

Minutes

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK & FINISH GROUP

MINUTES OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK & FINISH GROUP HELD ON MONDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2011, IN PHOENIX ROOM 3, GROUND FLOOR, OLD COUNTY OFFICES, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.30 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr N Brown, Mrs L Clarke (Chairman), Ms R Vigor-Hedderly and Julia Wassell

CO-OPTEEES PRESENT

Mr P Hudson, Mr T Hunter-Watts and Mr A Hussain

OFFICERS PRESENT

Ms S Griffin, Ms T Martin, Ms M Thorpe and Ms S Yapp

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Mrs Margaret Aston.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs Vigor-Hedderly declared an interest as she is Cabinet Spokesperson for the Voluntary Sector under the Community Engagement portfolio.

An interest was declared on behalf of Mrs Aston as she is Cabinet Spokesperson for Locality Working under the Community Engagement portfolio.

The Chairman advised that legal guidance had been sought. As the Task & Finish group does not cover the specific portfolio areas, Mrs Vigor-Hedderly and Mrs Aston are able to sit on the Task & Finish Group.

3 INTRODUCTION TO THE REVIEW

Lesley Clarke, Chairman of the Domestic Violence Task & Finish Group, welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that Domestic Violence is a very important topic. The purpose of the review is to understand more about Domestic Violence and how it is being addressed in Buckinghamshire.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Mrs Clarke went on to say that the new Domestic Violence strategy will begin in April 2012, and this review will feed into the strategy. Recommendations from the Task & Finish Group will go to the Overview & Scrutiny Commissioning Committee, County Council's Cabinet, and if relevant, to partner organisations through the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board.

4 INTRODUCTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Chairman welcomed Susie Yapp, Safer Bucks Partnership Manager and Teresa Martin, Senior Domestic Violence Coordinator, Buckinghamshire County Council to the meeting.

Teresa Martin took members through a PowerPoint presentation which gave an overview of Domestic Violence and Abuse in Buckinghamshire and outlined the following key points;

- The term Domestic Abuse encapsulates both Domestic Violence and Abuse. It is important to understand that Domestic Abuse also includes emotional abuse where the abuser seeks power and control over their victim and that emotional abuse can be as powerful as physical abuse.
- The period of 6 months to 1 year post-separation is one of the most dangerous times for a woman to become a victim of serious domestic violence.
- Figures from the British Crime Survey 2010/11 report that every year 1 million women experience at least one incident of Domestic Violence (DV) – nearly 20,000 women a week and in the highest rate of repeat victimisation of any serious crime, DV accounts for 73% of all incidents of DV.
- There were 6,044 incidents of Domestic Abuse reported to police in 2010-11. In the last financial year there have been two DV related homicides in Aylesbury. The impact on the victim and the wider family needs to be considered.
- The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is part of a co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse, incorporating representatives from statutory, community and voluntary agencies working with victims/survivors, children and the alleged perpetrator. High risk cases can be referred to MARAC for multi agencies to address.
- There has been an escalation of incidents of DV with high risk indicators. A risk assessment tool entitled the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) is used to assess levels of risk and enable professionals to recognise and provide for intervention and prevention.
- There is known to be a lot of under-reporting of DV incidents. 16,504 women and girls between the ages of 16-59 have been victim of DV in Buckinghamshire in the past year (Home Office ready reckoner tool was used to calculate these figures) with 6,044 incidents reported to the police.
- In the Child Protection plans Domestic Abuse is the highest Primary Presenting Factor for parents (314 plans in total) closely followed by substance abuse (219 plans in total) which shows DV is a very real issue.
- Domestic Violence is one of the top 3 priorities for the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board (as well as Anti Social Behaviour and Serious Acquisitive Crime).

- A considerable amount of funding is received from Children and Young People (£114,450 in 2011/12). Funding for 2012/13 is to be confirmed.
- Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) is one area where there is a considerable risk in future.
- The SSBPB has to manage a significant loss in funding due to a cut in the Safer Communities Fund of the order of 50% against the 10/11 baseline. The SSBPB is drafting a budget which in the best case scenario would continue to invest £75k into IDVA; however this still represents a reduction on the current capacity of two full time IDVAs at a cost of £90k.
- A bid for £20,000 for IDVA funding was submitted to the Home Office, clearly evidencing the need for the programme; however it was unsuccessful. The outcome was challenged twice (by Neil Gibson and Martin Phillips, copying in Buckinghamshire MP's) to no avail.

After the presentation, the following questions were asked and points made;

A member asked if the figures for Berkshire were available and if they were comparable to Buckinghamshire as it would be useful to have this information for the review

Susie Yapp explained the most violent case figures fluctuate and there have been 5 recorded DV murders in Buckinghamshire over the last 5 years. Community services in the charitable sector i.e. Women's Aid are still developing data systems but there are some figures available.

Julia Wassell arrived at 10.45pm

A member commented that quite often it is younger women who go into refuges and asked if it was possible to get police figures which give a breakdown of the majority of female victims. National research shows that there is little difference in DV in relation to ethnicity/age etc, it is the type of DV that changes within different communities i.e. honour based DV in Asian based communities

Teresa Martin advised that possibility of obtaining data from Women's Aid and the Police would be looked into.

Action: Teresa Martin/Madeleine Thorpe

Susie Yapp explained that most refuges have a ceiling age of 12 years of age as at this age males become larger and harder to deal with; however refuges in Aylesbury have a ceiling age of 16 years.

A member reiterated previous comments about ethnicity and class and asked if hard to reach groups were being targeted effectively

Teresa Martin said that it appears that younger women use refuges and middle class women use Outreach but the data from Women's Aid would be looked at.

A member commented that sometimes there is financial control over women and even if they want to, they are unable to leave their partner as they do not have the physical means to do so

A member referred to the figures shown in the presentation of 125 women and 154 children accommodated in refuges in Bucks and 212 women and 244 children being refused refuge due to a lack of space and asked how long women stay in refuges and where did those refused go to

Teresa Martin advised that she would contact Women's Aid to confirm where those women refused refuge in Bucks go to. Teresa explained 3-4 months is the ideal length of stay to be

able to provide support and counselling but women tend to stay longer in refuges at the moment. Recent conversations with Women's Aid have revealed that a stay can now be anything up to a year which unfortunately decreases the ability for refuges to take in new cases. A limit of 12 months has now been put into place. If the victim is not housed within 12 months they are 'evicted' from the refuge and placed on the housing list. The introduction of the Choice Based Letting Scheme has created more problems as previously victims of DV were accepted as priority cases for re-housing. They now have to bid for a property which in turn is allocated to those with the highest priority first. Clarification of the Lettings Scheme from Women's Aid is needed.

Action: Teresa Martin/Madeleine Thorpe

A member said it would be interesting to compare figures with those from South Bucks and asked if communication with Thames Valley Police was good and what is mandatory and statutory from a County Council point of view as to what they have to supply to residents and districts

Susie Yapp explained that the MARAC is chaired by the Detective Inspector in charge of Protecting Vulnerable People unit.

A member asked how DV is measured i.e. a row between partners

Teresa Martin explained that the power and control in most relationships varies. DV is where there is power and control over/from one person and where one partner becomes fearful. Physical violence is easy to identify, it is the psychology, emotional abuse and degradation which is harder to recognise.

Susie Yapp added that quite often individuals do not realise that they are victims until they unpick the balance of power in their relationship i.e. having to account for mileage on the car and telephone calls are very good pointers

Teresa Martin went on to say that some light-bulb moments have occurred during DV training to professionals and agencies, when individuals have recognised themselves as a victim.

The Chairman asked if it was possible to have radio advertisements asking people if they are subject to DV as they might not know they are being abused and how can this knowledge be disseminated to members of the public

Teresa Martin referred to the Public Service Agreement DV campaign where Bucks New Uni students made posters detailing a 'shopping list' of DV tendencies. Women's Aid has also produced posters giving examples of physical abuse i.e. spitting. Teresa advised that she would bring the poster to a future meeting if it could be found.

Action: Teresa Martin

A member asked if GPs recognise DV and therefore signpost patients to refuges etc

Susie Yapp advised that GP surgeries have DV posters on display and she would hope that GPs refer a patient to support services if an incident of DV is suspected. Susie added that statistics not shown in the presentation are that victims of DV experience up to 30 incidents before they go to the police and the focus of BCC Domestic Violence team is intervention of the most serious cases.

Members were advised that 21 November 2011 is the start of the White Ribbon campaign in the UK, part of a national campaign to raise awareness of DV. The pledge of the campaign is never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. The campaign has been running since 1970.

A member commented that only those victims who present themselves are being dealt with

Teresa Martin explained that health visitors and midwives are trained to ask if DV is occurring as DV quite often starts or intensifies during pregnancy.

A member said one of the biggest problems is the lack of reporting and asked how many refuge places there are in Aylesbury and High Wycombe

Teresa Martin explained that the number of places depends on the number of children but she would confirm the amount of places.

Action: Teresa Martin/Madeleine Thorpe

A member asked where would any suspicion of DV be reported to i.e. the police or other authorities and went on to say he had been told that the police had won some DV cases where the victim had not been prepared to give evidence in court

Susie Yapp explained there are at least two avenues for reporting - Women's Aid and the National DV Helpline and that the Police have been successful in prosecuting without evidence. Susie went on to say there is an Adult Safeguarding campaign underway which includes a number of posters etc advising that any suspicion of DV should be reported. The contact for Careline is shown on the posters. Susie added that she would confirm the contact number for Careline

Action: Susie Yapp

Addendum

Careline - 0800 137915. Please call Careline to report alleged abuse anonymously or if you feel a report is not being taken seriously.

A member said the best way to make a difference is to get through to where the damage is occurring. Many victims think DV is their fault, have a sense of failure and think they need to protect their children and so don't come forward

Teresa Martin explained that each case of DV is treated individually. The reporting DV needs to be increased as figures show five years ago 3000 incidents of DV were reported and 6000 incidents were reported in 2010/11.

Susie Yapp advised that during a Young People's conference last week, the Bucks Children's Safeguarding Board showed slides of children who harm others who all have a history of experiencing DV which was quite alarming. DV is one of the key areas which is most prevalent in repeat child protection plans.

Teresa Martin added that the impact of DV on children needs to be recognised as results of brain scans on those children who have witnessed/not witnessed DV have shown the difference to be very surprising.

A member referred to the figures shown in the slides which are based on a female population of 253,900 between the ages of 16-59 and asked why 59 is the cut off point when some cases amongst older women are known of

Teresa Martin explained this is the criteria the Home Office has chosen to use (using the ready reckoner tool) but that Buckinghamshire records incidents to individuals above the age of 59 years as do the Police. Teresa added that the figures on the slides do not include male victims.

A member said they were amazed at the small amounts of money for funding in this area

Susie Yapp explained that five years ago there was even less funding invested and that the £114,000 from Children and Young People service area represented a recent growth. Susie added that some charitable funding is also received.

A member advised that she is responsible for a group of 15 Asian women in High Wycombe and DV statistics are currently being collected. She added that the Sanctuary Model turns the issue of housing on its head whereby the perpetrator is removed from the home, not the victim and therapy is put in place.

A member said there have been changes in the law in the last 5-10 years which give the police more empowerment over offenders.

Teresa Martin explained as a result of amendments to the Crime and Victim Act 2004 and the introduction of the Domestic Homicide Review in April 2011, a lot of new legislation has been implemented.

Susie Yapp explained that on the 13 April a Clause came into effect detailing the mandatory requirements for Community Safety and the review to be undertaken if a homicide occurs. There have been 5 DV murders in Buckinghamshire in the last 5 years which have all undergone a review. The risk is a review can be quite a costly process.

A member asked what member involvement is there across the District and County and where are members involved

Susie Yapp explained that the Domestic Violence and Abuse Board (DVAB) reports to the Safer Bucks Co-ordinating Group which in turn feeds into the Safer & Stronger Bucks Partnership Board (SSBPB). David Carroll is representative on the SSBPB. Susie added that a presentation to raise awareness of DV is going to be made to a number of Local Area Forums in Buckinghamshire.

A member asked how long the presentation is and why it is not being taken to all District and County Councils

Susie Yapp explained that she is working on behalf of Partnerships and the presentations can be arranged if required.

A member said that information about DV needs to be disseminated to members of the public and but no contact information is included in the slides seen today and asked what information goes onto posters

Teresa Martin advised that the National Helpline number is given on posters.

Members asked for the following to be looked at as part of the review;

- the recommendations around giving victims of abuse priority for housing
- arranged marriages

A member asked for a breakdown of the list of acronyms used in the presentation

Action: Teresa Martin

A member asked for a summary of the Crime and Victim Act 2004

Action: Sharon Griffin

5 SELF ASSESSMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Teresa Martin explained that the Audit Commission have produced a Domestic Abuse Partnership: Area Self-Assessment tool to help areas think about the strengths and weaknesses of the Domestic Abuse Partnership.

There are three themes and four areas of work;

Themes

- A joint partnership approach
- A victim centred approach including an understanding of diversity
- Effective use of funds, understanding costs, benefits and outcomes

Aspects

- Prevention
- Early identification
- Advice and support

- Dealing with perpetrators

Completion of the self-assessment identified that Buckinghamshire is doing well in a majority of areas but areas of improvement have been identified within the Partnership and are to be incorporated into the new strategy.

The current DV strategy for 2009-2012 is coming to an end in March 2012 and from this an action plan will be developed.

Due to changes in the environmental funding some areas have slipped back. The areas that were identified in needing development in Buckinghamshire are as follows;

- *Developing ways of learning from victims/survivors to help with strategy and service improvements*

There are ways of learning from victims/survivors. It is important that the wants/needs of women, children and perpetrators are incorporated into the current strategy. The development of a focus group and the setting up of a more structured group with greater inclusion of victims of DV is being looked into.

- *Strategies & available information do not reflect the diversity of local needs*

Sue Burke has met with different groups in the community to engage with them and make sure they are part of the next strategy and action plan and that services are available for delivery to all. Wycombe Women's Aid provides outreach to Asian women. Workers now speak some of the Asian languages but a gap has arisen those who can speak African languages.

- *Services need to better reflect local geography*

In Buckinghamshire 35% of people live in rural areas and some services are not easily accessible i.e. public transport. Those living in rural areas quite often report any signs of DV to Health Visitors and GPs; therefore training needs to take place to identify the signs of DV. The Freedom Programme, a twelve week programme providing to men and women about domestic violence is now in place in 9 locations across the county. The Women's Institute have commissioned a report called 'Violence Against Women in Rural and Urban Areas'. A note will be taken of the recommendations from the report.

- *Identify spend on prevention as a first step to accessing the cost-effectiveness of alternative activities*
- *The partnership should ensure that housing options fit the diversity of local victims including across gender*

After the update the following questions were raised;

A member asked for a summary of the report

Action: see link below

<http://tinyurl.com/c62t5py>

A member said there is 24 hour monitoring/protection in refuges and asked how are victims of DV violence protected when they leave their own homes

Teresa Martin said that the Sanctuary Scheme needs to be addressed as one area to be considered is if the woman moves out of the family home schooling of the children is disturbed. The scheme protects victims whilst they are in the home but not on the school run.

A member commented that one of the biggest problems is that no-one is prepared to officially go against the perpetrator.

Teresa Martin said that the IDVA has resulted in an increase in witness statements to the police.

Susie Yapp explained that there is a Specialist DV Court which puts skilled and trained individuals in one place to deal with DV incidents

The Chairman asked for more information about honour based violence within Asian and African communities and if it was possible to have a breakdown of the different cultures i.e. kashmiri, pashtun etc and if the financial recession been a contributing factor towards the increase of incidents of DV

Teresa Martin advised there has been an increase seen in all African countries.

Susie Yapp explained that the general perception is that there is added pressure to the financial burden. The recession escalates DV but doesn't cause it.

The Chairman referred to the resource implications and said that a revised budget summary is needed if the review is needed to show to the Task & Finish Group.

Action: Teresa Martin/ Susie Yapp

6 EVIDENCE GATHERING FOR THE REVIEW

Madeleine Thorpe outlined the Scope of the Review and the areas to be addressed as follows;

- Performance of services in the county
- Development of the 2012-15 Domestic Violence Strategy
- Involvement of Victims
- Honour Based Violence/ Forced Marriage
- Rural Communities (with low access to DV services)
- Prevention of Domestic Violence – working with Children & Young People

The review would also look at how Agencies work together and how data is shared and gives the opportunity to look at proposed commissioning changes.

The next steps include;

- Inviting a police representative to a meeting to explain how their data is shared
- Arranging visits to Aylesbury MARAC, Wycombe Women's Aid, Asian Women's Group, High Wycombe,
- Inviting a representative from Karma Nirvana to attend a meeting

After the update the following questions were raised;

The Chairman referred to a document previously available which gave examples of Best Practice which could be looked at to see what someone else was doing before individuals/organisations starting the work themselves

Teresa Martin advised this was the National Domestic Violence Co-ordinator Network

Action: Madeleine Thorpe

A member asked if it would be possible to speak to any perpetrators and where would men go to discuss DV

Teresa Martin explained that MARAC includes males and that the group may want to speak to a male IDVA and Broken Rainbow (they run a 1:1 male perpetrator programme) and Neil Blacklock, the director of Respect.

A member said the areas of priority should be where there are children involved.

The Chairman asked if there were any members of the review based in rural areas

The suggestion was of Margaret Aston and Ruth Vigor Hedderly 'majoring' in rural areas.

A member said the group needs to link up with Districts as follows;

- Rachel in South Bucks
- Tony Pecks, Home Choice Lettings
- Martin Holt, Chiltern District Council

The Chairman asked the 3 district councillors if they could find out whether the Choice Lettings scheme impacts on the DV groups within their own Council.

A member said more women might come forward if there are safety mechanisms in place

Susie Yapp explained that a lot of women are placed in refuges outside Buckinghamshire. There is a reciprocal arrangement in place across the country.

A member referred to the figures shown in the slides of 125 women and 154 children in refuges in Buckinghamshire and said it would be interesting to know if these women and children are Bucks residents and if not which refuges across the country are housing Buckinghamshire women.

Teresa Martin explained that the figures have previously been looked at. The number of women from other counties coming into refuges in Buckinghamshire and the number of Buckinghamshire residents going to refuges outside the county is roughly balanced. Teresa added that it is quite often young people, not home owners in refuges and that home owners tend to stay in their own homes because of the investment they have in the property.

Teresa Martin asked if it would be helpful for a directory of services for DV to be circulated to members

Action: Teresa Martin

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take be held on Wednesday 7 December 2011, 1pm Mezz 2, County Offices, Aylesbury

CHAIRMAN