

POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL REPORT

Meeting Date	1 st May 2025
Report Title	Tackling Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas

Information should be accessible for all. If you require this information in a different language or format, please contact the Police, Fire and Crime Team at info@northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk.

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to review progress on tackling domestic abuse in rural areas across North Yorkshire.

Background

In June 2022, the joint strategy to address Violence Against Women and Girls was launched by then Office for Policing, Fire, Crime and Commissioning (OPFCC) [Addressing violence against women and girls in North Yorkshire & City of York](#).¹ This strategy spanned 2022 to 2024, and work is ongoing to fully review and update the strategy accordingly to ensure the strategic aims and objectives remain aligned to local need and expectations. In the meantime, work continues to be delivered under the existing strategy which includes specific projects and initiatives to ensure parity of services across both urban and rural areas, and other isolated communities.

In 2024, North Yorkshire Police (NYP) recorded 4,413 level 1 domestic offences against women, and 1,636 against men. The level one category incorporates Sexual Offences and Violence against the Person.

However, police recorded statistics on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) are not an accurate picture of true victims and offending rates, under-reporting is a major issue with many barriers to reporting and limited access to support services in rural areas.

It is estimated that only 24% of Domestic Abuse is reported to the police nationally, on top of this rural victims are half as likely as urban victims to report their abuse, leaving a significant number of rural victims unknown and unheard. On average, after abuse starts, a rural victim will wait almost 5 months longer to seek help than an urban victim, taking 3 years to act. However, IDAS have reported a 9% increase in referrals in the previous months when compared to the year before – reflecting the hard work being put in to raise awareness of support and break down the barriers of under-reporting.

¹ <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/womenandgirls/>

Activity Update

Liberty Links

'Liberty Links' continues to provide mobile and outreach services to women in rural and other isolated communities throughout the Ryedale district via a specially converted van since August 2023. Various other services have also been jointly delivered from the van including Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS), Substance Use Support and Mental Health staff to provide specialist support.

- Between August 2023 and January 2025, 414 women accessed the service for advice and guidance, 160 accessed enhanced support.
- Between August 2023 and March 2025, 32 women specifically accessed the service for advice and guidance around current or previous domestic abuse; of these:
 - 12 were referred directly to IDAS for specialist support around domestic abuse
 - the remaining 20 were provided with advice on how to self-refer to IDAS
 - 27 of the 32 women revisited Libby Links to receive ongoing support

Further additional funding was secured by the Policing, Fire and Crime Directorate of the Combined Authority (PFCD) through the Home Office Safer Streets Fund for St. Giles Trust to purchase and convert a second 'Liberty Links' van, which was launched in Craven in February 2025. This van will reach out to people in Skipton, Bentham, Grassington and Settle. The PFCD has also allocated funding for two Outreach workers to continue to deliver this Liberty Links provision (including the new provision in Craven) until March 2026.

Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS)

The Policing, Fire and Crime Directorate of the Combined Authority, North Yorkshire Council and City of York Council have jointly commissioned a new package of support services to deliver a 'Whole System Approach' to Domestic Abuse from April 2024 until March 2028; collectively investing over £8m over four years to provide a holistic package of enhanced support services for everyone affected by domestic abuse across North Yorkshire and the City of York including those living in rural areas and other isolated communities.

IDAS have been jointly commissioned to deliver the specialist support elements of this package for victims and survivors, and their children who have been affected by domestic abuse within their family, alongside support for any young people displaying abusive behaviours themselves towards family members or other young people because of the domestic abuse they have experienced at home. IDAS are specifically required through the service specifications to provide a tailored and bespoke package of support for victims and survivors, and their children, from rural and other isolated and/or marginalised communities.

We know from work carried out to date supporting families living in rural areas and other close-knit communities, these communities can both provide a network of support, but equally can create additional barriers to accessing services, as some victims worry that they will be judged by the community they are part of. To try and break down these barriers, IDAS is continually developing their 'Whole Community Approach to tackling domestic abuse'; IDAS initially piloted the 'Whole Community Approach' in Ryedale from 2023 and is exploring opportunities to expand this approach into other rural districts throughout North Yorkshire. The aim of the 'Whole Community Approach' is to ensure that rural communities are aware of the services that IDAS provide and are equipped to tackle the root causes of domestic abuse and sexual violence. IDAS 'heatmap' their referrals to identify what is working well and look at 'cold spots' where referrals are lower in certain areas or with certain agencies. IDAS then develop an action plan to have a presence in those areas, which will include awareness raising and meet the team events. The

approach also includes work with local community leaders and businesses to provide awareness raising seminars and grow a network of Community Champions. There are currently 30 Champions who promote the work that IDAS do, raising awareness and creating a network of support for victims in rural areas.

The PFCD has secured funding via the Ministry of Justice National ISVA/IDVA Fund until 31st March 2026 for IDAS to employ a specialist Older Persons and Rural Lead Practitioner to provide specialist support and advice to all IDAS teams through internal training and Peer Case Reviews, in addition to holding their own caseload where more complex advocacy is required for those living in rural communities and older victims. This Practitioner has been in post since 2023 and has embedded themselves within these more rural communities and linked in with other organisations and agencies who are also working victims and survivors; they have gained trust and a better understanding of the issues faced by victims and survivors living in these more rural specific communities and therefore better able to tailor support around their specific needs. For example, the Practitioner works closely with the North Yorkshire Police Rural Crime Taskforce to hold joint events and workshops and has a regular presence at Community One Stops and on the Citizen Advice Bureau’s Rural Bus in Hambleton, Richmondshire and Ryedale districts. IDAS also hold regular advice and information drop-in sessions at community hubs and libraries in Ingleton, Settle, South Craven, Skipton, Harrogate, Nidderdale, Ripon, Bilton, and Starbeck.

More recently, IDAS are exploring opportunities to work more collaboratively with the farming community and young farmers in particular. IDAS have contacted Field Nurse, a rural charity supporting healthcare at auction marts across North Yorkshire and Lancashire and the Farming Community Network to discuss find ways to work together and identify key events IDAS could attend to increase awareness of their services. The Yorkshire Agricultural Society have agreed to share IDAS leaflets and posts at their farming wellbeing and health events and on their Women in Farming Facebook group. Contact has also been established with the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution ‘The heart of farming’ to increase awareness in farming communities, with a representative attending a meeting with IDAS this month to discuss ways to work together moving forward.

Alongside this awareness raising and outreach into rural communities and recognising that victims and survivors living in more rural locations face additional challenges around travel and transport in particular, IDAS workers explore a range of options to access specific funding for travel, digital devices and improved internet connections.

As a result, IDAS have seen a 9% increase overall in referrals from our more rural districts during the first nine months of 2024/25, compared to same nine-month period last year; most notably there has been a 12% increase in referrals in both the Ryedale and Harrogate districts demonstrating the positive impact of IDAS' work to spread awareness and reduce under-reporting in these areas.

Referrals	Q1-3 2023/24	Q1-3 2024/25	Difference	
Craven	380	393	+13	+3%
Hambleton	728	767	+39	+5%
Harrogate & District	1,212	1,353	+141	+12%
Richmondshire	348	371	+23	+7%
Ryedale	381	428	+47	+12%
TOTAL	3,049	3,312	+263	+9%

Risk of domestic abuse in all cases is dynamic, so bespoke risk and needs assessments are completed with all victims and survivors accessing IDAS support; these are regularly reviewed throughout engagement to ensure that plans are still relevant as risk and need changes. This includes a ‘premises risk assessment’ for those victims who wish to remain in their homes, specifically considering safety in the home and whether target hardening items are required. Victims and survivors living in rural areas are most likely to request

personal safety alarms for when they are out and about but are unlikely to request a house alarm, as they tell us they would be ineffective because there are often no one nearby to hear and respond to a house alarm; instead, victims and survivors in rural areas are more likely to request new locks and door jammers.

However, some victims and survivors living in rural communities may choose to move out of their home into alternative accommodation, including refuge and safe accommodation. Some victims face additional challenges identifying suitable move-on accommodation in rural communities, particularly where their livelihood and accommodation is intrinsically linked to their abuser or family members, those living and/or working on farms or racing yards for example. Although IDAS are commissioned to provide a variety of both purpose-built Refuge and dispersed Safe Accommodation provision throughout York and North Yorkshire, however some survivors have highlighted they would find it difficult moving from a rural area into a more urban area. In response to this, IDAS have introduced their innovative Safe Havens Scheme, providing short-term emergency accommodation and respite opportunities for up to two months with host families particularly for those who may not be able to live in refuges or wish to remain in rural communities; these short-term placements provide the time for victims and survivors to consider their longer-term options. IDAS are actively promoting the scheme to recruit hosts in the Settle and wider Craven area in particular.

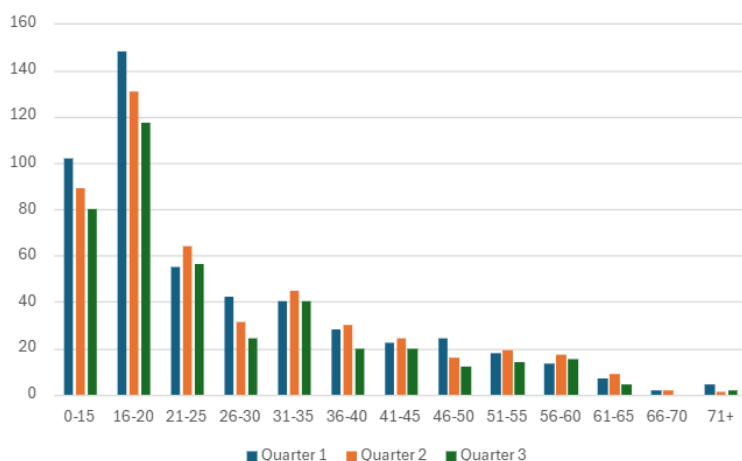
Gender breakdown of ISVA service performance by quarter:

***Please note, this is not broken down into Rural and Urban areas, this information is across the region.**

Quarter	Female		Male		Non-Binary		Intersex		Gender Queer		Transgender	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Q1	449	88%	52	10%	3	0.6%	1	0.2%	0	0%	14	2.8%
Q2	421	86%	57	12%	3	0.6%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	16	3.1%
Q3	362	88%	44	11%	4	1%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	18	4.4%

*Percentages do not include the Transgender column as individuals are recorded as their gender identity.

ISVA Age data by quarter



New Beginnings Peer Support

The PFCDD have allocated funding until 31st March 2026 for New Beginnings to develop their after-crisis peer support service in Harrogate and expand the project into Craven to ensure the voices of those living in rural and other isolated communities are heard.

+Choices: Services for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

As part of the 'Whole System Approach' to Domestic Abuse package of support services, the PFCD, North Yorkshire Council and City of York Council have jointly commissioned Inspire North (Foundation UK) to deliver the +Choices Programme: Services for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse from April 2024. This now includes an offer of support for perpetrators who pose a high risk of serious harm, and who are willing to engage through a new bespoke 1:1 behaviour change programme based on the Respect accredited Drive model.

As with the IDAS Victim Support Services above, +Choices are also specifically required to consider how to provide a tailored and bespoke package of support for perpetrators and their victims living in rural and isolated communities; this is offered through a combination of telephone based and online support to maximise attendance and engagement. Targeted promotion and awareness raising of the service through poster and leaflet drops have taken place in more rural districts, particularly across Craven, Harrogate and Richmondshire districts which has resulted in an increase of those identifying as living in rural communities as a result (this was not recorded under the previous contract, so we are unable to provide a comparison to the previous year).

Civil orders

North Yorkshire Police have a criminal justice outcome rate of 10%, double the national average, and one of the highest uses of Civil Orders.²

1 in 5 perpetrators are repeat perpetrators, though not necessarily attacking the same victim. This is where the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, also known as Clare's Law, is essential, a concerned individual can request information about the Domestic Abuse or Violence history of their partner.

Between January 2023 and November 2023, NYP had 1005 requests and made 351 disclosures (35%).

NYP have a high success of getting Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO) in court, these orders protect a victim in the aftermath of an abuse incident if the perpetrator is not being charged. Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) can also be used, this is an emergency non-molestation order to remove an offender while a DVPO is being proposed to court.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, NYP issued 406 DVPNs and 371 DVPOs.

Next Steps

The recently launched Police and Crime Plan for 2025-2029, highlights the importance of tackling VAWG and taking a Whole System Approach. We will achieve this by consulting women and girls to understand their needs and working with partners to reach and support those in the most rural, isolated communities.

Nationally, in September 2024, the Home Office announced a pilot initiative to better protect victims of domestic abuse by embedding domestic abuse specialists into 999 control rooms. This is part of 'Raneem's Law' and a step in the governments mission to halve VAWG in a decade. North Yorkshire is not currently a part of this pilot, but the government is working closely with the 5 pilot forces to inform a national roll-out and statutory guidance as soon as possible.

² Slide 6 <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/NYP-Performance-Pack-March-2025.pdf> and Part 2.1 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2023-to-2024/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2023-to-2024>