

SUBJECT:	<i>Draft Domestic Abuse Strategy</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Cllr Patrick Hogan, Portfolio Holder Healthy Communities</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Martin Holt, Head of Healthy Communities</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Katie Galvin 01494 732265 kgalvin@chiltern.gov.uk and Michael Veryard mveryard@chiltern.gov.uk</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All</i>

1. Purpose of Report

To comment on the Draft Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2018-2021

The PAG is asked to note the report and Draft Domestic Abuse Strategy and note the below resolutions made by Cabinet at the meeting held on 17 April 2018:

DECISIONS MADE BY CABINET ON 17 APRIL 2018:

It was **RESOLVED** that

1. the response to the consultation on the strategy as detailed in Appendix 3 be noted;
2. the approval and endorsement of the final Strategy be delegated to Head of Healthy Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities; and
3. the intention to produce a multi-agency action plan to support delivery of the Strategy be noted.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse and anyone can perpetrate it. Victims are female and male; whether in heterosexual or same sex couples and abuse occurs among all occupational groups. Domestic abuse involves any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, not just violence or abuse between partners. Domestic abuse has a direct impact on family household breakdown and increased homelessness, increased risk of crime and disorder, safeguarding, impact on welfare benefits, reduced opportunities for younger and older people to contribute to the local economy and community.

3. Content of Report

3.1 Domestic abuse is a largely invisible crime. Although domestic abuse affects both men and women female victims are disproportionately higher and women are more likely to experience repeat incidents. It is often difficult to measure the national picture accurately as women are often reluctant or afraid to report it to the police. Many abused women find it difficult to function in their daily lives because of the effects of domestic abuse. Absences from work due to injuries or visits to the doctor often cause them to lose their jobs, making them less able to leave their abusive situations¹ Male victims of domestic abuse can often find it difficult to admit what is really happening to them. Many abused men believe that experiencing abuse in some way affects their masculinity or that they are not "real men" if they are suffering. Men have exactly the

¹ <https://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/domestic-violence/effects-of-domestic-violence-domestic-abuse-on-women-and-children/>

same rights as women to be safe in their own homes and statutory services have a duty to provide services to all, irrespective of gender.

- 3.2 More than 30% of domestic abuse starts in pregnancy, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth. It can result in a wide range of impacts on mother and baby including miscarriage, preterm labour, low birthweight, and long lasting physical disability. The impact on the mother includes physical harm, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- 3.3 Children who live with domestic violence are at an increased risk of behavioural problems and emotional trauma, and mental health difficulties in adult life. Not all children who live with domestic abuse will exhibit problems or difficulties either immediately or later in life, but all will be affected in some way.
- 3.4 The abuse experienced by victims who are Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group as well as those who have been refugees can be further complicated by other relevant abusive factors such as forced marriage, or female genital mutilation (FGM). Women from Black, Asian or minority ethnic communities are likely to face additional barriers to receiving the help that they need; the most profound barrier being communication for non-English speakers.
- 3.5 Research shows that 1 in 4 Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual people will experience domestic abuse along with 80% of the Trans community. Nationally LGBT reporting to the Police is underrepresented due to a number of barriers that include a reluctance to report, confidence in being taken seriously and responses that are insensitive to same sex partners. The Buckinghamshire Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) Strategy for 2018-2021 has been drafted. The District Council's Community Safety team was involved in a multi-agency workshop held in October 2017 to help develop the strategic aims and outcomes of this new strategy. The Councils and other partner agencies have been asked to submit all comments to the Safer and Stronger Partnership Board by the 3rd April.
- 3.6 The Strategy's vision is 'Everyone in Buckinghamshire lives a life free from domestic abuse' and its strategic aims are to:
1. Prevent domestic abuse from happening by raising awareness and challenging attitudes and behaviours which foster or tolerate it.
 2. Reduce the impact of domestic abuse on children and adults by intervening early.
 3. Provide support to victims.
 4. Ensure perpetrators are held to account.
 5. Reduce the risk of people becoming victims again.
- 3.7 These aims will be achieved through working in partnership with all agencies.
- 3.8 The Strategy outlines in detail how the aims will be achieved but primarily it will be through:

Prevent - Informing our communities of the indicators of Domestic Abuse and help available. Raising awareness to children and young people of what constitutes healthy relationships.

Support - Offering help to victims irrespective of age, gender, culture, sexuality need or their level of risk.

Protect - Working with victims to lead safer lives through support services and safeguarding structures as well as protecting them from perpetrators through prosecution, restraining orders or via perpetrator behaviour programmes.

Recovery - Helping victims to feel safe and move on to lead happier, more empowered lives.

3.9 The following actions will form the starting point for a detailed action plan drawn up collaboratively with partners.

Prevent

- Prevent domestic abuse from happening by raising awareness and challenging attitudes and behaviours which foster or tolerate it.

Support

- Reduce the impact of domestic abuse on children and adults by intervening early by working in partnership across all agencies:
- Provide support to victims
- Ensure perpetrators are held to account
- Reduce the risk of people becoming victims again

Protect

- Provide support to victims
- Ensure perpetrators are held to account
- Reduce the risk of people becoming victims again

Recovery

- Provide support to victims
- Reduce the risk of people becoming victims again

How can the District support the strategy?

Community Safety

3.9 The Community Safety team at the District Council works closely with a number of agencies in this area of work.

3.10 In particular, the team works with Bucks County Council, Chiltern Clinical Commissioning Group and Thames Valley Police to raise awareness of the services available to both victims and perpetrators. This includes stands at community events and supermarkets, supporting White Ribbon Day with a cake sale and ensuring posters and leaflets are available in GP surgeries.

- 3.11 The Community Safety Manager works closely with the Chiltern and South Bucks Domestic Abuse Engagement Worker (funded by Thames Valley Police and BCC) who focuses on reducing the number of repeat incidents to standard risk victims and attends the monthly multi-agency safeguarding meeting to discuss the top 10 victims and offenders and identify what support is required.
- 3.12 Domestic Abuse information and awareness training is available for front line staff to ensure they recognise the signs and know what to do. The Community Safety Officers are also Domestic Abuse Champions and will support staff to ensure appropriate agencies are contacted if they are working with a victim or perpetrator.
- 3.13 The Community Safety Manager also works closely with the Housing team to support information sharing with the Police and the Early Help Panel.
- 3.14 The Housing team attend MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) to discuss medium and high risk cases and ensure appropriate safety plans are in place for victims.
- 3.15 The Community Safety team will work closely with partner agencies to help develop and support delivery of the new action plan.

Housing

- 3.16 The Housing Act 1996 and associated guidance places a clear duty on the Council to assist victims of domestic abuse who are seeking housing assistance. This encompasses threatening behaviour, violence and abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional). Under the Act, it is not deemed reasonable for a person to continue to occupy their home if it is probable that this will lead to violence or threats of violence which are likely to be carried out by a person who is associated with the victim. In this situation, a person will be deemed to be homeless and the Council will have a duty to provide assistance and secure accommodation for the household.
- 3.17 The Government's Code of Guidance on Homelessness makes it clear that an assessment of the likelihood of a threat of violence or abuse being carried out should not be based on whether there has been actual violence or abuse in the past. The Council is expected to consider all aspects of the case when making a decision on housing assistance for a person reporting to be a victim of domestic violence.
- 3.18 The draft Bucks DVA Strategy emphasises the importance of agencies working in partnership when dealing with victims of domestic violence. This directly reflects the Government's Code of Guidance on Homelessness which states that the Council should be a key partner in local domestic violence partnerships and should be represented at the local multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). Council Housing Officers are already regular attendees at MARAC and this cross agency working forms a key part of the Council's assessment of its duty to a reported victim of domestic violence.

- 3.19 The section in the draft strategy titled "Provide Support to Victims – Reduce the risk of people becoming victims again" makes specific reference to Housing, namely that:
- 3.20 "Housing applications are given priority status which enables fast and effective "move on" from confidential safe houses and refuges so victims and their children can live in home which is safe. "
- 3.21 The Council already has a duty to secure temporary and longer term housing for victims of domestic violence when (i) he/she has applied for homelessness assistance and (ii) the Council has accepted the main housing duty in response to this application. However, while the Council will always seek to provide alternative secure and safe accommodation as soon as possible, it must be recognised that the demand for family housing (i.e. 2 or more bedrooms) is very high. The availability of family housing is very limited in comparison to the demand and the Council has a range of priority cases that it is trying to assist at any time. Consequently, it is not always possible for the Council to secure a "fast" move-on for a victim. Some victims will have very specific housing requirements in terms of property and location which can severely limit the availability of options for move on.

4. Consultation

The Healthy Community PAG considered and supported the draft strategy, and the Councils draft response, with the recommendation that the Strategy be retitled Domestic Abuse Strategy

5. Options (if any)

To endorse the strategy and devise a district action plan that can link with countywide actions.

6. Corporate Implications

Reports must include specific comments addressing the following implications;

7.1 Financial – domestic abuse can have a direct financial impact on homelessness as the council would be required to accommodate those fleeing violence and in priority need

7.2 Legal – guidance expects that Councils will work in partnership to address the causes and impacts of domestic abuse

7.3 Crime and Disorder- domestic abuse can have a significant impacts on local policing resources and may result in the Community Safety Partnership being required to conduct a Domestic Homicide Review

7. Links to Council Policy Objectives

We will work towards safe, healthy and cohesive communities

8. Next Step

To note the report and support the DVA Strategy 2018-2021 through the development of a local action plan

Background Papers:	As noted in report
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