

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 2 October 2025 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors E Davies (Chair), E Aston (Vice-Chair), F Doran, S Handley and G Luter.

In Attendance: E Harvey (Lead Lawyer: Property & Commercial), T Mercer (Service Delivery Manager: Public Health), H Onions (Director: Public Health) and P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)).

Also Present: Councillor K Middleton (Cabinet Member: Public Health & Healthier Communities).

Apologies for Absence: Councillors P J Scott and G Thomas.

COMSC7 Declarations of Interest

None.

COMSC8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was noted that an amendment was required to record Councillor Fiona Doran as having been present at the previous meeting held on 8 July 2025.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2025, subject to the amendment above, be approved and signed by the Chair.

COMSC9 Domestic Abuse Strategy

The Committee received a presentation from the Director: Public Health and the Service Delivery Manager: Public Health which provided an update on progress made against the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023–2025 and the integration of Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) prevention activity within the refreshed approach.

Officers outlined the four-pillar approach of the current strategy which included Partnership, Prevention, Provision and Pursuing & Protection and summarised the significant achievements made since the introduction of the Strategy in 2023 including the establishment of the Lived Experience Advisory Forum (LEAF), the development of the multi-agency DALP dashboard, the expansion and delivery of a comprehensive training programme across Council Partners, improvements to the Domestic Homicide Review processes and the completion of the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment.

Members were provided with an overview of the work which had been undertaken within the prevention pillar including the expansion of the Community Champions and Workplace Ambassador programmes, the continued development of the White Ribbon campaign, the delivery of domestic abuse awareness and healthy relationships programmes across all primary, secondary and alternative education settings, and strengthened links with Safeguarding Teams. Officers also noted that training uptake from local businesses had been lower than anticipated and that new approaches were being explored.

In terms of provision, Officers reported that the integrated Domestic Abuse Service commissioned in 2023 had delivered specialist support for victims and families, a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) service, support for children and young people, and increased safer accommodation capacity across the borough. It was highlighted that all services had become increasingly trauma-informed and that clearer integrated pathways had been developed for children, young people and adults, linking to services such as Family Connect, Strengthening Families, Adult Social Care, substance misuse services and housing.

As part of the work undertaken within the pursuing and protection pillar, Officers highlighted the increased engagement of victims in the criminal justice processes, the commissioning of perpetrator behaviour-change interventions, and an independent review of MARAC arrangements with actions now in progress.

Officers provided an update on the proposals for refreshed strategic commitments for 2026–2028, including strengthening existing perpetrator programmes, enhanced screening during and after pregnancy in partnership with SaTH and the expansion of White Ribbon activity during the 16 Days of Action. At the time of the meeting, work was also underway to improve safety for women and girls in the night-time economy through partnership activity including CCTV and taxi marshal schemes. Members were also advised that target-hardening measures, including a sanctuary scheme delivered with the Police and a Council-led pilot scheme for low to medium risk victims were being considered to support victims wishing to remain safely in their homes.

Members were informed that market engagement had commenced for the retendering of the Domestic Abuse Service from June 2026. Proposed changes included bringing the management of safer accommodation in-house to the Council's Housing Solutions Team and the separate tendering process for the perpetrator programme tendered due to commissioning arrangements. A part-time VAWG Prevention Lead had recently been appointed to coordinate this work and support delivery of the White Ribbon campaign.

In response to questions raised around engagement with young people and Colleges, the Service Delivery Manager: Public Health confirmed that within the proposed commitments Telford College had committed to supporting one of the 16 Days of Action with a dedicated youth-focused event.

Officers also explained that commissioned providers such as Loudmouth had continued to deliver workshops, assemblies and drama-based sessions in schools to stimulate conversations about healthy relationships, while programmes for young people not in mainstream education were delivered collaboratively by domestic abuse specialists, Early Help teams and partner organisations.

Members discussed the development and sustainability of the Lived Experience Advisory Forum (LEAF) where Officers explained that while many survivors chose to move forward after their personal experience of abuse, the existing group was actively expanding links with survivor-voice forums across West Mercia and Women's Aid. This work was intended to strengthen representation and ensure that lived experience continued to influence strategy delivery and future planning.

Following questions raised on how work around domestic abuse aligned with safeguarding and Early Help teams, particularly within school settings, Officers explained that safeguarding leads (DSLs) in schools were already engaged in domestic abuse partnership structures and that activity continued to strengthen those links. Domestic abuse programmes delivered in schools were said to complement existing safeguarding practice, with Early Help and specialist workers supporting assemblies, staff development sessions and targeted interventions for identified pupils.

As part of the discussion around safe accommodation and support for families, Officers explained that the Council was required to provide safe accommodation in addition to safe shelter, and that many units were already equipped for children and infants. Members expressed the importance of safe sleep expectations and ensuring essential items were available in temporary accommodation for parents.

Members welcomed the refreshed community-based approach for the 2025 White Ribbon campaign which would include pop-up events and an expanded communications plan. The Cabinet Member: Public Health & Healthier Communities encouraged Members to act as ambassadors for the campaign and confirmed that training, event information and supporting materials would be shared with councillors in advance of the 16 Days of Action. Officers confirmed that a review of the current training offer for domestic abuse was underway including consideration of future refresher requirements.

The Chair thanked officers for their comprehensive update and acknowledged the significant progress made across all four pillars of the strategy, noting that the Committee looked forward to contributing to and reviewing the refreshed commitments for 2026–2028. Members also expressed their thanks to those involved in sharing their experiences to help develop the strategy.

Members noted the report.

COMSC10 Work Programme Review

The Lead Lawyer: Property & Commercial presented the updated work programme as set out in the agenda pack and highlighted that the next meeting would take place on 12 February 2026.

Members were informed that proposed items for that meeting included a review of the Community Action Team (CAT) programme and consideration of the Telford & Wrekin Skills Strategy, which aligned with work undertaken by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Members discussed the importance of shaping the scope of the CAT programme review, with the Chair noting the opportunity for the Committee to steer the focus of the item, assess progress to date, identify achievements and areas requiring further attention and contribute meaningfully to future development.

Members noted the update.

COMSC11 Chair's Update

The Chair invited Members to consider any additional matters they wished to see included on the Committee's work programme, noting that Members may have identified issues within their wards or broader community areas that could benefit from future scrutiny.

The Chair encouraged Members to bring forward any suggestions, highlighting that there was capacity within the forthcoming municipal year to explore further topics of interest or emerging concerns.

The meeting ended at 6.38 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday 12 February 2026