

**North Wales**  
**Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy**  
**2021 - 2024**

**Update on Progress – May 2021**

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## 1. Executive Summary

### **Our vision:**

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

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

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

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

PREPARE PREVENT PROTECT PURSUE

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

## 2. Introduction

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

A new Strategy has been developed and is in the final stages of ratification. A copy of the Strategy will be published and shared with Welsh Government and other partners within the next few months.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. Governance

The North Wales Vulnerability and Exploitation Partnership Board will be accountable for the strategy and delivery of the objectives. Chaired by the Chief Executive, North Wales Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Strategic Partnership Board provides oversight, direction and support to local partners to ensure a collaborative approach. The Board meet on a quarterly basis to monitor and evaluate progression towards the Strategic Aims and Objectives as outlined within the Delivery Plan and Actions. Whilst all six Local Authority areas and partner agencies across North Wales are responsible for setting their own action plans in response to their localities' specific needs, representatives are encouraged to update and report on their progress and barriers to achieving success, commensurate with the Strategic Delivery Plan.

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

#### Vulnerability and Exploitation Board Representation and Partners

- Anglesey County Council
- Barnardo's / Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs)
- BAWSO
- BCUHB
- Church in Wales
- Conwy County Borough Council
- DASU
- Denbighshire County Council
- Flintshire County Council
- Gwynedd County Council
- Haven of Light
- HMP Berwyn
- North Wales Police
- North Wales
- North Wales Youth Justice Service
- Office of Police and Crime Commissioner
- National Probation Service
- RASASC Wales
- Regional VAWDASV Team
- Welsh Anti-Slavery Leadership Group
- Wrexham County Borough Council

#### **4. Specific areas of progress during 2020/21**

2020/21 was a year of serious concern, disruption and unforeseen pressure for all partners, particularly those providing front line support for those most at risk of abuse and exploitation. Our specialist services have seen a massive 40-50% increase in referrals over this period, but have had to balance this additional work with the constraints of the pandemic, local restrictions and full lockdowns.

2020/21 saw a massive increase in financial support for the specialist sector, which was welcomed, but this came with its own issues, as the majority of the additional funding was for emergency provision, rather than sustainable, long term projects.

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

1. Capital funding for disbursed units
2. Remote evidence facilities based within specialist sector provision
3. Emergency (Covid related) equipment
4. Support and equipment for children and adults to access technology for support and social interaction
5. Training to upskill the specialist workforce
6. Specialist training to support staff with vicarious trauma and enhanced clinical supervision
7. Online provision in all areas of support

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
VAWDASV Objective 1	Improve access to high quality and up to date information on VAWDASV and the help available in public spaces and online through the promotion of the Live Fear Free Helpline and resources across the region	Regional VAWDASV team	Communication grant used to purchase Live Fear Free merchandise to distribute in accessible places in rural areas, e.g GP surgeries, pharmacies.
	Promote appropriate family support and parenting programmes to ensure that safe, healthy relationships are modeled and any inappropriate attitudes towards gender inequality are challenged and addressed appropriately.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Work to continue with partners to look at family support and parenting programmes delivered within statutory services. Specialist services now commissioned to provide appropriate parenting support.
	Implement National Training Framework to ensure that all professionals working in public facing roles are fully equipped to support victims and survivors of VAWDASV.	“Relevant Authorities” under 2015 legislation	Roll out of Group 1 complete in some agencies, but a lot of work to do in others. Ask and Act roll out delayed due to Covid.
	Work with and support specialist BME VAW services to undertake community development to challenge cultural attitudes and change practice which can underpin FGM and forced marriage.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Community Advocates commissioned to support mainstream provision and provide specialist advice and support.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	Work with regional commissioners (drug and alcohol services, homelessness services, health and children's services) to integrate VAWDASV into mainstream contracts to embed support for victims and their families in generic services.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Working with HSG commissioners, but still need to engage with APB, RPB etc
VAWDASV Objective 2	Develop robust pathways for children and young people to report violence and seek support and advice. Provision of children's support workers in specialist agencies, (according to level of need identified) as well as work with local schools and youth groups, encouraging the use of "champions" to work as peer mentors and support.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners and Children's Safeguarding Board	Additional Children and Young People's workers commissioned, as well as providing technology to allow children to access education and social activities. Work with schools on hold due to Covid.
	Work with schools and colleges to support staff to implement a trauma-informed ethos, enabling young people to feel safe to disclose abuse.	VAWDASV Whole School Approach group	Work with schools on hold due to Covid
	Develop and deliver programmes to educate, inform and challenge young people about healthy relationships, abuse and consent and work with further/higher education colleges to develop an approach to working with young people as bystanders to promote VAWDASV prevention and further social change	VAWDASV Whole School Approach group	Work with FE/HE providers on hold due to Covid

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
VAWDASV Objective 3	Commission evidence-based perpetrator programmes and whole-family interventions with a focus on encouraging and creating behaviour change at the same time as protecting their victims/ families from further abuse.	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	Choose2Change and Intervention Hub commissioned to provide behaviour change programmes and Caring Dads commissioned as whole family intervention.
	Work with HMP Berwyn to ensure that custody to community support is seamless for the perpetrator and their family (if appropriate and correct risk assessments are in place). Robust pathway from assessment to programme within prison and then continuation in the community following release	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Delay in work with HMP Berwyn due to local and national restrictions, but initial discussions have begun.
	Ensure that perpetrators of VAWDASV are always held to account for their actions  Provide training for all frontline staff to have a consistent response to perpetrator and victim disclosures. Training should enable staff to make an assessment of risk.	Regional VAWDASV Training Group	Training in working with perpetrators has been commissioned as part of the enhanced upskilling of the specialist sector.
VAWDASV Objective 4	Pilot the IRIS programme, working with IRISi (roll out of specialist support provision within GP surgeries, as well as other primary health provision where appropriate).	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners and BCUHB	Pilot delayed due to Covid and roll out of vaccination programme. Application made to MOJ for funding and partners engaged from IRISi, DASU and BCUHB.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	Maximise safe disclosure points and opportunities for early help-seeking in local communities for survivors (adults and children) and for perpetrators, through the embedding of Ask and Ask across North Wales. Ensure that all frontline staff understand the need to provide a safe and secure environment to enable disclosure.	Regional VAWDASV Training Group	Roll out due to commence in April 2020. Train the Trainer sessions completed, but roll out within LAs delayed until online provision available. Some session delivered during early Spring 2021 with full calendar in place for delivery during 2021/22.
	Build up capacity and sustainable funding for intervention work with children and young people	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	Some of the additional Emergency funding was used to build capacity, but there are still gaps in consistent provision, especially for work in schools.
	Continue to work with the criminal justice system to reduce short term prison sentences for women and engage them in diversionary activities. Support the diversionary work currently being done by the Local Criminal Justice Board and their partners, and further develop this support.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Working with WG to support the Female Offending Blueprint.
	Ensure that families identified and needing support for living with VAWDASV have early access to specialist support to mitigate the trauma associated with adverse experiences in childhood and as adults.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Link with ACE Hub as much as possible for joint working opportunities. All specialist providers offer trauma informed support and have specialist training to support this.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	Work with specialist providers to inform the development of ACE awareness and how it can be used to respond to victims and survivors of VAWDASV.	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	Work with ACE agenda largely on hold due to Covid.
	Work with specialist providers to ensure that survivors have access to evidence based recovery programmes, to support them in building resilience and strengthening their family/friend support network.	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	All specialist providers trained to deliver recovery based programmes and commissioned to provide these.
VAWDASV Objective 5	Ensure that specialist service providers are able to support victims and survivors experiencing multiple disadvantage by providing recovery based, trauma informed training for all specialist service providers and partner agencies.	Regional VAWDASV Training Group	Specialist training commissioned during 2020/21 to support the upskilling of staff within the specialist sector.
	Improve the training provided for professionals who come into contact with perpetrators to ensure that disclosures are managed appropriately, giving them an understanding of the need to involve internal disciplinary/misconduct procedures, as well as criminal justice procedures.	Regional VAWDASV Training Group	Online training commissioned to provide training for professionals working with perpetrators.
	Work with criminal justice partners, to ensure that adequate training is provided in supporting victims of VAWDASV through the use of civil remedies.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Regional Advisor working with HMCTS to look at training for magistrates and court staff. This has been delayed due to Covid.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	Work with regional commissioners (drug and alcohol services, homelessness services, health and children's services) integrate VAWDASV into mainstream contracts to embed support for victims and their families in generic services.	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	Working with HSG commissioners, but still need to engage with APB, RPB etc
VAWDASV Objective 6	<p>Ensure that there is long-term support in place for all survivors of VAWDASV to recover from their experiences, using recovery based, trauma-informed interventions.</p> <p>Specific support should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist support for those who have experienced FGM, HBV, FM and/or have no recourse to public funds</li> <li>• Housing support, promoting victims being supported to remain in their homes and the perpetrator being removed</li> <li>• Sexual violence support</li> </ul>	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	Specialist services have received additional funding throughout 2020/21 to ensure that they can provide continuous support, via alternative routes and using alternative technology. All support sessions have been delivered online and work is now being undertaken to ensure that the move back to face to face provision is done safely.
	Ensure that victims of VAWDASV have appropriate support throughout the criminal justice process, from disclosure to prosecution. Provide consistent IDVA/ISVA provision across North Wales, offering the same service to victims of VAWDASV, regardless of where in North Wales they are based.	Regional VAWDASV Joint Commissioning Group	Regional IDVA provision consistent across North Wales, delivered by two partner agencies. Regular monitoring meetings are in place with both agencies, the commissioners and NWP, to ensure that any challenges are addressed in a timely way.

Objective	Actions	Owner	Progress/RAG
	Provide standardised MARAC process, with regular virtual case discussions as well as monthly meetings to consider more complex cases. Each area to be monitored regularly on governance and implementation of processes.	Vulnerability and Exploitation Board partners	Weekly (virtual) MARAC meetings now being held in all six LA areas, as well as monthly meetings still held to consider more complex cases. Regional MARAC steering group now in place to provide consistency and support.