



Report to Cabinet

Date:	7 th December 2021
Title:	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities
Contact officer:	Claire Hawkes, Service Director Localities and Strategic Partnerships
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	To approve the Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Strategy; and to approve the allocation of the domestic abuse grant proposed in Appendix 2.
Reason for decision:	Under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 all councils are required to publish a Domestic Abuse strategy.

1. Content of report

- 1.1 One in 20 adults are estimated to experience domestic abuse every year equating to almost 21,000 people a year in Buckinghamshire or 57 people every day. It is a crime which disproportionately affects women, however it can happen to anyone anywhere irrespective of sexuality, religion, gender, ethnicity, income or age.
- 1.2 Often hidden from view, at home and out of sight, the impact of domestic abuse is far-reaching and long lasting, causing a ripple effect into all parts of a person's life. It can be devastating on physical and mental health with serious consequences for children witnessing domestic abuse. The pandemic has had an immeasurable impact with it being branded as an "epidemic beneath the pandemic".
- 1.3 Buckinghamshire has many excellent statutory and voluntary sector services working well together but we know we can do more.
- 1.4 We welcome the new Domestic Abuse Act. We want Buckinghamshire to be a place where as few people as possible are affected by domestic abuse, but those who are can get help and live the lives they want. Making people feel safe requires a co-ordinated response from government, local authorities, partners, and the public.

- 1.5 The act places new duties on the local authorities. One of which is to establish a local Domestic Abuse Board. In Buckinghamshire this falls under the umbrella of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board.
- 1.6 The multi-agency Board helped co-design a strategy (appendix 1) and will oversee an action plan to commission and deliver support to victims and their children within safe accommodation services. Everyone's situation is different, and a one-size-fits-all approach to domestic abuse does not work. This high-level strategy seeks to take an ambitious holistic approach to how we want to develop and improve domestic abuse services over the next 3 years.
- 1.7 In drafting the strategy, the Board considered research from the 2021 Director of Public Health's annual report, the 2021 needs assessment and consultation feedback.

2. Other options considered

- 2.1 The production and delivery of this strategy is a statutory duty set out under section 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. By publishing a strategy on our webpages before January 2022 we are compliant with the duty.

3. Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 Buckinghamshire has received £850,000 from the government for specific elements of the new statutory duties. A high-level overview of the proposed distribution of these funds can be seen in Appendix 3. More detailed allocations will be formed following the development of SMART action and delivery plans. This funding, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner's funding commitment, provides an opportunity to accelerate our domestic abuse work. It enables us to reset our work plans and commissioning activity to focus on new innovative collaboration which puts us as best in class.
- 3.2 However, this level of funding has not been guaranteed by Government, although there has been an indication that similar levels of funding will be provided next financial year, no commitment has been made about subsequent years. We will not be made aware of future grants until after the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 3.3 Domestic abuse can impact a person's life significantly. Home Office (2019) analysis highlighted the economic and social costs of domestic abuse of over £66b. A robust domestic abuse strategy will support all service areas of the Council and also the work of our statutory partners.

4. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 4.1 Domestic abuse is a critical area and plans will require support from across a wide range of council services. The Cabinet Members for Communities, Housing, Children's, Adults and Health have highlighted their commitment in the foreword section of the strategy.
- 4.2 The draft strategy and needs assessment were published on Your Voice Bucks with a short survey to gather initial views both from services, partners and providers. A link to the survey was distributed through the community board networks.
- 4.3 Two task and finish groups were held with members of the Domestic Abuse Board as well as a number of follow up conversations with key partners and council services.
- 4.4 The Communities & Localism Select Committee were offered the opportunity to respond both via the survey and through a briefing session.
- 4.5 The overwhelming response to the draft strategy was positive. Some changes were made in response to the feedback to better reflect the need to consult with marginalised groups, emphasise the need to provide services which meet all the emotional and physical needs of victims and their children, and to ensure that all services and agencies within Buckinghamshire worked together to deliver the desired outcomes of the strategy.

5. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 5.1 In addition to the above, the views of the Partnership 'Joint Chairs' group were sought. This group brings together Chief Officers and Chairs of Buckinghamshire's statutory partnerships who highlight that domestic abuse is a common theme running across all partnership areas. The group welcomed the approach and the final version demonstrates their commitment to collaborate in this critical area.
- 5.2 Representatives from Domestic Abuse Team at Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities attended the first meeting of Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse board and commented on the positive approach, citing the draft as good practice. Representatives of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office have also commented on the proactive approach taken.

6. Next steps and review

- 6.1 Subject to the approval of the strategy, work will swiftly begin to form detailed SMART action plans. To help continue to understand the local action needed, community board chairs will be invited to attend workshops to discuss the needs assessment and the development of local action plans. The new localism model enables local

conversations and public facing messaging. This is particularly important with a crime that often goes unreported and one that we wish to raise public awareness with.

- 6.2 The Domestic Abuse Board will monitor action plans reporting into the Safer Bucks Board as this links to Priority 4 of the Safer Bucks Plan. The Strategy will be refreshed every 3 years.

7. Background papers

- 7.1 Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Strategy (appendix 1)
- 7.2 Proposed High level funding allocation (appendix 2)
- 7.3 [Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment 2021](#)

8. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 8.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone [01296 382343] or email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]

