the strategy be included in the Strategy's Foreword.
9. The Cabinet Member to explore ways of working with partners to ensure that they are using their resources for domestic abuse effectively, such as using the Community Safety Partnership and the Domestic Abuse Board.
10. The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive an update on the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy and delivery of the priorities in 12 months' time. The annual refresh of the Strategic Needs Assessment, and the reporting of the outcomes achieved from the Domestic Abuse Strategy to be brought to an Annual Scrutiny Task Group so that scrutiny can have oversight and scrutinise them. The Cabinet Member to explore options on how to report these outcomes measures to scrutiny such as: through the annual report and delivery of the priorities through measures that could include the reduction in the number of high risk domestic abuse

discussed at MARAC, increased reporting, or decreasing in numbers and severity of harm, people losing their lives to domestic abuse, or the number of safe accommodation provided. **The first review update to be March 2027.**

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Task Group welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise the draft domestic abuse strategy, and it agreed that domestic abuse was a deeply emotional and critically important issue. The Task Group thanked officers for their informative presentation. The Council and its staff face the emotional challenges of responding to and supporting residents with the trauma and distress caused by domestic abuse, and at the same time meet the legal duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 including providing safe accommodations. The Task Group noted that financial resources for domestic abuse were limited and often short term.

The Task Group learnt that domestic abuse is serious and expensive issue for councils to manage and respond to, which required a multi-agency approach. It is a widespread issue, which can affect people of all ages, genders, backgrounds and faiths both emotionally, physically, financially and psychologically.

Unfortunately, many people suffer in silence but the Task Group are keen to ensure that the details of the support is available reaches everyone in the borough. During the review, the Task Group learnt of the important of engaging with young people early to help discourage them from engaging in any abusive behaviours. As a result, it was particularly keen to endorse two of the priorities contained in the draft Strategy which help to address this:

- ✓ Intervening Earlier – Expand education, outreach, and early support.
- ✓ Supporting Children and Young People – Deliver age-appropriate, trauma-informed interventions.

The Task Group also endorsed the importance of the work to engage with minority groups especially around honour-based abuse.

Concluding from the scrutiny review, the Task Group was happy to recommend that the draft strategy be approved by Cabinet in December 2025 and that it receives an update on the effectiveness in March 2027.



# Cheshire West and Chester

## Report to Cabinet

<b>Date</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> December 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Natalie Abraham – Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Transformation and Strategy
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Nathan Pardoe – Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy, Regeneration and Digital Transformation
<b>Report Title:</b>	The Council's Digital Ambition and Data and Insight Strategies 2025-2028
<b>Is this a Key Decision?</b> [(one that affects finances over £1m or significantly affects two or more wards)]	No
<b>Exempt Report:</b>	No

### 1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of two new strategies – the Digital Strategy, 'Digital Ambition 2025-28' and the Data Strategy, 'From Data to Impact 2025-28'.
- 1.2 Together these strategies aim to drive service improvement, evidence-based decisions and digital innovation to support residents and communities.
- 1.3 The delivery of these two strategies will be underpinned by robust work programmes, which will be included within the Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2026/27. Progress will be monitored and reported through the quarterly Corporate Performance Reports to Cabinet.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (i) approves the 'Digital Ambition 2025-28' Strategy and the 'From Data to Impact 2025-28' Strategy; and
  - (ii) supports the embedding of data and digital principles outlined in this report and the significance of these strategies in relation to the Council's transformation agenda.

### **3 Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 The digital and data strategies set out a clear framework to support the Council in the delivery of its strategic objectives and to improve outcomes for its residents and communities.
- 3.2 These strategies are of significant importance because they underpin what the Council aims to achieve through the Borough Plan missions. Without high-quality, accessible and well-governed data, it will not be possible to deliver the seamless digital services, predictive analytics and proactive interventions that residents expect.

### **4 Report Details**

#### **4.1 Overview**

This report presents two intrinsically linked strategies, 'Data Ambition 2025-2028' and 'From Data to Impact 2025-2028'.

- 4.2 Appendix 1 is the 'Digital Ambition 2025-28' Strategy and Appendix 2 'From Data to Impact 2025-28' Strategy.
- 4.3 Both strategies have been shaped through a collaborative process, informed by the Council's Digital Transformation Member Working Group, engagement with Council services and partners, and the consideration of best practice. This approach ensures the strategies reflect organisational priorities, stakeholder needs and the latest standards in digital and data innovation.

#### **4.4 Our Digital Ambition 2025 – 2028**

- 4.5 This sets out a clear aspiration:  
*To ensure every person, business, and organisation thrives in a modern, connected world where technology is accessible, inclusive, and drives innovation.*
- 4.6 This vision reflects the Council's commitment to creating a digitally confident borough that leverages technology to deliver meaningful outcomes. It is about enabling adaptability, fostering collaboration, embedding innovation and resilience, and prioritising inclusion and sustainability.

#### **4.7 Our Digital Commitments:**

The strategy is positioned as an enabler, empowering all council services to operate more effectively, efficiently and innovatively. It is built around the guiding commitments of:

- Designing services that are easy to use and accessible to all.
- Using data wisely, to inform better decisions and allocate resources effectively.

- Building strong foundations for security, privacy and innovation.
- Championing digital skills and inclusion, ensuring no one is left behind, while offering choice and flexibility in how digital solutions are embraced.
- Fostering partnership, co-design and investment in people, with transparency and accountability at the core.

#### 4.8 **Why the Digital Ambition strategy matters:**

The strategy has been developed to ensure the Council:

- Remains responsive to a rapidly changing technology landscape and evolving expectations of services that are modern and accessible.
- Positions digital as a springboard for change, driving productivity and innovation.
- Prioritises smarter decisions to support the delivery of the Borough Plan, aiming to improve outcomes for every community.

#### 4.9 Translating the Council's vision into focused activities, the strategy sets out the following priorities:

- Digitally inclusive, customer-focused services, which are easy to use, accessible, shaped by resident, colleague and partner feedback, and that have targeted support to reduce barriers.
- Data will inform continuous improvement, ensuring resources are directed where they have the greatest impact.
- Robust privacy and security measures, to maintain trust and compliance, and keep information safe.
- Digital developments will be flexible and adaptable, enabling quick responses to new challenges.
- Investment in modern digital infrastructure to strengthen connectivity, while leveraging innovation to reduce waste, optimise resources and support long-term sustainability.

#### 4.10 **Connecting the Strategies**

The Digital Ambition sets out a clear, proportionate and measured approach to ensuring that the Council maximises digital opportunities in a safe and evidence-led way. However, the most significant impact is only achievable if there is equal focus on the underpinning data.

#### 4.11 **From Data to Impact – Our Data and Insights Strategy 2025-28**

##### 4.12 This sets out a clear vision for the council:

*The Council will become a truly data-enabled organisation—one that harnesses the full potential of data and insight to deliver efficient, effective and sustainable services for residents. Support will be targeted more*

*effectively, ensuring that the right help reaches the right people at the right time and prevention is prioritised.*

**4.13 The Council's ambition is to:**

- **Empower people with timely, relevant and accessible data** ensuring colleagues, communities, councillors and partners have the data they need.
- **Generate robust insights** into complex services to support confident, evidence-led decision making.
- **Build trusted data**, blending information in a responsible and ethical way across Council services and partners to produce high-quality analytics, including forecasting and scenario modelling.
- **Build confidence and capability** among staff and Councillors to use data and insight effectively in their roles.
- **Take advantage of the latest technologies** to maximise the value of data, stay ahead of emerging opportunities and remove outdated processes and data no longer required.

**4.14 The Five Pillars:**

The delivery of the strategy will be structured around five pillars to ensure all key areas are developed holistically and that the work undertaken has significant positive impact on the organisation. The following sections are an extract from the strategy document:

**4.15 People – Building a data-confident workforce**

A centre of excellence for data will be created supported by investment in skills across the organisation. Data skills are essential in every role. By improving the data culture across the organisation, and investing in advanced analytical capabilities, staff will be empowered to ask better questions, make smarter decisions, and unlock the full value of data.

**4.16 Process – Embedding governance and ethical standards**

Clear policies, standards and ethical frameworks will be established to manage data securely and responsibly. Strong governance and oversight ensures data is accurate, secure, and used ethically – building trust and enabling innovation.

**4.17 Products – Transforming data into actionable insight**

A suite of reliable and robust data products will be developed that enable timely, evidence-led decision making. Accessible, well-designed and supported data products empower decision makers with the insights they need - when they need them. This supports proactive service design, continuous improvement and better outcomes.

**4.18 Platforms – Building the infrastructure for insight**

Modern scalable data technology will be embedded to support secure, integrated and automated data processes. A robust platform enables

seamless data access, integration and analysis – supporting efficiency and better decision making.

**4.19 Partnerships – Collaborating for greater impact**

Data partnerships will be established across sectors to share insight, drive innovation and improve outcomes. Collaboration unlocks richer insights, enables joined-up service design, and maximises community benefit.

**4.20 Centre of excellence:**

The Council's aim is to build a virtual centre of excellence – a dedicated hub for advanced data and analytics. This will see existing multi-disciplinary teams working together on shared, strategic goals. Central teams will foster collaboration between service areas and expand the community of practice, promoting evidence-based decisions and investing in data skills and capabilities across the organisation.

**4.21 Managing the interdependencies:**

The Digital Ambition and From Data to Impact strategies are intrinsically linked, forming two sides of the same transformation agenda. Digital innovation cannot thrive without high-quality, accessible, and well-governed data; it is the fuel that powers -automation, predictive analytics, and personalised services. Conversely, the value of data is fully realised only when embedded into digital platforms that enable insight-driven decision-making and seamless user experiences. Together, these strategies ensure that technology and intelligence work hand in hand—supporting Borough Plan priorities, improving service design, and enabling proactive interventions.

4.22 This interdependency demands governance that is joined-up and coordinated, as recognised through their integration with the Council's Digital Cross-Cutting Board to manage shared risks and priorities effectively.

4.23 The work programmes will be incorporated into the Council's Annual Delivery Plan for 2026/27 onwards and monitored through the quarterly, Corporate Performance Report to Cabinet.

**5 How does the decision contribute to the Borough Plan?**

5.1 Both the Digital and Data strategies support activity across all six missions of the Borough Plan. They will ensure the Council can deliver its commitments in new and innovative ways at key locations across the Borough and with partners, helping to support residents and communities in the most effective way.

5.2 The activities outlined in the strategies will modernise service delivery and improve operational flexibility. They will also enable collaboration with partners on broader strategic agendas. Having flexible and modern digital and

data solutions will provide significant advantages in terms of being able to share information across wider partners and work across wider organisational boundaries.

## **6 What engagement has taken place with partners?**

- 6.1 The digital and data strategies have been informed by work with specialist digital and data partners to ensure the strategies are aligned with best practice. The Council is also working closely with government departments, such as the Department for Education, to shape service delivery in line with the wider national agenda.

## **7 What are the financial implications?**

- 7.1 Work programmes are currently being finalised for both digital and data services which are aligned to both corporate priorities and intended benefits realisation. The work programmes are being designed to be two-year programmes running from 2026 to 2028, recognising existing digital activity contributes to the ambition. The financial implications of the work programmes will be included in the refreshed capital programme which will be considered by Council in February 2026 as part of the budget report.
- 7.2 These enabling strategies will support wider transformation across Council services as well as directly enabling realisation of specific data and digital Policy Options within the 2026 to 2030 Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 7.3 High level delivery plan:

<b>Delivery Phase</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>
Digital Milestone 1	Establish core digital platforms and build digital confidence		
Digital Milestone 2		Scale and integrate digital capabilities, accelerating delivery and improving user experience	
Digital Milestone 3			Drive innovation through digital capabilities, realising delivering measurable

			impact and embedding continuous improvement.  Benefits Realisation
Data Milestone 1	Team building, policy review, and foundational training		
Data Milestone 2	Infrastructure modernisation and initial product delivery		
Data Milestone 3		Expansion of partnerships and advanced product launches	
Data Milestone 4		Ongoing optimisation and continuous improvement	Benefits Realisation

## **8 What are the legal implications?**

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications of the strategies themselves, but the Council may choose to engage partners or procure solutions to deliver the underpinning work programmes. Any external sourcing will be underpinned by legal and procurement support to ensure compliance with the Council's procurement rules and relevant legislation.

## **9 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

- 9.1 Both these strategies will have oversight through the Council's Digital Cross-Cutting Board to ensure any risk to delivery is identified and effectively managed and mitigated. A full risk assessment will be undertaken as part of mobilisation of the delivery programme.

## **10 How does the decision contribute to the "All Together Fairer" priorities?**

- 10.1 The Digital Ambition and From Data to Impact strategies focus on the delivery of new digital and data solutions for the Council and its communities which ensures that:
- Services can be delivered to underserved or vulnerable communities.
  - Solutions reduce gaps in digital access across communities.

- Modern digital and data delivery ensures services are more inclusive, responsive, and targeted to reduce inequities.

## **11 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity issues?**

- 11.1 The completion of migration to cloud technologies enables the delivery of services across the borough, allowing all residents to access services equally irrespective of where they live.
- 11.2 The From Data to Impact Strategy will underpin the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data that helps to identify gaps or differences in service provision. Robust data standards will reduce the likelihood of bias in the data modelling and improve data quality. Improved access to data and insights will support continuous improvement and ensure services and policies are shaped by accurate insights that are fair to all.

## **12 What are the implications of the decision on climate change?**

- 12.1 The Council's preference is to host business solutions with third party suppliers, i.e. "Cloud-hosted". This means the ambitions outlined in these strategies can be delivered successfully. Modern data centres are more energy efficient than locally managed data centres with standards to help manage and reduce overall climate impact.

## **13 Are there any other options?**

- 13.1 An option is not to approve these strategies. However, it is good practice to have both Digital and Data Strategies in place to underpin the delivery of modern Council services and so this option is not recommended.

### **For further information:**

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Nathan Pardoe

**Officer:** Natalie Abraham, Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Transformation and Strategy

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### **Background Documents:**

None

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years):**

None



Cheshire West & Chester Council

# Our digital ambition 2025-2028



Cheshire West  
and Chester

# **Our Digital Ambition: 2025-2028**

## **Foreword**

I am both delighted and proud to introduce to everyone the new Digital Ambition for Cheshire West and Chester. As the Director of Strategy and Transformation, it is a privilege to share our vision for a digitally empowered future, one that puts people, communities, and innovation at the very heart of everything we do.

The world around us is changing rapidly. Digital technology is transforming the way we live, work and connect with one another. Our residents expect modern, accessible services and our businesses need robust, future-proofed digital infrastructure to flourish. The last few years have shown us just how vital digital inclusion, resilience, and adaptability are, whether in delivering services remotely, supporting vulnerable residents or driving economic growth.

This Digital Ambition is more than a strategy document; it is a promise. A promise to harness technology for the benefit of every resident, every business, and every community across Cheshire West and Chester. This enabling strategy has been shaped by listening to you – our residents, our partners, our businesses, and our staff – and our ambition is simple: to make digital work for everyone.

We will design services that are easy to use and open to all, use data wisely to make better decisions, and stay flexible so we can respond quickly to change. We'll build strong foundations that keep information safe, protect privacy, and support innovation. By doing this, we aim to create digital solutions that improve lives and help our organisation grow with confidence.

We know that turning ambition into reality will take partnership, passion, and perseverance. We will work collaboratively, with our residents, our voluntary sector, our business community and our staff, to co-design and co-deliver projects that matter. We will prioritise digital skills and inclusion, invest in our people and champion accessibility at every stage.

We are also committed to transparency and accountability. We will report regularly on our progress, share what we learn, and be open about the challenges we face. Most importantly, we will keep listening, because your voices are central to this journey.

Our Digital Ambition is a living document. It will adapt and evolve as technology advances and as the needs of our communities change. But our commitment remains steadfast: building a fairer, greener, and more connected borough through the power of digital.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to shaping this strategy. Your insights, experiences, and aspirations have informed our approach, and your ongoing involvement will be vital to our success.

Together, we can create a Cheshire West and Chester that is not only ready for the digital future, but leading the way. Thank you for joining us today, and I look forward to working with you all as we turn our digital ambition into action.

**Natalie Abraham**  
**Director of Strategy & Transformation**

## **1. Our digital commitments**

Digital is our opportunity to do things better. These commitments are our promise to design services that work for everyone, use data to make smart choices, and stay ready for change. We'll protect what matters and embrace innovation, shaping a future that's inclusive, secure, and full of possibility.

We are committing to:

**Provide digitally inclusive and customer focused services:** Designing our digital services in collaboration with our residents and colleagues to ensure they are accessible, inclusive, and shaped by user feedback. This means meeting accessibility standards, providing support for diverse needs, and making our services simpler, quicker, and easier to use for everyone.

**Ensure our decisions are data-driven:** Using data, feedback, and emerging technologies to proactively improve our services. Our decisions will be evidence-based, personalised, and continuously refined to meet the ever-changing needs of our community.

**Be agile and responsive in our delivery:** Embracing flexible, iterative approaches to digital development that can quickly respond to changes. By doing so, we will keep our services relevant, resilient, and aligned with evolving user expectations.

**Build upon smart, impactful infrastructure:** Investing in robust and futureproofed digital infrastructure that connects communities, supports sustainable growth, and drives the digital transformation of internal services. This includes delivering measurable benefits to residents in areas such as adult and children's social care.

**Protect privacy and data:** Safeguarding personal information and uphold the highest standards of data protection and cybersecurity across all digital services. We aim to ensure trust, transparency, and compliance with all legal and ethical responsibilities.

**Innovate and grow:** Supporting our local economy by fostering innovation, enabling businesses to thrive, and attracting new investment that benefits the wider community.

## 2. Why we want to improve

### Where we are now

**Delivering seamless digital customer experiences:** Over 75% of customer interactions now happen through digital channels, including online forms, voice-activated apps, personalised portals, automated telephony, and chatbots. Our award-winning website consistently receives high satisfaction ratings, and our integrated digital front door connects directly with back-office systems to ensure smooth, timely service delivery.

**Digitising internal processes:** We're also changing how we work, using Power Apps, online forms, and automated workflows to support processes. These tools help staff work more smartly, reduces manual tasks, and improves service delivery behind the scenes.

**Secure data:** We have established the necessary safeguards to protect and secure our data as we explore how Artificial Intelligence can support what we do, streamline processes and provide more personalised experiences.

**Digital foundation:** A robust digital foundation is in place, to propel our ongoing digital transformation, encompassing a variety of established capabilities, a network of digital advocates championing change and new technologies, and a digital learning platform to ensure we possess the necessary skills.

### How can we tell if we are getting it right

Our next step is to build on the progress we've made, scale up what works, and deliver greater impact for residents, businesses, and communities. Over the next three years, success means creating digital services that are simple, inclusive, and trusted, supported by strong foundations and driven by data and innovation.

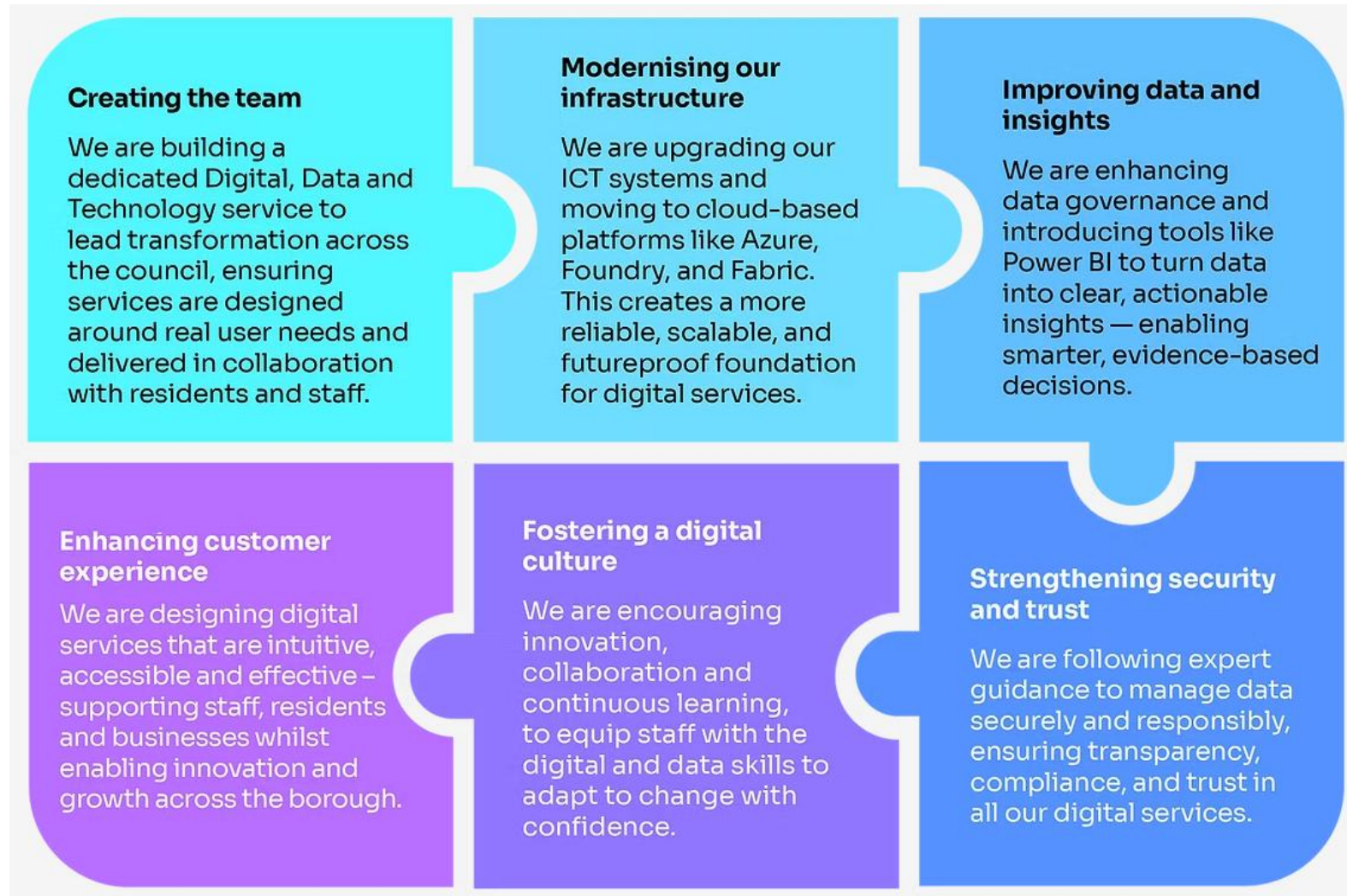
Here's what that looks like in practice:

- **Simple, inclusive services for everyone:** Residents and staff can complete tasks online in minutes, with clear support for those who need extra help.
- **Decisions that improve lives:** Data and feedback drive continuous improvements, so services adapt as needs evolve.
- **Fast, flexible delivery:** New features and fixes roll out quickly, keeping services relevant and resilient.
- **Strong, secure foundations:** Future-ready infrastructure and robust data protection give people confidence and enable better outcomes.
- **A thriving digital economy:** Businesses grow, investment flows in, and innovation benefits the whole community.

Together with colleagues and partners, we will create a digital borough that works for everyone – building trust, driving growth, and making life simpler and better for all.

## The building blocks of our digital service

To deliver our digital ambition, we are assembling the key building blocks of our digital service, each one an essential piece of the puzzle.



## Our digital methodology to embed this change

Delivering modern, efficient, and customer-focused services requires more than adopting new technologies, it requires a clear approach to applying them effectively. Our digital capabilities, from automation and data insights to AI and user-friendly platforms, provide the tools to innovate and improve how the council operates.

To ensure these capabilities deliver real value, we embed them through a structured methodology that identifies opportunities, tests solutions, and measures impact before full implementation. This approach keeps us agile, responsive and focused on outcomes that matter for residents, businesses, and staff.

## Our digital capabilities

Our range of digital capabilities enables us to leverage digital innovation to enhance the Council's services.

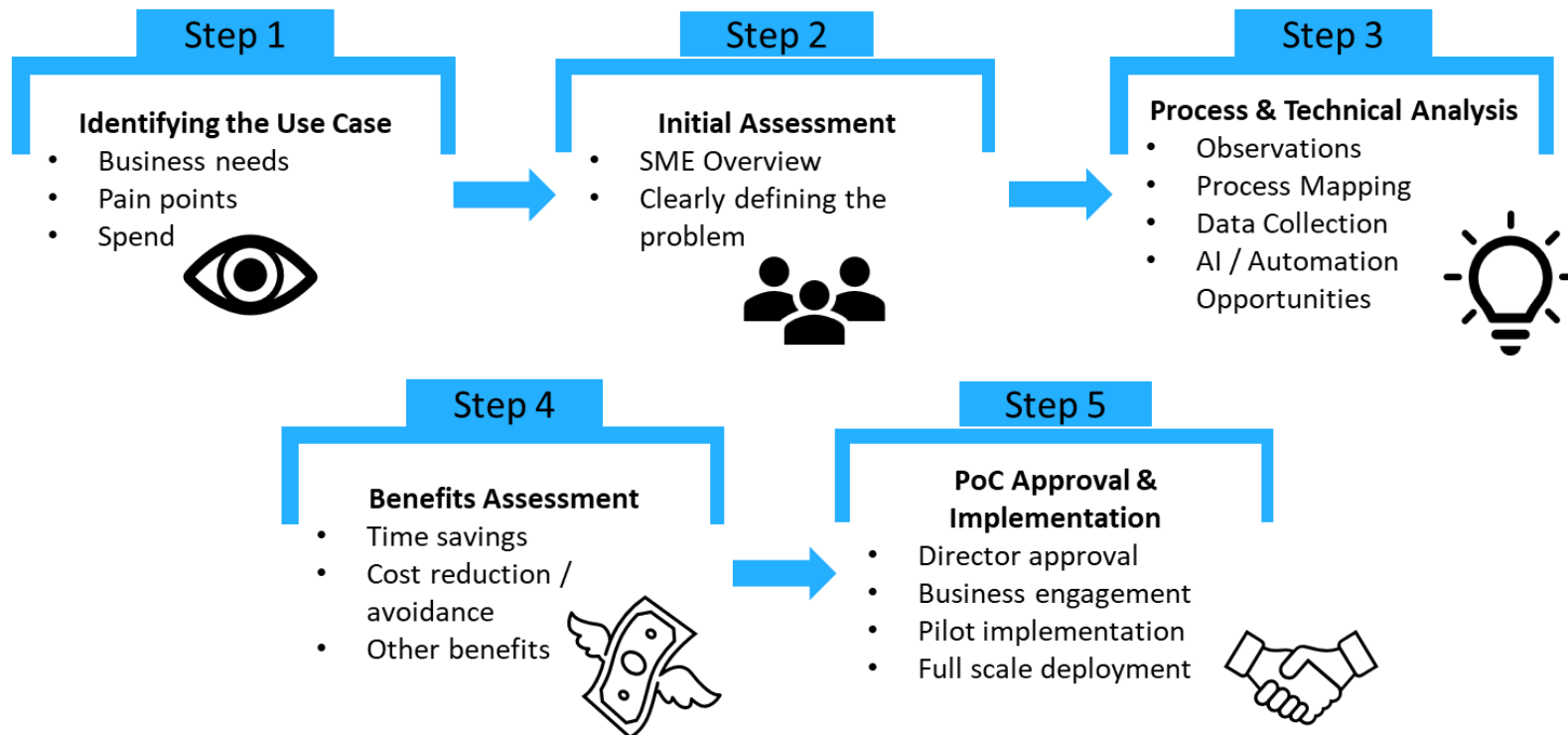
- **Power Platform suite:** The Power Platform suite supports the creation of applications, workflow and data insights.
- **Robotic Process Automation (RPA):** RPA can automate repetitive tasks.
- **Digital Forms:** Digital forms allow for data to be accurately captured, can improve accessibility and increase processing speed.
- **Portals:** Our range of portal platforms provide a centralised access point for services and information, enhancing user experience and offering a seamless integrated interface with back-office systems.
- **GovDelivery suite:** The role of the GovDelivery suite is to improve communication and engagement with residents, businesses and staff.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Gen-AI:** Artificial Intelligence and Gen-AI has the potential to transform service delivery, introducing new insights and driving out productivity and value through its application.
- **Supplier-led solutions:** Collaborating with supplier-led solutions enables the leveraging of innovative solutions and expertise.

## Our methodology

Our methodology to embed digital capabilities outlines a structured approach to identify, review, and implement digital solutions.

By identifying a process and its challenges, areas for improvement are identified. A range of digital capabilities can then be piloted to see how they perform in real-world scenarios. Based on observations and tests we can adjust to ensure the resulting solutions are effective and meet the needs of users.

After iterating the impact of the solutions, they are assessed to confirm they realise the expected benefits e.g. the reduction in time taken to assess an application. Once validated, deployment with training and support embeds the digital capability leading to improved effectiveness, productivity and customer satisfaction.

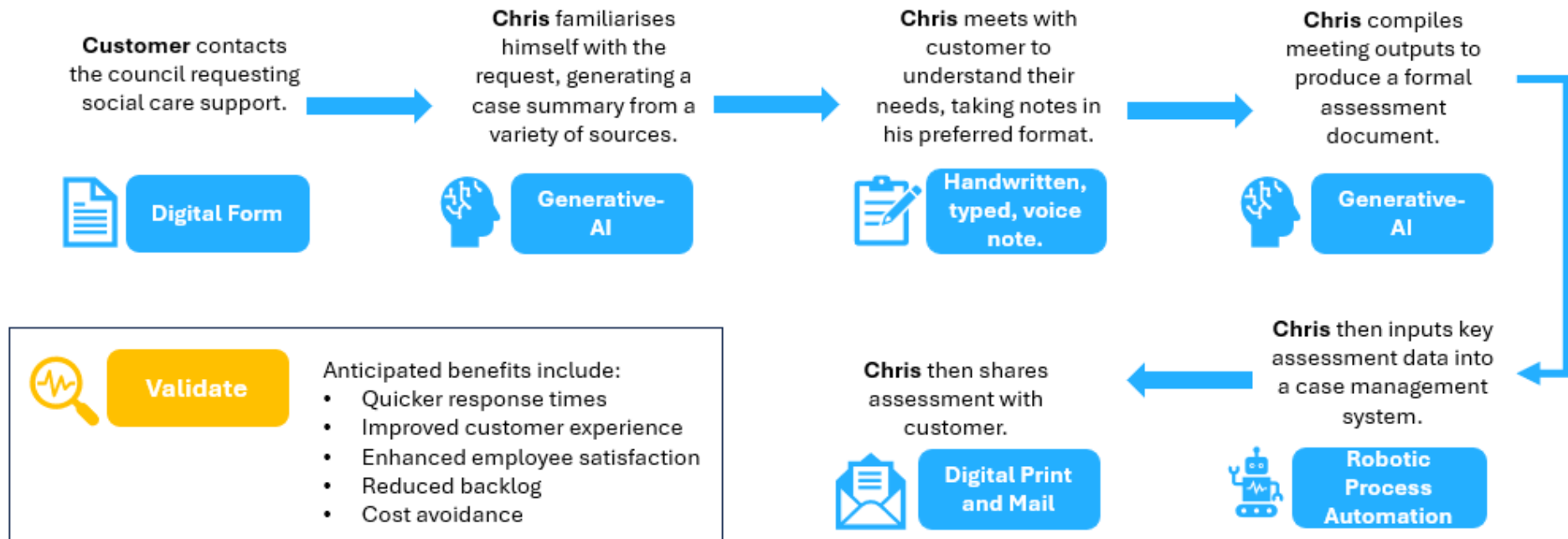




## Putting the methodology into practice

At Cheshire West and Chester, we're committed to turning digital ambition into tangible outcomes.

This section showcases a real-world example where digital and technology initiatives could support service transformation, improve resident experiences, and enhance operational resilience. This use case reflects our collaborative approach to solving local challenges with practical, people-focused solutions.





### **3. What this means for Cheshire West and Chester**

#### **What this means for the borough**

Our six digital commitments are designed to make services simpler, smarter, and more inclusive. Here's what they mean in practice:

##### **Provide digitally inclusive and customer focused services**

- Services will be easier to use and accessible to everyone, meeting high standards of inclusivity.
- Residents and colleagues will have a voice in shaping digital services, ensuring they reflect real needs.
- Support will be available for different abilities and circumstances, reducing barriers to access.

##### **Ensure our decisions are data-driven**

- We will use data and feedback to improve services continuously, making them more relevant and effective.
- Decisions will be based on evidence, helping us target resources where they make the biggest difference.
- Insights will allow us to respond to changing needs, keeping services up to date.

##### **Be agile and responsive in our delivery**

- Digital developments will be flexible and adaptable, so we can respond quickly to new challenges.
- Services will stay relevant and resilient, even as technology and expectations evolve.
- We will learn and improve as we go, rather than waiting for perfect solutions.

##### **Build upon smart, impactful infrastructure**

- Investment in digital infrastructure will strengthen connectivity and reliability across the borough.
- Internal systems will become more efficient and integrated, improving how services work behind the scenes.
- Communities will benefit from future-ready technology, supporting growth and sustainability.

##### **Protect privacy and data**

- Residents can trust that personal information is safe and secure, with strong data protection measures.
- We will maintain high standards of cybersecurity, reducing risks and protecting services.
- Transparency will be a priority, so people understand how their data is used responsibly.

### **Innovate and grow**

- Digital innovation will support local businesses and attract investment, boosting the economy.
- Residents will have better access to digital skills and opportunities, helping them thrive in a changing world.
- We will create an environment where new ideas can flourish, benefiting the whole community.

### **What this means for the Council**

Our six digital commitments are not just principles, they translate into real, measurable benefits for every service area. Here's what this means for you:

#### **Provide digitally inclusive and customer focused services**

- Services will be co-designed with residents and staff, ensuring they are intuitive and meet real needs.
- All digital services will meet accessibility standards, reducing barriers for people with disabilities or low digital confidence.
- Easier-to-use online services mean fewer calls and visits, freeing up staff time for complex cases.

#### **Ensure our decisions are data-driven**

- Data insights will help target resources where they have the greatest impact.
- Use of analytics to anticipate demand (e.g. in social care or housing) and act early.
- Decisions will be backed by real-time performance and community feedback.

#### **Be agile and responsive in our delivery**

- Iterative development means we can release enhancements quickly rather than waiting for big projects.
- Ability to pivot services in response to emergencies, policy changes or user needs without major disruption.
- Smaller, incremental changes lower the risk of costly failures.

#### **Build upon smart, impactful infrastructure**

- Investment in scalable platforms reduces technical debt and supports long-term savings.
- Improved connectivity supports remote working, digital inclusion, and economic growth.
- Modern infrastructure underpins automation and integration, reducing duplication and manual work.

#### **Protect privacy and data**

- Strong data governance ensures compliance with GDPR and builds public confidence.

- Reduced risk of breaches protects sensitive information and avoids reputational damage.
- Transparent data practices make it easier to demonstrate ethical and legal responsibility.

#### **Innovate and grow**

- Digital innovation attracts investment and supports local businesses.
- Collaboration with tech partners and academia brings new ideas and funding.
- Encourages staff to experiment and improve services, creating a more dynamic organisation.

## **4. What's next**

### **The 2025-2028 Digital Roadmap**

This three-year roadmap outlines a phased approach to delivering our digital ambition. Structured under three themes the roadmap translates ambition into action – starting with the deployment of essential digital infrastructure, progressing through service-wide integration, and culminating in transformative innovation.

Each year builds on the last to ensure that digital tools not only enhance service delivery but also empower residents, businesses, and communities to thrive in a modern, connected borough.

#### **Foundations**

**Focus:** Establish core digital platforms and build digital confidence.

#### **Activities:**

- Standardise and expand use of digital forms to improve data capture and accessibility.
- Consolidate and enhance portals to provide seamless access to services and integrate with back office systems.
- Pilot AI use cases to explore the potential for service transformation.
- Develop digital inclusion and core skills initiatives, and baseline current position.

#### **Integration and acceleration**

**Focus:** Scale and integrate digital capabilities across services, accelerating delivery and improve user experience.

#### **Activities:**

- Use data from digital forms and portals to drive service design improvements and predictive analytics.
- Integrate AI into frontline services to enhance decision-making and personalise customer interactions.

- Using baseline data, expand and embed digital inclusion and skills programmes to target support, and scale delivery both in the community and with the workforce.
- Embed digital capability reviews in service planning cycles to ensure the iterative development of solutions.

### Innovation and Impact

**Focus:** Drive innovation through digital capabilities, delivering measurable impact and embedding a culture of continuous improvement.

#### **Activities:**

- Operationalise AI solutions for proactive service delivery and real-time insights.
- Scale community engagement through digital simulations and visualisations.
- Evaluate and adjust digital services based on user feedback, performance data and emerging technologies.
- Showcase best practice across the organisation through case studies.

### Cross-cutting enablers

These enablers will be essential throughout all three years to support successful delivery:

- **Digital Methodology:** A structured, iterative approach to identifying, piloting, and embedding digital solutions.
- **User-Centred Design:** Co-design workshops, usability testing, and feedback loops to ensure relevance and accessibility.
- **Trust and Security:** Robust data governance, encryption, user control, and compliance with GDPR and other standards.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Energy-efficient technologies, paperless processes, and intelligent resource allocation.
- **Modern ICT Infrastructure:** Continued investment in scalable, secure, and resilient platforms like Azure, Fabric, and Foundry.

### The delivery and monitoring framework for our digital ambition

To ensure the successful realisation of our digital ambition, we have established a delivery and monitoring framework that will translate strategic intent into actionable outcomes. The framework is designed to be agile, transparent and aligned to the Council's organisational priorities.

### The Annual Delivery Plan

The Council's Annual Delivery Plan is the strategic anchor, ensuring all digital activity is aligned with the Council's broader transformation goals and the Borough Plan. It will set out the key digital capabilities and initiatives for each year, and will be informed by:

- emerging opportunities in data, automation and AI
- service-led capability reviews
- insights from user-centred design and co-production workshops
- lessons learnt from previous initiatives.

#### Resourced and prioritised work programme

The Council's Annual Delivery Plan will feed a prioritised work programme, which will:

- map initiatives against financial and human resources
- be centred around the digital methodology to assess feasibility and impact
- ensure cross cutting enablers (e.g. trust and security, sustainable practices and modern infrastructure) are embedded throughout.

#### Work Packages

Each activity identified in the work programme will be developed into a discreet work package. Serving as a business case, the work packages will include:

- a clear problem statement and the desired outcomes
- cost-benefit analysis, including financial and operational impacts
- risk assessment and mitigation strategies
- delivery timelines and success metrics.

#### Monitoring

Feedback loops from users and delivery teams will be used to refine approaches, ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to emerging needs. Progress will be monitored through:

- regular delivery reviews with delivery teams
- a digital delivery dashboard, showing progress with digital initiatives
- digital pulse surveys to assess satisfaction with new digital services.

## Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in audio, Braille, large print or other formats. If you would like information in another format or language, including British Sign Language, please email us at: [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

إذا أردت المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بطريقة أخرى، نرجو أن تطلب ذلك منا.

যদি আপনি এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদেরকে বলুন।

Pokud byste požadovali informace v jiném jazyce nebo formátu, kontaktujte nás

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਥੇ ਮੰਗ ਲਵੋ।

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

Türkçe bilgi almak istiyorsanız, bize başvurabilirsiniz.

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔

You can also telephone: **0300 123 8 123**

or textphone: **18001 0300 123 8 123**

website: [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

# From Data to Impact

## Our Data and Insights Strategy

### 2025-2028



# From Data to Impact: Our Data and Insights Strategy 2025-2028

## Foreword

Data is central to how we operate as a Council. Yet there remains a significant opportunity to strengthen how we collect, manage, analyse and apply data - unlocking its full potential to make smarter decisions and deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Like councils across the country, we face unprecedented challenges - an ageing population, growing demand for services, rising expectations and financial pressures. Data has the power to help us meet these challenges head-on - enabling smarter decisions, targeted interventions, efficient use of resources and early action to prevent problems arising. To fully harness this potential, we must overcome barriers - legacy technology, fragmented systems, inconsistent data quality, limited awareness of the value of data, and gaps in skills across the organisation.

This Strategy marks a step change in our ambition. By transforming our approach to data and insight, we aim to become a truly data-driven organisation. This means using data to design more responsive services, understand and manage demand, target support where it is most needed and to develop preventative approaches. It means making confident, evidence-led decisions that benefit our residents, businesses, partners and colleagues. Our strategy outlines the principles that will guide us, and the approach we will take to achieve this vision by 2028.

We start from a strong foundation: our Insight and Intelligence team and Data Insights team are driving innovation and emerging technologies - cloud platforms, advanced analytics and AI – are turning ideas into reality.

Crucially, this strategy underpins our *Digital Ambition*. Data is the fuel that powers digital transformation. Without high-quality, accessible and well-governed data, we cannot deliver the seamless, personalised and proactive services our residents expect. Whether it's enabling automation, supporting predictive analytics, or improving digital self-service, data is the foundation on which our digital future is built. Equally, this strategy is essential to delivering the **missions of the Borough Plan**. Whether we are working to reduce inequalities, improve health and wellbeing, support inclusive economic growth, or protect our environment, data and insight is central to understanding what works, identifying where support is most needed, and measuring the impact of our actions. It will help us to design services around real-world need, intervene earlier and work more effectively with our communities and partners.

This strategy is our commitment to unlocking the full value of data and insight - transforming how we work, how we serve, and how we shape the future of Cheshire



West. It is not just a technical roadmap - it is a call to action for every part of the organisation to embrace data as a strategic asset and a catalyst for change.

## Our Ambition

We will be a truly **data-enabled organisation**—one that harnesses the full potential of data and insight to deliver efficient, effective and sustainable services for our residents. We will also target support more effectively, ensuring that the right help reaches the right people at the right time and prevention is prioritised.

By embedding data and insight into everything we do, we will be better equipped to respond to complex challenges, make timely and informed decisions, invest in services which achieve impact, and improve outcomes across our communities. Our ambition is to:

- **Empower people with timely, relevant and accessible data** ensuring our colleagues, communities, councillors and partners have the data they need.
- **Generate robust insights** into complex services to support confident, evidence-led decision making.
- **Build trusted data**, ethically blending information across Council services and partners to produce high-quality analytics, including forecasting and scenario modelling.
- **Build confidence and capability** among staff and Councillors to use data and insight effectively in their roles.
- **Take advantage of the latest technologies** to maximise the value of data, stay ahead of emerging opportunities and decommission legacy processes and datasets.

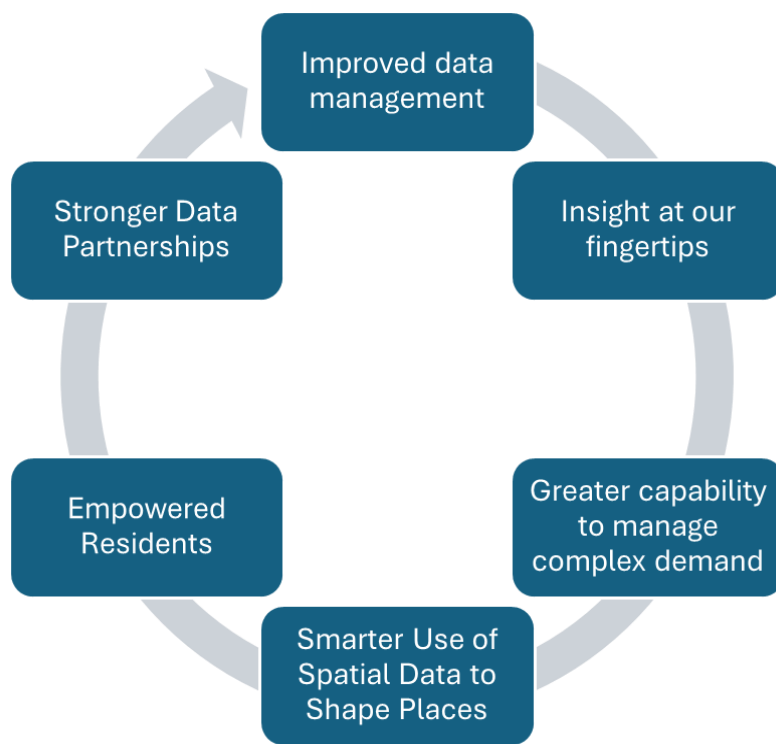
This ambition is not just about improving internal processes - it's about making a tangible difference to people's lives. By using data more intelligently, we will be able to:

- **Identify emerging needs earlier**, enabling preventative action before issues escalate.
- **Target support more effectively**, ensuring that the right help reaches the right people at the right time.
- **Design services around real-world demand**, improving accessibility, responsiveness and impact.
- **Reduce inequalities**, by understanding where gaps exist and tailoring interventions to close them.
- **Empower people and communities**, by making data and insights about their communities more transparent and accessible.

Ultimately, this strategy will help us shift from reactive to proactive service delivery, tackling root causes rather than symptoms with a focus on prevention and early intervention - supporting healthier, safer and more resilient communities across Cheshire West.

## Our aims for 2028

This strategy will deliver six key outcomes by 2028 - each with a tangible impact on how we work and on the lives of our residents:



### 1. Improved data management

We will collect, manage and store data more effectively across the Council. We will work in line with technology best practice, information governance and ethical principles, creating a council-wide network on which to base analytics and decision making.

#### Impact:

- Data will be joined-up, accurate, consistent and secure, reducing duplication and errors.
- Services will spend less time searching for information and more time acting on insights.
- People and communities will benefit from quicker, more reliable responses and better coordination between teams.

## **2. Insight at our fingertips**

Services will have access to data and insights in usable, intuitive formats. New tools will empower teams to better understand the needs of our residents, evaluate the impact of interventions, and drive continuous improvement.

### **Impact:**

- Managers will make faster, evidence-based decisions to improve service delivery.
- Councillors will have clear, accessible data to support local priorities.
- People and communities will see services that adapt quickly to changing needs.

## **3. Greater capability to manage complex demand**

We will improve how we join and analyse data to build a richer picture of need and forecast demand - particularly in high-impact areas such as children's services, adult social care and homelessness. Enhanced descriptive and predictive analytics will support earlier, more targeted interventions at both population and individual levels.

### **Impact:**

- People needing support will receive it sooner, preventing crises.
- Resources will be allocated more effectively, reducing costs and improving outcomes.
- Services will shift from reactive to proactive, tackling root causes rather than symptoms.

## **4. Smarter use of spatial data to shape places**

We will take a more sophisticated and integrated approach to spatial data, ensuring it is used alongside our service data to deliver an enhanced view of our communities. It will also be used to enable a better understanding of need and inform our modelling by highlighting variation across the Borough, leading to improvements in our physical spaces and support place-based decision making.

### **Impact:**

- Investment decisions will be informed by real data on community needs and usage.
- Local areas will benefit from targeted improvements in housing, transport and green spaces.
- Residents will experience safer, healthier and more vibrant neighbourhoods.

## **5. Empowered residents**

Residents will have easier access to data and insights about local services and places. This transparency will help people understand what's available, be more involved in shaping services, and contribute to thriving communities.

### **Impact:**

- People will feel more informed and confident about the support they can access.
- Communities will have a stronger voice in shaping local priorities.
- Greater trust in the Council through openness and accountability.

## **6. Stronger data partnerships**

We will deepen collaboration with key partners around data, insight and technology. Improved data sharing and joint working will unlock richer insights, drive innovation and deliver efficiencies.

### **Impact:**

- Local organisations, including health, housing and the voluntary sector, will work from a shared understanding of need.
- Joint initiatives will tackle complex issues like health inequalities and economic growth.
- People and communities will benefit from more joined-up, holistic support.

Achieving these aims will require a whole-organisation commitment to collaboration, innovation and data-informed decision making - supported by investment in the right infrastructure, skills and governance.

## How this Strategy has been developed

This strategy has been shaped through extensive engagement with stakeholders, consideration of national best practice, and a full organisational review of our data and analytics capabilities.

### Collaboration with stakeholders

To ensure this strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of our organisation and communities, we have engaged widely with:

- Colleagues across the Council – including those who input, manage, analyse and use data. This included structured conversations with analysts, service managers and technical teams, as well as feedback from participants in the Multiverse data apprenticeship programme. The Business Intelligence Review conducted by our data partner, provided a detailed assessment of current skills, gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Elected Councillors – through workshops and briefings, we explored how data can better support Members in their roles, including local decision making, community engagement and scrutiny. Their feedback has informed our ambition to develop a new data offer for Councillors.
- Local partner organisations – including NHS colleagues, voluntary sector partners, and academic institutions. These conversations have helped shape our thinking around data sharing, joint intelligence, and collaborative insight generation.

### Consideration of best practice

The aims and actions in this strategy are informed by national guidance and frameworks, including:

- The UK Government's Data and Digital Professional Framework, which has guided our thinking on roles, responsibilities and skills development.
- Nesta's Data Maturity Framework, against which we aim to progress towards Level 4 "Maturing" by 2028.
- The Local Government Association Data Maturity Model, which we will use to benchmark progress.
- The Data Maturity Assessment for Government (DMA), where we are targeting Level 4 "Developing".

### **Organisational review: Business Intelligence and Target Operating Model**

A pivotal input to this strategy was the Data Strategy Review and Target Operating Model developed by our data partner. This review provided:

- A comprehensive assessment of our current data capabilities, including strengths in automation and dashboarding, and gaps in governance, ownership and strategic alignment.
- Recommendations for a centralised data function (Hub model) to reduce duplication, improve trust in data, and accelerate delivery of insights.
- A proposed Target Operating Model (TOM) covering data engineering, analytics, AI development, governance, and performance management.
- A roadmap for skills development, data literacy, and embedding analytics into business processes.

This strategy builds directly on those recommendations and sets out how we will implement them in practice.

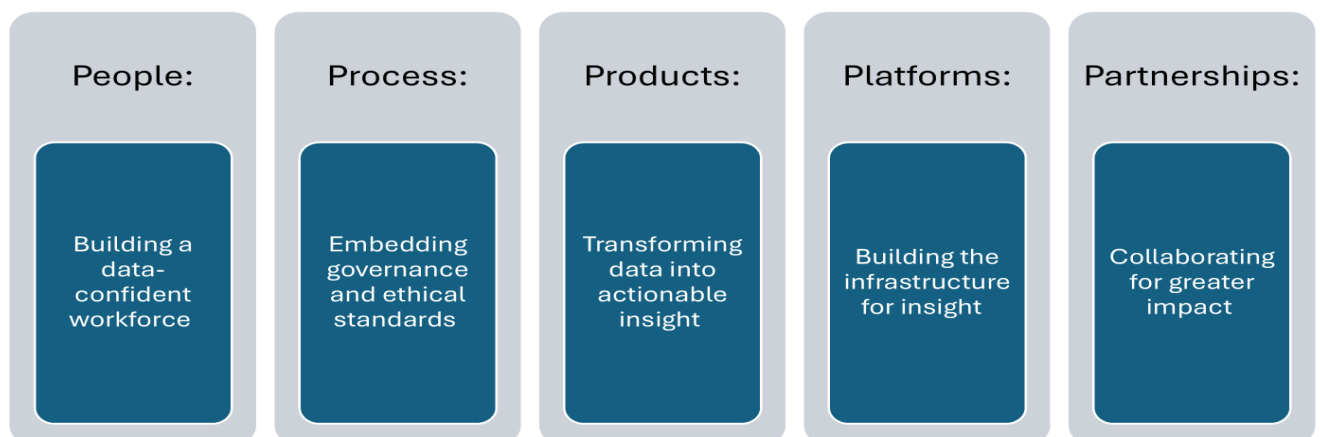
### Links to other strategies and key priorities

This Strategy does not sit in isolation and connects with existing strategies and plans set out by the Council and our partners including:

- Borough Plan – Play your Part Towards a Stronger Future 2024–2028
- Digital Ambition 2025-2028
- Cyber Security Work Programme
- Information Governance Work Programme
- Partner strategies, such as Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System’s ‘Digital and Data Strategy 2022-2025’

### Our five pillars of change

To realise our ambition by 2028, we have developed a programme of work structured around five key pillars:



1. People: Building a data-confident workforce
2. Process: Embedding governance and ethical standards
3. Products: Transforming data into actionable insight

4. Platforms: Building the infrastructure for insight
5. Partnerships: Collaborating for greater impact

Each pillar represents a strategic driver for change and includes targeted actions to embed data and insight across the organisation.

## **1. People – Building a data-confident workforce**

### **Aim:**

Create a centre of excellence for data and invest in skills across the organisation.

### **Why this matters:**

Data skills are essential in every role. By improving the data culture across our organisation, and investing in advanced analytical capabilities, we will empower staff to ask better questions, make smarter decisions, and unlock the full value of our data.

### **Key actions:**

- Establish clear roles and responsibilities.
- Embed a diverse data team including analysts, engineers, data scientists and leaders.
- Expand business partnering to embed data expertise across services.
- Develop and effectively disseminate an organisation wide set of standards and best practice.
- Deliver training programmes to improve data skills and awareness of data ethics, including the use of data for prevention.
- Facilitate cross-service working to support teams to share data and insights.
- Invest in advanced technical skills (e.g. data engineering, AI, analytics).
- Grow the 'Data Hive' - a peer learning network for sharing tools, techniques and best practice.

## **2. Process – Embedding governance and ethical standards**

### **Aim:**

Establish clear policies, standards and ethical frameworks to manage data securely and responsibly.

### **Why this matters:**

Robust governance ensures data is accurate, secure, and used ethically - building trust and enabling innovation.

### **Key actions:**

- Review and update data policies in collaboration with Information Governance.
- Define and implement data standards aligned with legislation and best practice.
- Develop a framework for data ethics to guide responsible analytics.
- Improve data quality through validation tools and clear ownership protocols.
- Explore links with the Cyber Security programme and digitisation of paper records.



### **3. Products – Transforming data into actionable insight**

**Aim:**

Develop a suite of reliable and robust data products that enable timely, evidence-led decision making.

**Why this matters:**

Accessible, well-designed and curated data products empower decision makers with the insights they need - when they need them. This supports proactive service design, continuous improvement and better outcomes.

**Key actions:**

- Create up-to-date dashboards for core services, covering demand, cost, staffing and activity.
- Develop predictive models to forecast demand and identify opportunities for prevention in high-impact areas (such as social care and homelessness).
- Introduce risk stratification tools to identify population segments most likely to need support.
- Enhance spatial data capabilities through a centralised GIS offer.
- Launch a new Councillor and public-facing portal to improve access to local data.

### **4. Platforms – Building the infrastructure for insight**

**Aim:**

Develop a modern, scalable data platform to support secure, integrated and automated data processes.

**Why this matters:**

A robust platform enables seamless data access, integration and analysis - supporting efficiency and better decision making.

**Key actions:**

- Migrate priority datasets to Microsoft Fabric to create a trusted central repository.
- Implement master data management to create single views of clients and assets.
- Introduce role-based access and data security protocols.
- Automate key data processes to support reporting and statutory returns.
- Embed data standards into procurement requirements for new systems.
- Standardise development in line with best practice to reduce inefficiencies.
- Decommission legacy datasets and technology to reduce cost.

### **5. Partnerships – Collaborating for greater impact**

**Aim:**

Strengthen data partnerships across sectors to share insight, drive innovation and improve outcomes.

**Why this matters:**

Collaboration unlocks richer insights, enables joined-up service design, and maximises community benefit.

**Key actions:**

- Develop a data sharing policy to guide ethical and secure collaboration.
- Establish governance structures and common data standards to support interoperability.
- Expand use of shared platforms like Microsoft Azure and Fabric for cross-sector data access.
- Actively engage with central Government departments regarding future change, such as statutory data returns.
- Strengthen partnerships with NHS, voluntary sector, academia and technology providers and ensure close working relationships with Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.
- Play an active role in regional and national data networks.

## The five principles in practice

Delivering our ambition requires more than words - it demands action. Across Cheshire West and Chester Council, we are already putting the five principles of this strategy—People, Process, Products, Platform and Partners—into practice through innovative projects that demonstrate the power of data and insight.

These case studies showcase how we are building the foundations for a data-driven organisation and the tangible benefits this brings for services and residents. Each example highlights how the principles work together to:

- Empower our workforce with the skills and confidence to use data effectively.
- Embed governance and ethical standards into every stage of data management.
- Create high-quality products that turn raw data into actionable insight.
- Invest in modern platforms that enable secure, scalable and integrated data solutions.
- Strengthen partnerships to share knowledge, drive innovation and deliver better outcomes.

From growing a data culture through the Data Hive, to transforming Adult Social Care reporting, to pioneering predictive analytics and spatial intelligence, these projects illustrate the impact of our strategy in real-world settings.

They show how data is helping us:

- Respond to complex challenges with agility.
- Improve efficiency and reduce costs.
- Deliver preventative services that make a real difference to people's lives.
- Build trust through transparency and collaboration.

These examples are just the beginning. As we scale our efforts, the principles demonstrated here will underpin every aspect of our transformation - ensuring that by 2028, the Council is a truly data-enabled organisation.

### **Case Study 1: The Data Hive – growing a data-confident workforce**

#### **Overview:**

The Data Hive is our community of best practice, designed to grow the organisation's data culture and develop colleagues' expertise in Power BI and analytics.

#### **People**

- Over 100 staff have completed or are undertaking data qualifications through our partnership with Multiverse.
- Colleagues from across services collaborate to share learning and improve confidence in using data.

#### **Process**

- Promotes consistent approaches to reporting and analysis, embedding governance and ethical principles.
- Encourages peer learning and standardisation of Power BI development.

#### **Products**

- Creation of reusable dashboards and templates, reducing duplication and improving quality.
- Supports operational decision making and strategic planning.

#### **Platform**

- Built on our secure cloud-based data platform, ensuring reports use trusted datasets.
- Enables scalability and integration with other Council systems.

#### **Partners**

- Collaboration with Multiverse for apprenticeships and technology partners for training resources.
- Ensures our workforce stays up to date with emerging tools and techniques.

#### **Impact:**

- Faster, more accurate reporting.
- Develop insight more quickly.
- A stronger data culture across the organisation underpinned by peer support.

## **Case Study 2: Adult Social Care (ASC) automated reporting –driving efficiency and insight**

### **Overview:**

Automated reporting for ASC has transformed how we monitor cost, activity and demand, enabling real-time decision making.

### **People**

- Project team included service managers and representatives from Insight and Intelligence and Data Insights.
- Co-designed to meet operational and strategic needs.

### **Process**

- Role-based access controls ensure sensitive data is protected while enabling wider visibility.
- Information security built into the model from the start.

### **Products**

- Real-time dashboards provide insights into cost, activity and demand.
- Underpins performance discussions and identifies data quality issues early.

### **Platform**

- Runs on our secure Azure data platform, reducing reliance on legacy systems.
- Supports future scalability and cost savings.

### **Partners**

- Collaboration with technology suppliers to optimise reporting and ensure compliance with best practice.

### **Impact:**

- Improved efficiency and accuracy of business intelligence reporting.
- Faster response to emerging trends and enhanced ability to implement preventative measures for vulnerable groups
- Better resource allocation and planning.

## Making it happen

Delivering our ambition to become a truly data and insight-driven organisation will require strong governance, clear accountability, sustained investment, and a commitment to continuous improvement. This section sets out how we will ensure the strategy is implemented effectively with a focus on prevention through data-drive early intervention.

### Accountability and governance

It is critical that the interdependencies between both our ‘Digital Ambition’ and our ‘From Data to Impact’ strategies are managed effectively. Therefore, our existing Digital Cross-Cutting Board Terms of Reference will be refreshed to provide guidance and oversight of our shared goals. This group will:

- Set the direction to ensure alignment with the Borough Plan and our Digital Ambition.
- Coordinate efforts across programmes, keeping projects on track and resolving any gaps and challenges.
- Monitor progress against key milestones and hold services accountable for delivery.
- Champion ethical data use and ensure compliance with legal and regulatory standards.
- Share best practice and act as a forum for resolving cross-cutting data issues.

The group will bring together experts from Insight and Intelligence, Information Governance, Digital, Finance and service areas, with senior sponsorship from the Corporate Leadership Team.

### Delivery approach

A hybrid approach to delivery is recommended to ensure the programme can be delivered within the allocated budget and to maximise the opportunity for upskilling and knowledge retention across internal teams.

- **Commission** specific technical support to deliver templated deployments in line with best practice that internal teams can replicate
- **Onboard** additional resources to help accelerate technical delivery of new products and support succession planning and knowledge transfer
- **Migrate** existing datasets and SQL scripts to Fabric to re-use existing data models where appropriate and avoid unnecessary cost
- **Enhance** existing reporting to reflect best practice and avoid duplication – one data model to support multiple reporting requirements
- **Decommission** legacy datasets and technology reducing duplication and cost.

## Reporting progress

Progress will be tracked through:

- A quarterly delivery dashboard, reporting against each of the five strategic pillars.
- Integration with the Council's Annual Delivery Plan and corporate performance reporting.
- Regular updates to Management Board and Cabinet, highlighting achievements, risks and areas requiring escalation.
- Public transparency through published updates and case studies showcasing impact.

## Strategic Milestones

This strategy sets out a transformative roadmap to elevate data capabilities, governance, and impact across the organisation. The plan is structured around a number of core milestones, sequenced into four phases over a two-year period.

**Phase 1 (Months 1–6):** Team building, policy review, and foundational training.

- **Build a centre of excellence:**  
Establish a virtual multidisciplinary team and launch targeted training programmes to embed data expertise and ethical awareness throughout the organisation. Further develop the 'Data Hive' peer learning network to foster collaboration and best practice sharing.
- **Strengthen data governance and quality:**  
Review and update data policies, implement robust data standards and develop a framework for responsible analytics. These actions will ensure compliance, improve data quality and support ethical decision-making.

**Phase 2 (Months 7–12):** Infrastructure modernisation and initial product delivery.

- **Modernise data platforms and infrastructure:**  
Migrate priority datasets to Microsoft Fabric, implement master data management, and automate key processes. Standardise development practices and decommission legacy systems to drive efficiency and security.
- **Advance data products and insights:**  
Deliver modern dashboards, predictive models, and risk stratification tools to enhance service delivery and resource planning. Expand spatial data capabilities and launch a public-facing portal to improve data accessibility for stakeholders.

**Phase 3 (Months 13–18):** Expansion of partnerships and advanced product launches.

- **Foster strategic data partnerships:**

Develop policies and governance structures to enable ethical, secure data sharing. Strengthen partnerships with NHS, voluntary sector, academia, and technology providers, create strong relationships with Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority, and actively participate in regional and national data networks.

**Phase 4 (Months 19–24+):** Ongoing optimisation and continuous improvement

- **Review strategic priorities:**

Assess development to date, identify gaps and reprioritise if needed.

This strategic approach will position the organisation as a leader in data-driven decision-making, ensuring robust governance, innovative products, and strong partnerships to deliver lasting value.

## Finance and investment

Delivery of this strategy will be supported by:

- Targeted investment in infrastructure, skills and technology, aligned with our Financial Strategy.
- Use of transformation funding and external grants where available.
- A business case approach to new data initiatives, ensuring value for money and measurable benefits.
- Ongoing review of resource requirements to ensure sustainability.

## Evaluation

We will evaluate the success of the strategy through:

- **Achievement of the six strategic aims by 2028**, ensuring progress across data management, insight accessibility, demand forecasting, spatial intelligence, resident empowerment and partnership working.
- **Improvements in data quality, accessibility and usage** across the organisation, measured through audits and adoption metrics.
- **Evidence of better decision making and service outcomes**, demonstrated by faster response times, improved resource allocation and enhanced performance reporting.
- **Evidence of successful prevention and reduction of demand through data-driven interventions**, such as earlier support in Children's Services and Adult Social Care, reducing crisis interventions and improving wellbeing.

- **Impact on residents and communities**, including improved access to information, greater involvement in shaping services, and more equitable outcomes.
- **Feedback from colleagues, Councillors, partners and residents**, gathered through surveys, engagement sessions and case studies.
- **Benchmarking against national standards and peer organisations**, including progress against Nesta's Data Maturity Framework and the Data Maturity Assessment for Government.
- **Demonstrable contribution to Borough Plan missions**, such as reducing inequalities, improving health and wellbeing, supporting inclusive economic growth and protecting the environment.



## Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in audio, Braille, large print or other formats. If you would like information in another format or language, including British Sign Language, please email us at: [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

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যদি আপনি এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদেরকে বলুন।

Pokud byste požadovali informace v jiném jazyce nebo formátu, kontaktujte nás

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ਜੇ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਥੇ ਮੰਗ ਲਵੋ।

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

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# Cheshire West and Chester Council

## Report to Cabinet

<b>Date</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> December 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Rose McArthur – Director of Transport and Highways
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Karen Shore – Cabinet Member for Transport and Highways (including Waste)
<b>Report Title:</b>	Fleet Maintenance Service, New Contract Award
<b>Is this a Key Decision?</b> [(one that affects finances over £1m or significantly affects two or more wards)]	Yes
<b>Exempt Report:</b>	No

### 1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report presents the outcomes of a review of Cheshire West Recycling (CWR), which was undertaken to assess the suitability of the company to continue to deliver the Council's Fleet Maintenance service beyond March 2026, when the current contractual arrangement comes to an end. This report presents a recommendation for the award of a contract for continued Fleet Maintenance to CWR.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- i) approve the award of a new fleet maintenance service contract to Cheshire West Recycling (CWR) for an initial period of 8 years, with the option to extend for a further 4 years, commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026; and
  - ii) delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to agree any property arrangements to facilitate the award of the new fleet maintenance contract.

### 3 Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The information gathered and assessed during the Company Review demonstrates that awarding CWR a new Fleet Maintenance Service contract will minimise risk around future service delivery and maintain affordability of

the service. It will also ensure that the Council continue to receive a high quality and efficient service that provides best value and it will minimise disruption and provide stability for what is a high performing and effective operational workforce.

## **4 Report Details**

### Background and Context

- 4.1 CWR was established as a wholly owned company controlled by Cheshire West and Chester Council in accordance with Regulation 12 of the Public Contract Regulations 2015, operating in accordance with co-operative principles and with a social and environmental purpose. The Council entered a service contract with CWR to deliver kerbside recycling and waste collection services from 29 March 2020.
- 4.2 The Council directly own 147 vehicles across a variety of different Council service areas, ranging from small vans to accessible buses and gritters, 4x4's, quad bikes, tractors and trailers and electric vehicles. There are lease arrangements in place for a further 163 vehicles across a number of services. There is future opportunity to grow the Council electric fleet and to undertake maintenance of these vehicles.
- 4.3 Following a full options appraisal, approval was given in April 2022 to create two new workshops to replace the Phoenix House Depot, to provide maintenance services across the Council fleet. In October 2022, CWR were awarded a two-year contract (with optional one year extension) to manage these fleet workshops and provide continuity of service for the Council's Vehicle Operator License.
- 4.4 The 2024 CWR Company Review facilitated the award of a new Kerbside Recycling and Waste Collection Contract to CWR, commencing in April 2026 for a period of eight years, with the option to extend for a further four years.
- 4.5 To ensure consistency and operational alignment, the Council intends to renew the Fleet Maintenance Contract so that its terms match the duration of the above waste / recycling contract. This strategic alignment will support service continuity, improve contract management efficiency, and enhance long term planning across both waste collection and fleet maintenance operations.

### Review Approach

- 4.6 A whole company review was required for CWR to ensure the Council was receiving value for money. The provision of Fleet Maintenance services was included in the review.

- 4.7 The review process was developed using a methodology and best practice processes from other Council company reviews that have been undertaken. Lead officers developed the specific methodology for this review in conjunction with the Council's Senior Managers for Assurance and Procurement, to ensure a fair, thorough and objective process.

#### Findings

- 4.8 The CWR Company Review was undertaken in early 2024 and the results were shared with Cabinet in October 2024. CWR were able to demonstrate they are meeting Council and Commissioning Objectives. Despite teething problems at the start of the vehicle maintenance contract there was no break in service provision. CWR continued to maintain vehicles and they are proactive and collaborative. The Fleet team rate the relationship with CWR very highly and the Company is very data driven giving valuable information to the service. The added value provided to the service is significant, the staff and company have proved to be very flexible when required.
- 4.9 The location of the two workshops in the Borough has helped significantly in enabling the reduction of emissions and travel time both when responding to break downs and when vehicles are brought in for routine maintenance.
- 4.10 The Company themselves recognise Social Value is an area for improvement as they are now at a 'business as usual' stage of operation. CWR have set achievable targets for Social Value going forward.

#### Companies Test

- 4.11 Within Cheshire West and Chester Council's Constitution, there is an intention to support the development and growth of council-owned companies. This is underpinned by the Finance and Contract Procedure Rules (Section G4E, references E3.7 and E8.1), which provide the framework for enabling such growth.
- 4.12 The development of Council companies plays a vital role in helping the Council deliver its strategic outcomes. These companies offer a platform for innovation, allowing the creation of services that extend beyond the traditional council model. For services that could be delivered by council companies a Companies Test is undertaken, and where they can meet the necessary specifications and provide value for money the intention is that they should be given the opportunity to bid for work.
- 4.13 To enable this growth, it is essential that the Council actively identifies and explores potential opportunities that could be commissioned through its companies. The proposed approach begins with a positive and open

mindset—asking “why not?”—to encourage commissioners to consider the feasibility of using Council companies as delivery vehicles for services.

- 4.14 Early identification of opportunities is key. A structured “pipeline” of potential growth opportunities is developed through ongoing discussions with commissioners, the Change team (major projects), Corporate Management, the Senior Leadership team, and wider Council communications. This pipeline is supported by the application of a “Companies Test,” which serves as a mechanism to assess and progress suitable opportunities.

#### Options Appraisal

- 4.15 In considering the requirements of the Companies Test, an options appraisal has been undertaken to determine the most appropriate route for the future delivery of the Council’s fleet maintenance provision, currently delivered under contract with CWR. This process is a critical part of good governance and decision-making, ensuring that the Council considers all viable alternatives and selects the option that delivers the best overall value - financially, socially, and operationally.
- 4.16 The appraisal focused on two primary options: to award a new contract to CWR or to initiate a competitive procurement process to seek an external provider on the open market. In evaluating these options, the aim was to ensure that any decision taken would align with its strategic objectives, deliver value for money, and support the wider interests of residents and staff.
- 4.17 To guide the assessment, four key themes were established as evaluation criteria: flexibility, social value, staff considerations, and risk. Flexibility refers to the ability of the service model to adapt to future changes in policy, demand, or service design. Social value encompasses the broader benefits to the community, such as local employment, environmental impact, and community engagement. Staff considerations include the implications for workforce stability, terms and conditions, and continuity of service provision. Finally, risk assessment focused on the potential for service disruption, financial exposure, and reputational impact.
- 4.18 By applying these criteria, the appraisal has been able to weigh the strengths and limitations of each option in a structured and transparent manner. This ensures that the chosen approach is not only cost-effective but also aligns with the Council’s values and long-term ambitions.

4.19 The appraisal has recommended the award of the Council's Fleet Maintenance Contract to CWR based on the following findings:

- CWR demonstrated that they have the technical expertise and direct experience needed to operate the Fleet Maintenance service for the Council and would be able to mobilise quickly to maintain quality of service
- CWR's aims align with the service strategy and they operate within clearly defined performance standards which meet our service requirements
- CWR were able to demonstrate that their proposed approach would meet Council & Commissioning Service Objectives for financial and performance management
- The appraisal noted that there have been no significant issues with CWR performance since inception. The appraisal looked positively on Fleet Service's insight that Officers are very happy with the company's performance to date and commissioning CWR would retain that positive relationship
- The appraisal noted that the added value provided to the service by CWR is significant. CWR staff and the wider company are always happy to help and have proved to be very flexible when required. Their enthusiasm to tackle immediate challenges is very important to ensure that the fleet operates effectively
- The appraisal did note however that there are potential areas for development going forward with CWR which would help the Council with future service delivery. CWR acknowledge these learning points and are committed to working with officers to address these
- CWR are very data led, giving valuable information to the service to enable clear, evidence led decision making

## **5 How does the decision contribute to the Council Plan?**

- 5.1 The review demonstrates the Council's commitment to evaluating arrangements to ensure that services provided to residents of the Borough are effective, safe, offer value for money and support the Council's net zero carbon commitment.

## **6 What engagement has taken place with partners?**

- 6.1 The Council has worked with CWR through this review, to collate current data and service information. They provided explanation and clarification to the review on associated workstreams as required. They supported the benchmarking exercise and work completed by external technical advisors.

## **7 What are the financial implications?**

- 7.1 The company review undertaken during 2024 provided assurance that CWR were providing good quality services that represent value for money for the Council and residents within the Borough. To gain this assurance the Council

undertook a benchmarking exercise comparing the costs of CWR against other similar local authorities for the kerbside waste and recycling collection contract.

- 7.2 The decision to award the initial fleet maintenance contract in October 2022 established that awarding the contract represented value for money. The contract agreed an hourly rate of £64 per hour during 2023-24. This was compared to typical main dealer rates of £80 - £120 per hour establishing that it represented value for money. The current contract allows for this rate to be adjusted for inflation and has been set at £70.97 for 2025-26. This still represents good value for money compared to outsourced main dealer prices.
- 7.3 The Council invested £2m in 2022-23 and 2023-24 to develop two workshop facilities across the Borough. Awarding an 8 year contract to CWR ensures full utilisation of these assets and maximises the return on investment. A change in provider risks underuse and reduced value for money. A long term contract also supports service continuity.
- 7.4 A summary of costs for the last 2 years under the contract is set out in the table below:

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>£</b>
2023-24	392,292
2024-25	414,070
Total	806,362

- 7.5 Payments under the contract for 2025-26 are estimated to be in line with those incurred in prior years which are fully budgeted for. As per section 7.2 of this paper, although the hourly rate for the contract has increased for inflation, and will continue to do so, due to investment in new vehicles within the fleet, it is anticipated that the cost of maintenance required will remain at a similar level to previous financial years and within the budget envelope.
- 7.6 The contract costs, and any further associated costs for repairs and maintenance, are funded through revenue budget within Highways and Transport and ultimately recharged out to the associated Council clients.

## **8 What are the legal implications?**

- 8.1 A contract awarded to a wholly owned Council company is permissible in accordance with procurement legislation – contracts with Council owned companies fall outside the scope of the Procurement Act 2023 (Schedule 2, Part 1, Paragraph 2) which exempts contracts which it defines as “vertical arrangements”.



- 8.2 This exemption applies on the proviso that:
- The company is under the control of the Council: and
  - More than 80% of the activities being carried out by the company are being carried out on behalf of the Council.
- 8.3 Legal advice will be taken, as necessary, to ensure full legal compliance and to prepare any related legal documentation.

## **9 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

- 9.1 Financial – There is a moderate risk as CWR do not seek to make profits from its contracts with the Council, they are not able to absorb financial shocks, as such, risk transfer is limited and financial risks outside the control of CWR can fall to the Council. This risk is lowered due to the robust governance and contract management already in place to manage and mitigate such risk.
- 9.2 Procurement – there is a risk that going out to the market would increase the price of the contract and cause further pressure of the available budget. This risk is mitigated by awarding a new contract to CWR post March 2026 to maintain flexibility throughout the contract term and enabling the Council to have more oversight on the actual costs of delivering the service.
- 9.3 Service Delivery– As CWR is a wholly owned company to support the Council's service delivery, it does not have direct access to wider capacity or expertise that may be found in a larger company. As such, resources can become overstretched and on occasion this may impact on the ability to progress projects. This risk is lowered due to the robust process in place to manage key projects PMF in place with escalation processes to manage service failures.
- 9.4 Service Delivery - There is a low risk of poor performance as there is no financial penalty. However, this is mitigated by monthly contract meetings and performance reviews as well as the option for the Council to review the company at any point in time.

## **10 How does the decision contribute to the “All Together Fairer” priorities?**

- 10.1 Awarding a new contract to CWR enables the Council to negotiate Social Value benefits that look at supporting communities, the environment and local economy. CWR will also play a significant role in relation to emerging Council plan themes including the Climate Emergency agenda and Carbon reduction.

## **11 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity issues?**

- 11.1 There are no implications from the recommendation to extend the vehicle maintenance contract in relation to health inequalities and equality and diversity issues.

## **12 What are the implications of the decision on climate change?**

- 12.1 The review has shown that CWR have already made good progress in contributing to the Council's net zero commitments. The total carbon savings in 2023 was 59.5 metric tonne reduction in Carbon Dioxide Equivalent. If a new contract is awarded the Council will be seeking joint opportunities to improve this through CWR's business planning process.
- 12.2 Additional carbon reduction will be achieved through reduction in mileage travelled to and from the workshops for routine maintenance as a result of the creation of 2 workshops.

## **13 Are there any other options?**

- 13.1 The Options Appraisal considered the ongoing provision of vehicle maintenance by CWR compared with procurement of an external vehicle maintenance provider. This analysis demonstrates that the recommended option best aligns to the Council's key criteria of Quality, Achievability and Value for Money.

### **For further information:**

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Karen Shore - Cabinet Member for Transport and Highways (including Waste)

**Officer:** Chris Hardwick (Head of Strategic Transport & Infrastructure) / Lisa Rimmer (Senior Manager – Transport Commissioning and Fleet Management)

**Email:** [Chris.Hardwick@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:Chris.Hardwick@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) / [lisa.rimmer@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:lisa.rimmer@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

### **Background Documents:**

None

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years):**

None

## Accessibility Protocol - Physical Meetings

### The Public Sector Equality Duty

There is a duty on public sector bodies to remove or eliminate barriers that disabled people face, and to ensure that equality of opportunity and access is promoted. It is expected that Cheshire West & Chester Council employees will adhere to these protocols in line with the Equality Act 2010 and actively promote their use to help foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Physical Meeting Accessibility Protocols act as guidance for Members, Officers, and meeting attendees to ensure that meetings are available to and accessible to everyone at the same time. The Protocols include guidance on respecting an audience, speaking clearly and precisely, and the importance that information should be provided in accessible formats. Considerations are also made on the use of accessible premises with an imperative checklist necessitating the provision of level access, accessible toilets, hearing induction loop provision, and further considerations.

Further guidance is contained within the full Protocols to help Presenters at Physical Meetings; this includes advice on the use of visual tools such as a slideshow and encouragement that shared materials should be easy to digest and in an accessible format.

### Meeting Room Accessibility

Where possible, rooms used for Public Meetings will have accessible entrances and lift provision for those areas on the first floor and above. Seating is provided and all accessibility needs will be considered when determining facility provision and room layout. Accessible toilets are available at all Council locations. Meeting participants are encouraged to read the Accessibility Protocols in full via the links below or via the Cheshire West and Chester Council website.

### Further Information

The full Physical Meeting Protocol is accessible via the Council website at the following link:

<https://cmttpublic.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/documents/s77435/Accessibility%20Protocol%20Physical%20Meetings.pdf>

Supplementary Information to accompany the meeting protocols (including how to obtain accessible formats) can also be found on the Council Website via the following link:

<https://cmttpublic.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/documents/s77434/Accessibility%20Protocol%20Supporting%20Information.pdf>

Meeting Organisers are encouraged to use the 'Meeting Accessibility Checklist' that can be found at:

<https://cmttpublic.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/documents/s77433/AccessibilityProtocolMeetingChecklist.pdf>

For further information regarding disability and accessibility please contact the equalities mailbox at [EQUALITIES@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:EQUALITIES@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) or call 0300 123 8 123 Textphone: 18001 01606 275757. Web: [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

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