



REPORT TO COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE

Title: Domestic Violence & Abuse Update

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Purpose of the report

1. This report provides the Select Committee with a brief update of recent and planned activity regarding Domestic Violence and Abuse; and proposes some recommendations.

Recommendations

2. The Committee is recommended to:
 - note and comment on this update
 - consider the proposals for focus on by the Select Committee

Safer Buckinghamshire Plan - DVA strategic priority and delivery plan

3. The [Safer Buckinghamshire Plan](#) for 2020 – 2023 has 5 priorities, one of which is **Tackling domestic violence and abuse**. This DVA priority has a detailed delivery plan based upon the following key actions:
 - adopt an approach focussed on early intervention and prevention - implementing more evidence based best practice interventions for identifying at risk individuals and respond more effectively by intervening early to reduce harm and avert homelessness
 - engage with Early Help services to ensure appropriate early help is delivered to address adverse childhood experiences
 - seek more effective and accessible perpetrator services to change behaviours
 - better align specialist DVA services with mainstream services, reviewing procedures and protocols that link all relevant agencies to provide an improved, more holistic service
 - work to better understand the barriers and increase access to DVA service use for male victims, victims with physical and learning/sensory disabilities and people with poor mental health and improve services accordingly
 - work with the new Council's Housing Service to embed a victim-centred response to DVA, including reviewing the allocations policy to ensure DVA cases receive appropriate support

- work with Housing Associations to intervene early and avert homelessness; and develop accommodation options for victims unable to access shelters
- when commissioning DVA services anew from 2021 onwards:
 - seek opportunities to incorporate or provide separately support services for ‘hidden’ victims, for example older people, males, travellers, LGBT, people without recourse to public funds, services for BAMER in other languages, particularly information and possibly counselling.
 - to strengthen, formalise and connect the support received from mental health services and substance misuse services.
- seek alternative secure funding for the IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) service (an essential component of the commissioned DVA service) to remove dependency on short term funding
- implement a multi-agency partnership training programme to support all professionals in responding to victims, perpetrators and others affected e.g. children.
- produce public information which makes it clear what DVA is, how to spot the signs of it and how to respond to it as a victim, witness, or a concerned person
- work with the new Community Boards and community organisations, extend our DVA Champions scheme to raise awareness and encourage more consistent understanding of the issues and changes in legislation across our communities
- implement Domestic Homicide Review learning events to share lessons learned from both local and national recommendations

DVA demand in Buckinghamshire

4. The Buckinghamshire Public Health service has estimated the prevalence of DVA in Buckinghamshire amongst adults¹ – see table below:

Buckinghamshire	Age 16 - 59	Age 60 - 74
Total number of people in each age group	298,867	81,735
Prevalence of any DVA (partner or family non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking)	6.1%	2.4%
Estimate number of people with experience of DV in Bucks by age group	18,231	1,962
Total number of people with experience of DVA in Bucks (men and women aged 16-74)	20,193	

5. DVA crimes:
- The number of DVA related crimes recorded by the Police at the end of Q2 (Sept 2020) is 12% higher than the same time last year. In Chiltern & South Bucks LPA², it is 16% higher. Levels have been consistently higher every month in 2020/21 until September where numbers have fallen. However, this is very recent data, and DVA Flagged crimes are

¹ Based upon the Crime Survey for England & Wales, ONS 2018

² LPA = Local Police Area

regularly reviewed so there may be some adjustment to September numbers. This rise is attributed to a number of factors – changes in recording practice, increased awareness leading to increased reporting and a likely trend following lockdown.

- In 2019/20, 75% of DVA related crime was categorised as 'violence against the person', at the end of Q2, this proportion had increased to 79%. The increase in *violent crimes* was primarily accounted for by an increase in *violence without Injury*.

6. Commissioned services:

- Calls to Women’s Aid are 11% lower than the same time last year, however, that drop was almost wholly accounted for by Q1 (lockdown) and Q2 has returned to 2019/20 levels.
- Referrals to Women’s Aid refuges have increased this quarter but are still less than half the number as this time last year. Both refuges are now open and accepting new families having been closed during lockdown. Covid 14-day isolation requirements mean only one family can be admitted at a time. However, twice the number of victims as in 2019/20 are receiving IDVA³ support.
- Call levels have continued to increase since May 2020, despite a slight drop in call levels during August. This continues to exceed pre-lockdown levels and, except for July, is higher than the same period in 2019. The *number of pieces of short-term work* are also consistently higher than for the same period in 2019.

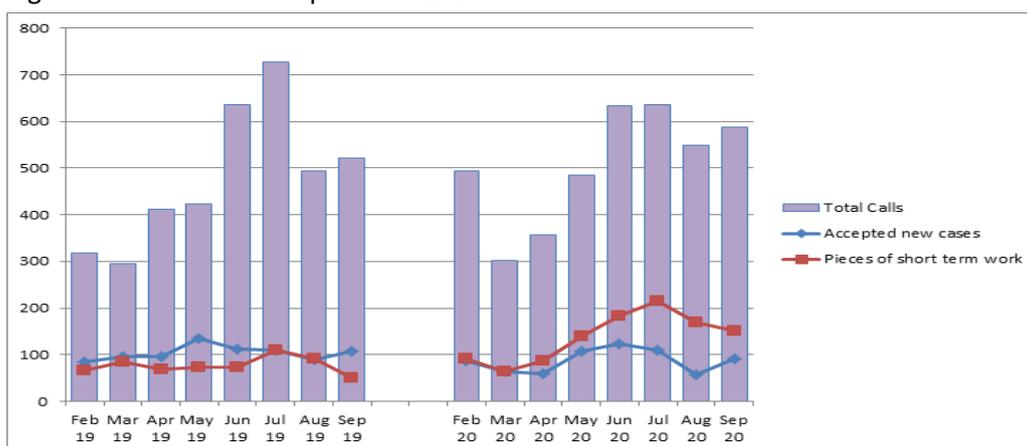


Chart- showing the profile of calls, accepted new cases and pieces of short-term work completed by Aylesbury and Wycombe Women’s Aid compared to the same time last year.

7. Although lockdown has lifted, we are continuing to monitor DVA demand in light of victims now taking the opportunity to leave or seek help which they may not have felt ready to do during the lockdown period. To manage demand, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Community Safety Fund was allocated to our local Women’s Aid services to increase outreach capacity.

Domestic Abuse Bill

8. Having been delayed by last December’s election, the Domestic Abuse Bill is making its way through parliament and is awaiting a date for the second reading in the House of Lords. It is anticipated that the Bill will be enacted by April 2021.

³ IDVA = Independent Domestic Violence Advocate

9. The Bill includes a wider range of provisions, the majority of which relate to policing and the criminal justice system. Other provisions relate to strengthening housing support for victims. Specifically, for local authorities, there is a new Duty relating to support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation, to establish a Domestic Abuse Board and undertake a Needs Assessment relating to safe accommodation and support for DVA victims. A summary of the key provisions of the Bill can be found [here](#).
10. The one local authority requirement that will need to be in place by April 1st is the Domestic Abuse Board, or to have arrangements to discharge the function through other governance arrangements. Buckinghamshire plans to have the Board operating in shadow form before April 1st.
11. Subject to the Spending Review, there will be *new burden* funding for local authorities.

Integrated DVA Services

12. The Council commissions a range of support services for victims, principally through one main contract. This contract was due to end in 2021 but due to delays caused by lockdown has been extended. Re-commissioning is underway with the newly commissioned service commencing in March 2022.
13. The new service will need to accommodate the requirements flowing from the DVA Bill in addition to the locally determined service requirements.

Wycombe Women's Aid Impact Report 2019/20

14. Wycombe Women's Aid has published its Impact Report for 2019/20. In total WWA supported 887 women, 137 children and 61 young people. There were 3,015 helpline calls and 2,526 face to face support sessions. 29% of women were seeking support around historic DVA and 71% were seeking support around current DVA. 7 years was the average length of abuse experienced by service users. 78% of families who left refuge moved onto safer accommodation.
 - Support at court was provided 13 times
 - 11 convictions obtained
 - 18 injunctions obtained
 - 6 improvements to security
15. The Aylesbury Women's Aid Impact Report will be published in November.

Perpetrator interventions

16. Effective intervention with perpetrators is one of the most challenging areas of DVA service provision whilst being an area where there is generally universal support to seek behaviour change in perpetrators.

17. One key action in the Safer Buckinghamshire DVA delivery plan is to seek more accessible and effective perpetrator interventions to change behaviours; and explore early intervention and prevention to prevent someone becoming a DVA perpetrator.
18. In Buckinghamshire, the only perpetrator programme was commissioned by the Police & Crime Commissioner and delivered by the Community Rehabilitation Company. A recent evaluation commissioned by the PCC concluded that, although the programme was well delivered, it was no more effective in achieving a positive outcome than short term measures such as writing a letter to the perpetrator. For this reason, the PCC has suspended the service whilst exploring more effective options.
19. Elsewhere in the Thames Valley, there are some small perpetrator programmes commissioned directly by local authorities.

“Intersectionality” (understanding of DVA by different social and gender characteristics)

20. **Learning disability:** Earlier this year, the charity Talkback was commissioned by the Council to deliver some local and national research to establish the nature and scale of DVA issues in Buckinghamshire relating to learning disability and/or autism, both as victims and perpetrators. TalkBack has completed this work and made some recommendations which are being reviewed and taken forward by a Task & Finish Group.
21. **Male victims of DVA:** According to the national data, in the year ending March 2018, roughly one 1/3 of people reporting DVA (National Crime Survey) were men. However, most DVA victim services are exclusively for women. This autumn, we are reviewing the support provided for male victims in Buckinghamshire. The review will investigate research carried out by key organisations such as Mankind’s ‘Oak Book’ directory of services for male victims and also seeks to consult male victims.
22. **Colour and ethnicity:** A recent report into DVA and BAME communities in the Thames Valley⁴ identified a number of barriers which would apply to DVA victims in Buckinghamshire such as the prevalence of honour and shame culture creating significant consequences for disclosing DVA, coercive control, language barriers and cultural misunderstandings by service providers.
23. **Older people:** One area to explore further in the next 12 months is DVA and older people.

Domestic Homicide Reviews

24. A Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is a statutory multi-agency review that takes place following the death of an individual aged sixteen or over, which has, or appears to have resulted from violence, abuse or neglect; and been inflicted by a person to whom they were

⁴ The Thames Valley BAMER Project - supported by the nine Local Authorities in Thames Valley and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The project, which concluded in March 2020, set out to identify the barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who are subjected to abuse or violence when needing to access support, and to identify lessons for improving service responses

related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship or a member of the same household as themselves.

25. 14 DHRs have been conducted in Buckinghamshire since their introduction in 2011. The DHRs concerned the deaths of 5 male and 9 women victims. The deaths included 4 suicides (3 women and 1 man).
26. One of the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan actions is to hold regular DHR learning events. The 1st learning event is on 9th December, focusing on "*Suicide and Domestic Abuse*". The 100 virtual tickets – targeted at people who usually sit on Buckinghamshire DHRs - have sold out. Preparations for the next learning event which will be "*DHRs and intersectionality*" on 23rd June 2021 is already in motion. Contributions are planned from the LGBT community, BAME and the traveller community.

Safe Accommodation Project

27. The advert for a Women's Aid Complex Needs Floating Support worker has gone out and interviews are planned for the 19th October. The £70K funding was successfully bid from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government Safe Accommodation Fund. The successful candidate will provide wrap around support for those with complex needs for the first 6 weeks up until placement in temporary accommodation and potentially for a few weeks thereafter if the individual is almost settled. The project, supported by the Council's Housing Service, will also explore move-on accommodation for victims alongside housing providers.

White Ribbon 2020

28. A communications strategy has been produced around White Ribbon Day 2020. White Ribbon Day is our opportunity to bring people together – in person or online - to raise awareness and commit to prevent men's violence against women. However, we recognise that DVA does not discriminate and anyone can be a victim no matter of no matter of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age or financial background. Our campaign will include all potential victims and raise awareness of the support on offer.
29. We are committing to a whole week of promotion for this campaign w/c 23rd November 2020. Each day will focus on different types of victim (females, males, BME, those with a disability and LGBT+) to tailor our messages and be more specific about the types of support on offer locally. There are scheduled radio adverts going out the week before, during and week after the campaign to reach those who will be inevitably isolating in their homes from Covid19.
30. We are also taking the opportunity to focus on the theme of coercive control emerging (nationally and locally) in DHRs and will be promoting the indicators of coercive control in our public and professional campaigns.

Buckinghamshire DVA Champion's Network

31. Research tells us that victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) can go to as many as 5 different agencies before they find appropriate help, advice and support. By having Domestic

Abuse Champions with increased awareness of the problems and of local services, the aim is to dramatically reduce this number and ensure early intervention.

32. Buckinghamshire has a network of 460 DVA champions. These are trained individuals from a wide range of internal council departments and external organisations. It is free to join the network and enjoy all of its benefits.
33. Champions are able to advise their clients, colleagues, family and friends and signpost them to local domestic abuse resources and support services.
34. The Champions are supported by quarterly network meetings. The July meeting focussed on male victims of DVA and the September meeting was on disability and DVA. At the next network meeting in December, the speaker will be the Director at the Centre for Women's Justice who has acted in many high-profile cases on behalf of women appealing murder convictions for killing abusive partners, most recently the well documented Sally Challen case.
35. Champion's also have access to a Champion's database with external champions within the Thames Valley and those further afield for example Havering and Torbay. This offers the opportunity to not "reinvent the wheel" and exchange ideas, advice and best practice.
36. As mentioned earlier, a bite-sized training module is being developed for people who are keen to be DVA Champions but are not able to complete the full 2-day training programme e.g. teachers, councillors, community board members. There's been some delay in designing this training module due to Covid, but it should be finalised by the end of the year.

Select Committee work programme and DVA

37. The Select Committee plans to focus on DVA at its meeting in March 2021.
 - We would recommend a focus on perpetrator interventions, reviewing what has worked well elsewhere in the country and how local provision can be improved.
 - An alternative focus could be on the work of the IDVAs and how the function is deployed within Buckinghamshire.
38. Consideration of the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Bill provisions and their impact would be useful some 18 months or so after the Bill has become law in April 2021.