

Date: 14 October 2021

Title: Director of Public Health Annual Report: Domestic Violence and Abuse

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Report Sponsor: Cllr Angela Macpherson / Cllr Carl Jackson

Purpose of Report: It is a statutory duty for the Director of Public Health to produce an annual report on the health of their population. This year’s report focuses on domestic violence and abuse and makes recommendations for all partners in Buckinghamshire.

The report is particularly relevant to members of the health and wellbeing board as domestic abuse has a significant impact on mental and physical health. Many people presenting to partner services will be experiencing domestic abuse and services have an opportunity to identify, support and refer victims of domestic abuse to key services. Domestic abuse will affect many people working in our organisations which makes tackling domestic abuse a key part of any organisational wellbeing strategy. Ending domestic abuse is everyone’s business and requires a co-ordinated response from national government, local partners and the public.

Background

The report was based on the findings of a needs’ assessment conducted pre-pandemic by the Public Health team and a recent literature review. It takes into account the views of a range of partners from Buckinghamshire Council, the NHS, Thames Valley Police, Women’s Aid and the views of survivors of domestic abuse and service users.

This report covers key areas including how to recognise signs of domestic abuse and signposts where to get help, who may be at greater risk of experiencing domestic abuse and when, including research on warning signs leading up to domestic homicides. It also covers what is known about interventions that contribute to reducing the risk and harms of domestic abuse and the need for more work to focus on preventing perpetrators from committing domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Bill 2021 was passed by Parliament in April 2021. The Bill and its statutory requirements, such as the formation of a Domestic Abuse Board, will inform local actions.

This report has been shared with members of the new Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board to help inform the developing strategy. It makes recommendations based on our local situation for the Board and a range of partners in Buckinghamshire to implement. The Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board will be responsible for strategy development and

development and oversight of an action plan which should include the responses to these recommendations.

Report for information, discussion, decision or approval: This report is for discussion and endorsement by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Recommendations:

- The Health and Wellbeing Board is requested to note the Director of Public Health Annual Report and endorse the recommendations.
- Members of the Health and wellbeing Board are requested to identify how their organisation can tackle domestic violence and contribute to the delivery of the Director of Public Health Annual Report recommendations and the actions in the developing Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- The Health and Wellbeing Board is requested to ensure active engagement of the relevant organisations in the Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board.

Recommendations within the Director of Public Health Annual Report: Domestic Violence and Abuse

The following recommendations should, in addition to statutory duties for support for people living in safe accommodation, inform the work of partners and the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board strategy and delivery plan:

1. The Domestic Abuse Board should support awareness raising of domestic abuse through coordinated, county-wide participation in a selected national campaign.
2. The Domestic Abuse Board should consider how bystander training could be utilised locally and promoted, as an evidence-based intervention to challenge harmful attitudes, language and behaviour relating to domestic abuse for people of all ages.
3. Buckinghamshire Council Community Safety team should consider how to increase the diversity within the domestic violence and abuse champions scheme by actively recruiting network members that reflect the diversity of people that may experience domestic abuse.
4. The Domestic Abuse Board should develop and roll-out high-quality, shared, scenario-based training across Buckinghamshire for key stakeholders and front-line staff. Primary care should also consider implementing the IRIS training package as an effective evidence-based training programme across Buckinghamshire.
5. The Domestic Abuse Board should oversee the development of a Buckinghamshire domestic abuse referral pathway for all staff to follow, to ensure timely and responsive delivery of services, fully understood by frontline staff and accessible to victims seeking help.

6. All Board member agencies to support the development of an evidence base for what works for perpetrators, to inform commissioning of promising interventions, and evaluation of their effectiveness.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is domestic abuse and who is at risk?

- 1.1 The Domestic Abuse Bill 2021 defines domestic abuse behaviour to consist of any of the following; physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological, emotional or other abuse.
- 1.2 Domestic abuse is often poorly recognised by victims and others and under-reported when recognised. Less than 1 in 5 women experiencing domestic abuse report it to the police.
- 1.3 One in 20 adults are estimated to experience domestic violence every year equating to almost 21,000 people a year in Buckinghamshire or 57 people every day.
- 1.4 Domestic violence crimes accounted for 15% of all recorded crime in Buckinghamshire from 2019 to 2020.
- 1.5 Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, at any age, across all gender identities, ethnic groups and walks of life. It can take place in different types of relationships such as between family members, ex-partners and people not living together.
- 1.6 Women are more commonly victims of domestic abuse than men and twice as many women as men experience domestic abuse. Police data for Buckinghamshire reveals 71% of victims of domestic violence were female
- 1.7 Women experience more of certain types of abuse including; more repeated physical violence, more severe violence, more sexual violence, more coercive control, more injuries and more fear of their partner than men. 91% of domestic violence crimes causing injuries are against women.
- 1.8 Domestic abuse can happen to anyone however it appears that some people are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse. A lack of complete data on victims limits our understanding of the full picture e.g. data on ethnicity is often not recorded. Much of our data comes from surveys or services. A lack of data may reflect reluctance to provide information, poor data collection, or barriers to accessing services, either because they are not inclusive or are perceived not to be.

- 1.9 From the data that exists it appears that being younger, having poorer mental health, having a physical or learning disability, being unemployed, from a single-parent household, of mixed ethnicity or identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or another definition of gender and sexuality identity increased the risk of experiencing domestic abuse.
- 1.10 This risk of domestic abuse is increased at certain times; when separating or fleeing from abuse, during or after pregnancy, when drugs or alcohol are used and around the time of football matches.
- 1.11 We know even less about perpetrators but the evidence that exists shows that the majority are men. Male perpetrators are more likely to seriously injure or kill their victim. Police data for Buckinghamshire show that 72% of perpetrators in Buckinghamshire were male (10 months to January 2021).
- 1.12 Having low self-esteem or depression, being hostile towards women, experiencing economic or marital stress, and communities with low social cohesion and social capital, and low bystander intervention increase the risk of people becoming perpetrators. Normalising abusive behaviour also increases the risk of becoming a perpetrator.
- 1.13 Perpetrators of domestic homicides are more likely to be men and are more often a partner or ex-partner. 86% domestic homicides between 2017 and 2019 in England and Wales were committed by men.

Trends in domestic abuse

- 1.14 In England and Wales, domestic abuse rates had been gradually decreasing between 2005 and 2020. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, this trend has reversed. During the first lockdown (March-June 2020), Police data showed a 7% increase in domestic abuse related offences. Contacts to the National Domestic Abuse charity Refuge rose by 61% and contacts to the charity Respect which supports male victims of domestic abuse rose by 70%.
- 1.15 Local data for Buckinghamshire showed an increase in both reported domestic abuse crimes and use of services by victims. Data up to January 2021 showed a 15% increase in domestic abuse crimes reported to police in Buckinghamshire.

Impact of Domestic Abuse

- 1.16 Experiencing and witnessing domestic abuse can have devastating impacts on victims, and their children, friends and wider family. Harm as a result of domestic abuse can have lifelong impacts on physical, mental and sexual health. The more severe the abuse, the greater the impact. In the worst cases, domestic abuse can result in homicide, including suicide as a result of domestic abuse.

- 1.17 The harms from domestic abuse include poor physical & mental health, chronic pain, memory loss, problems with daily activities, the consequences of sexual violence and “self-medicating” with drugs or alcohol. 16% of people experiencing domestic abuse consider or attempt suicide and 13% self-harm. 1 in 5 high risk victims attended A&E with injuries in the year before getting help offering opportunities to detect and prevent further abuse.
- 1.18 Domestic abuse also increases the risk of homelessness, poverty and impacts on employment. Domestic abuse is 2nd most common reason for losing a home and it is estimated that 1 in 5 homeless women are homeless due to domestic abuse.
- 1.19 It is estimated 1 in 5 children are exposed to domestic abuse in UK. This causes emotional, psychological, social, educational and developmental problems. This can be due to being directly harmed by a perpetrator but also by witnessing the abuse. The impact of moving home and school to escape a perpetrator and the wider social and economic impact on the family can affect children profoundly. There is also a danger that children may in some cases begin to see abuse as normal behaviour.
- 1.20 In 2020/21 in Buckinghamshire there were 2,400 referrals for social care assessment where domestic abuse was the primary concern (23% all children’s social care referrals). As a result 700 children were given children in need, child protection plans or became looked after. This accounted for half of all children who became looked after that year.
- 1.21 From 2009 to 2018 a woman was killed every four days by her partner or ex-partner in the UK. Controlling behaviour by the perpetrator was the best predictor of homicide rather than a history of violence. Research has indicated a predictable pattern of behaviour characterised by eight stages leading up to homicide in many cases examined. In almost all cases the perpetrator had a history of coercive control, stalking or domestic abuse. Leaving the relationship is a particularly dangerous time for women and 40% of women killed by a male partner in 2018 were separating/just separated from partner.
- 1.22 Between 2017 and 2019 there were 357 domestic homicides in England and Wales. Men committed 86% of all domestic homicides. The victim was female in 77% of domestic homicides. The perpetrator was male in 96% of female homicides and 53% of male homicides.
- 1.23 Between 2011 and 2020, there were 39 domestic homicides in the Thames Valley area, of which 15 were in Buckinghamshire.
- 1.24 Using national estimates the potential annual cost of the consequences of domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire is £687 million. We estimate that the cost of responding to

the domestic abuse cases *that we know about* in Buckinghamshire is about £3.5 million.

What works to tackle domestic violence?

- 1.25 There are many potentially effective domestic abuse interventions for victims, including school-based awareness raising, bystander interventions, improving public awareness and advocacy, training of frontline staff, and support such as independent domestic violence advisors and multiagency risk assessment conferences.
- 1.26 Historically, many interventions addressing domestic abuse have not been thoroughly evaluated so it is vital that new and existing programmes should be monitored and reviewed to improve the robustness of the evidence base.
- 1.27 Interventions for perpetrators are even less well understood, however these interventions are an extremely important part of tackling domestic violence and abuse services and should be developed and thoroughly evaluated. There needs to be much more focus on preventing people becoming abusers in the first place and preventing perpetrators from continuing their abuse.

Next steps for Buckinghamshire

- 1.28 Domestic abuse is a complex societal issue and prevention of domestic abuse and the response to domestic abuse must be multifaceted and multi-agency. The need to embed early intervention and prevention into a multiagency response to domestic abuse is highlighted in the government's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The response includes government-led initiatives as well as local authority multi-agency working, safeguarding, and commissioning. It highlights the multi-layered and co-ordinated health, social and criminal justice approaches required to tackle this issue and can be applied to all victims.
- 1.29 Preventing domestic abuse from occurring must be a priority and we are supporting our schools to implement recent RSHE (relationships, sex and health education) that includes recognising domestic abuse and abusive relationships, coercive control, consent, and mutual respect in friendships and relationships.
- 1.30 The new multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board will be championing good practice in awareness raising, education and training and the provision of high-quality support and advocacy services.
- 1.31 Services for victims (including children) and perpetrators will need to be further developed to meet the needs of diverse groups and people with protected characteristics, recognising that anyone can be a victim.

- 1.32 Starting with partners on the Board, all organisations should adopt measures to keep employees and service users safe from domestic abuse especially during this period of home working, remote digital working and digital consultations.
- 1.33 The Domestic Abuse Board will also need to explore how we can share and learn from past and current domestic homicide reviews to understand how such tragedies can be prevented in the future.
- 1.34 The following recommendations should, in addition to statutory duties for support for people living in safe accommodation, inform the work of partners and the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board strategy and delivery plan:
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