

Domestic Abuse Strategy

2021 - 2024

Taking a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse -
there's no excuse



Working together to develop and improve
domestic abuse services in Buckinghamshire

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If you are a victim of domestic abuse it is not your fault. You are not to blame and you are not alone. Help is available.

In an emergency, always call 999.

If you can't speak, call 999 and press 55; please stay on the line, listen to the call handler and answer questions, either by pushing buttons or coughing; the call handler will do everything they can to determine your location so they can deploy officers to you; if you can say one thing, please say your address.

If it's a non-emergency, you can call 101 or [make a report online](#) on the website.

If you don't want to speak to the police, the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) is free and open 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247.

Or you can contact:

[Aylesbury Women's Aid](#): 01296 436827

[Wycombe Women's Aid](#): 01494 461367

[AV & MK Sexual Assault and Abuse Service](#):
01296 719772

[Rape and Sexual Assault Support Service \(South Bucks\)](#): 01494 462222 or

[RSASS \(South Bucks\) Asian Women's Helpline](#): 07528 245304

If you feel at risk of harming yourself or others, the Samaritans are always available on 116 123. In an emergency, call 999 or go to your nearest A&E department.

1. FOREWORD

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.

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.'



In Buckinghamshire we are taking a zero tolerance approach and feel ending domestic abuse is everyone's business.

In Buckinghamshire we are taking a zero tolerance approach and feel **ending domestic abuse is everyone's business**. Making people feel safe requires a thorough co-ordinated response from government, local authorities, partners and the public. Everyone's situation is different, and a one-size-fits-all approach does not work, but if we can talk about it, we can start to make the change.

Understanding what domestic abuse is and how it impacts on individuals, families and communities is crucial to ensuring that high-quality and cost-effective services are delivered.

We have a strong collaborative ethos across Buckinghamshire with many excellent statutory and voluntary sector services working well together, but we know we can do more. The Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board, as part of Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership, is looking to strengthen and coordinate our responses across our services.

Recognising the high level of unreported abuse taking place, and that people in different circumstances are impacted by domestic abuse in different ways, it is important that we work together. We need to strengthen our collective knowledge of unreported abuse and ensure services are accessible as early as possible and can meet individual needs.

We were pleased to see the Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021; this gives more resources to tackle this critical issue. With the new duties we are now publishing our intentions to drive forward a three-year strategy for victim support and safe accommodation. The Act and the introduction of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner is important to help raise awareness and ensure the advocacy continues.

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 to end the abuse and go on to live the lives they want.

This strategy is about how we want to develop and improve domestic abuse services over the next three years. Underpinned by a SMART action plan, this document sets out our commitments which have been informed by a review of the effectiveness of current practice and the changing national context alongside qualitative and quantitative data from a range of contributors.

A key element is the voice of survivors, children and young people and professionals. Every voice counts and it is important we continue to listen and respond to feedback in order to make real progress.

None of us can do this alone; our partnership is vital. It is only by working together that we can hope to develop our understanding, approach and provision in such a way that we increase the safety and life chances of everyone in Buckinghamshire.



Steve Bowles
Cabinet Member
Communities



Angela Macpherson
Deputy Leader
Cabinet Member
Health and Wellbeing



Arif Hussain
Deputy Cabinet Member
Community Safety



Nick Naylor
Cabinet Member
Housing, Homelessness
and Regulatory Services



Anita Cranmer
Cabinet Member
Education & Children's
Services

2. BEING EVIDENCE-BASED

This strategy has been informed by listening to the voices of survivors of domestic abuse, children and young people as well as professionals.



Survivors:

- Accessible information about services (languages and formats)
- Targeted communications
- Effective signposting
- Simplified referral pathways for the whole family
- Refuges that meet specific cultural needs
- Increased support in finding safe alternative accommodation



Children and young people:

- To be safe and feel safe
- To feel heard
- Range of tailored support
- Peer support - for children to be able to talk to others their age who are going through the same thing
- Children and young people as victims
- Young people/young adults as direct victims



Professionals:

- Tailored services
- A 'one stop shop'
- Wider promotion of what is available
- Development of pathways and rapid response services
- Regular training for frontline staff
- Support to recognise an abusive relationship
- Safe space to disclose
- Improved offer of housing solutions
- Post-abuse support
- Accessible perpetrator programmes that bring meaningful change

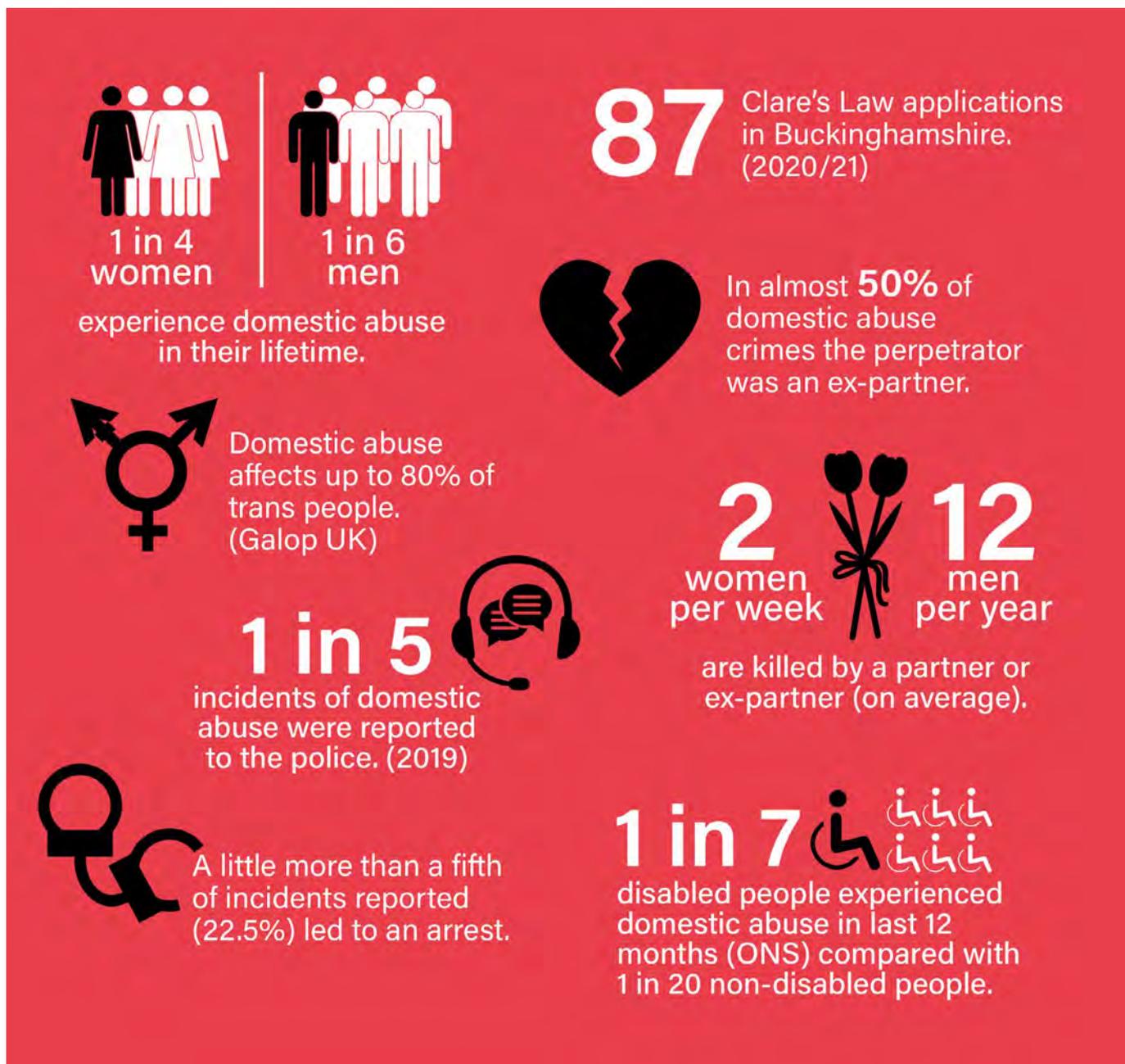
Particular thanks go to:

- Thames Valley Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) Project for focus group discussions.
- Children's Services colleagues for support on hearing children's and young people's voices.
- Sue Moulder and Heather Darker for interviewing 76 professionals including health, police, probation, education, adult and children's social care and housing.
- Dr Jane O'Grady, Buckinghamshire Council's Director of Public Health, for her Annual Report 2021 and recommendations (along with the Public Health team) for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).
- Business Insight and Intelligence team for supporting the refresh of the needs assessment.
- All members of the Shadow Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board for their insight and ideas in shaping our work towards the new duties.

National Context

Domestic abuse is committed against someone to exert power and control over them. It can be committed by a current or former partner, or family member, and disproportionately affects women.

Abuse could be sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, or psychological abuse and coercive behaviour, all of which may or may not be accompanied by physical violence.



Domestic abuse is often a 'hidden' issue which presents challenges to understanding the full extent of the subject. Although statistics are helpful in giving an indication of how far-reaching domestic abuse is, reported statistics will be much lower than actual abuse levels, and estimates may mask under-reporting within certain minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities, as well as mask significant barriers for victims to reach out for help.

It is estimated that the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) community may experience domestic abuse 1.6 times more frequently than the Cisgender and Heterosexual community.

Understanding the prevalence of domestic abuse and recognising the devastation it can cause on both an individual and their family as well as for the economy, the government has responded by publishing a new [Domestic Abuse Bill](#) and appointing a [Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#).

Other current legislation includes the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#), also known as 'Clare's Law'. This is named after Clare Wood, who was murdered in 2009 by her ex-partner who had an undisclosed history of violence against women. The scheme gives members of the public a formal mechanism to enquire about the information the police hold on a person in relation to domestic abuse offences and convictions (The Right to Ask), as well as giving police the power to disclose information to a member of the public to prevent a crime from happening (The Right to Know).

Local Context

Domestic abuse is prevalent in all communities and all areas of our county. Approximately **21,000 adults in Buckinghamshire will experience domestic abuse each year; that's 57 people EVERY DAY.**

There are disproportionately more female victims (71%) than male (29%) with over half of all victims (56%) being aged between 18 and 40 years of age.

There are 544,000 people living in Buckinghamshire, with an estimated 21,000 incidences of domestic violence and abuse occurring each year within the county.

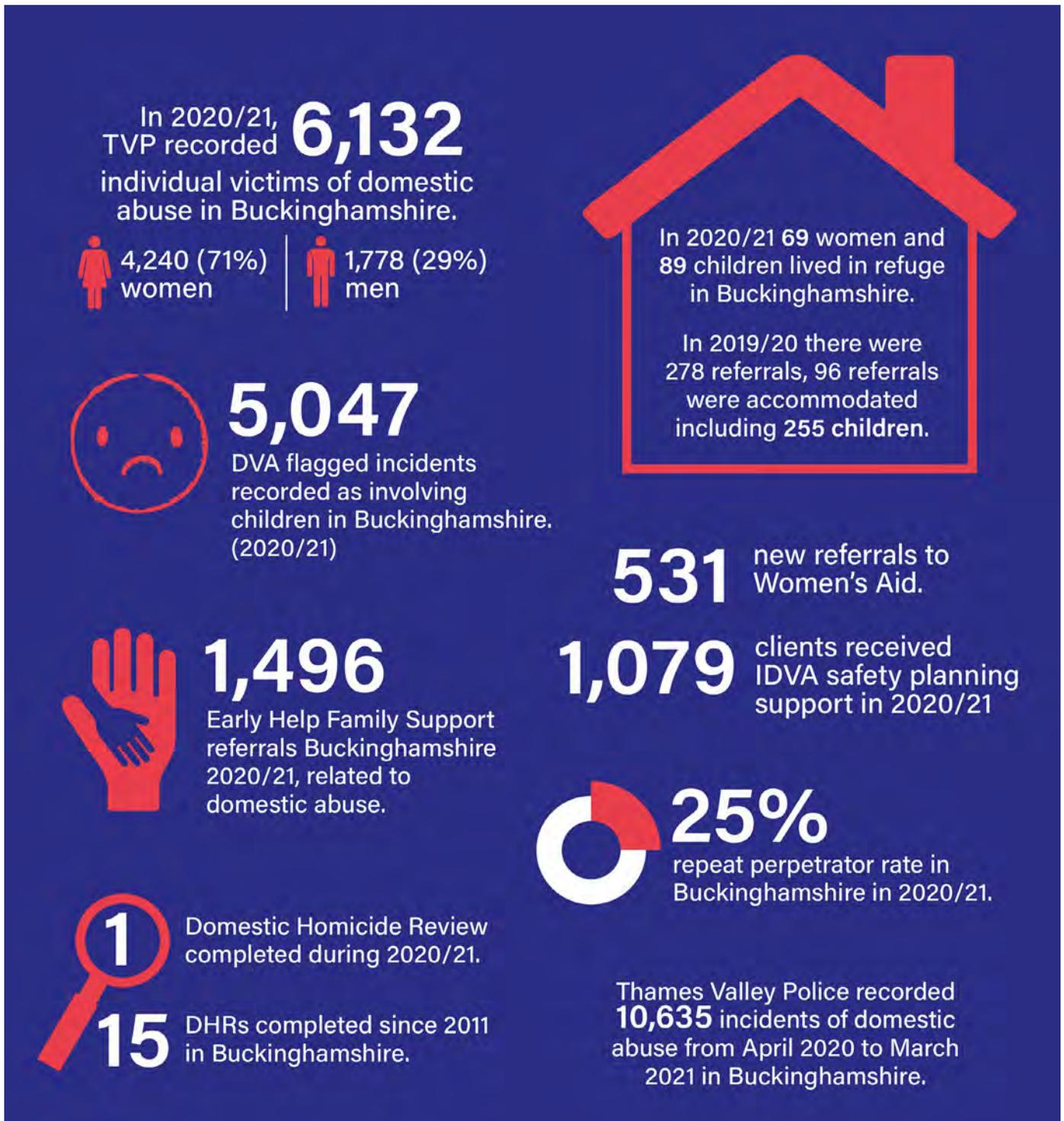
6,132 people in Buckinghamshire directly reported domestic incidents to the police in 2020/21. The Thames Valley Police recorded over 10,500 occurrences relating to domestic abuse in that time. This shows that domestic abuse is chronically under-reported, and that a significant number of disclosures are from third parties rather than the victims.

Police records show 3,212 recorded domestic abuse perpetrators in 2020/21, this demonstrates that there are a significant number of repeat victims of domestic abuse who are being victimised by the same perpetrators.

Of these 10,500 incidents, nearly half (5,047) recorded children being present. In Buckinghamshire it is estimated that 21,800 children and young people may be living with a perpetrator of domestic abuse, with children and young people now classified as victims under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

In 2020-2021 there were 2,443 referrals to Children's Social Care in Buckinghamshire with domestic abuse as a factor and 1,446 Early Help Family Support referrals. Whilst the above data example does not reflect actual numbers of children and young people impacted, in relation to incident statistics it illustrates a significant shortfall in specialist support provision currently available for children and young people outside of Refuge accommodation.

Domestic abuse can sometimes, extremely tragically, result in death. Between 2011 and 2020, there were 15 domestic homicide reviews in Buckinghamshire and 39 across the Thames Valley area. In these reviews it was found that 4 of the victims had taken their own life by suicide. This coincides with statistics that 16% of people experiencing domestic abuse consider or attempt suicide and 13% self harm.



Emerging Needs

Domestic abuse is multifaceted and will require a multidimensional approach to tackle it.

We need to consider our approach to violence against women and girls, whilst also understanding the complexity of domestic abuse and the different and evolving types of abuse and offences within it. These include sexual abuse and violence, emotional abuse, economic abuse, tech abuse, psychological abuse and coercive behaviour, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and 'honour based' violence, as well as emerging issues around digital abuse and social media abuse (with offences such as stalking, harassment, hacking, malicious communications and revenge porn) and identity abuse in the LGBT+ Community.

We also need to understand that domestic abuse affects all ages, all gender identities and all levels of society and cultures, including those with physical or learning disabilities, those relying on care and support (for example those suffering with dementia or those in residential or community care) older adults and even professionals within our own local government authority services.

This strategy takes evidence from:

- A refreshed needs assessment.
- The recommendations within the Director of Public Health annual report.
- Lessons learnt from over 15 Domestic Homicide Reviews.
- Feedback from engagement sessions.
- National and local data.
- Best practice examples.
- We have identified several emerging needs in Buckinghamshire.
- Overly complicated referral pathways.
- Inconsistency or misdirection of referrals.
- A lack of appropriate provision for LGBT+ people, male victims and people from minority ethnic groups or other minoritised communities.
- Need for accessible and effective perpetrator programmes.
- Capacity of Safe and Relevant Accommodation.

The Domestic Abuse Bill was signed into law on 29 April 2021 and is set to provide further protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse, as well as strengthen measures to tackle perpetrators. From this the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) secured £125 million to cover the cost of new duties placed upon local authorities.

Buckinghamshire has received £850,000 from the government for specific elements of the statutory duties. This, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner's commitment, provides an opportunity for a review and reset of our current work plans and commissioning activity as well as an opportunity to accelerate our domestic abuse work, focussing on new, class leading and innovated cross-agency collaboration, putting those we support at the very heart of what we do.



Listening to the barriers

'Being passed from agency to agency, having to retell my story again and again, it was so frustrating I almost gave up.'

'I kept thinking something really bad had to happen before anyone would help.'

'I didn't think I would be believed.'

'I thought I was alone and just blamed myself.'

'I felt I was trapped because of finances and there was no way I could live independently.'

'Because you don't know what support is available you don't know how to ask for it.'

Who is at greater risk of suffering Domestic Abuse?

Tools such as the DASH risk checklist (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence) help trained health and social care professionals and the police to assess the risk level of domestic abuse victims.

The checklist identifies vulnerabilities such as mental ill health, financial dependency and disability. High and medium risk victims receive support from independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA), and may be referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, anywhere, any time, however we know that some people are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse due to their unique characteristics or vulnerabilities.

Disability

Around 14% of disabled adults experienced domestic abuse, compared with 5% of adults without disabilities in 2018 to 2019. Disabled men are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse compared to non-disabled men. Disabled women are more than twice as likely compared to non-disabled women (17% and 7%). National and local data suggest that either disability is not recorded by services, or that disabled victims are not accessing them.

Learning disability

National data suggests that 1 in 5 (19%) people with a learning disability experienced domestic abuse of some kind in the last year (2019 to 2020).

Mental ill health

Domestic abuse and mental ill health are commonly associated. Research suggests that women with mental health problems are 3 times more likely to experience domestic abuse, and women experiencing domestic abuse are 3 times more likely to develop mental health problems.



Women experiencing domestic abuse are three times more likely to develop mental health problems.

Older people

Older people are affected by domestic abuse. Police data for Buckinghamshire in 2019 to 2020 showed that 9% of victims of known age were 61 years or older. However this age group only made up 4.5% of IDVA service users in the same year. Older people may be more vulnerable to coercive control (including economic abuse) given their dependence on family and carers as they age. They may be unwilling or unable to disclose, recognise or leave abusive relationships due to age-related conditions such as dementia.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is not well recorded in relation to domestic abuse. Recent Police data shows that in Buckinghamshire, in 70% of cases the victim's ethnicity was not recorded. Domestic abuse is also commonly under-reported in ethnic minorities. Although domestic abuse is experienced by people from all ethnic origins, cultural values and norms can affect people's perceptions of and responses to domestic abuse. For people from some ethnic minority backgrounds, these may include fear (of not being believed, of being exposed, of the criminal justice system), victim-blaming culture, and failure to recognise abuse. Honour and shame are highly important concepts in certain cultures, and the consequences of dishonouring family or community by disclosing abuse are significant.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

There are limited data around domestic abuse in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. However, as in other communities, community members and workers have noted domestic abuse as a serious and long-standing problem. The domestic abuse charity One Voice 4 Travellers estimated as many as 3 in 4 women from these communities experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives.

Sexual orientation and gender identity

National statistics do not report domestic abuse by sexual orientation or gender identity. However, studies suggest that between 25% and 40% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people report one or more domestic abuse incidents in their lifetime. This rises to between 28% and 80% for trans people.

An NSPCC survey in UK schools suggested that 44% of teenagers with same-sex partners had experienced some form of physical partner violence, increased from 20% for those in heterosexual relationships.

Domestic abuse victims identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or another definition of their sexuality or gender identity are known to present with higher levels of risk and complex needs compared to non-LGBT+ people, such as mental health problems, self-harm and drug and alcohol misuse. They also face unique issues such as being victim to threats of 'outing' about sexual orientation and gender identity; and 'identity abuse' which may include withholding of medication or clothing relating to their sexual or gender identity.



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3. OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

In Buckinghamshire we take a Zero Tolerance approach.

Our overall aim is to end the prevalence of domestic abuse. We want to make sure that the right help, intervention and support is available, that fewer victims and their children reach crisis point, and that any harm caused is significantly reduced or prevented altogether.

If we are to realise this vision, domestic abuse must become everyone's business. This strategy is a call to action for us all over the next three years to work together to make Buckinghamshire a safe place.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out our partnership approach to ending domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire. It has been developed, and its delivery will be overseen by the Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board, along with being underpinned by a SMART action plan.

It proposes 4 new ongoing priorities, whilst also recognising a strategy must be a living document, flexing to respond to new opportunities and challenges.

These 4 priorities and their commitments are for all people irrespective of gender, gender identity or gender reassignment, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership and pregnancy or maternity, whilst recognising the intersectionality of all these characteristics.

This will be reflected within our equalities impact assessments and our action plan.

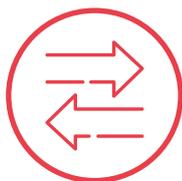
Our priorities:



1. Early intervention and prevention.



2. Effective services that meet the needs of victims and their families.



3. Tackling perpetrators to reduce reoffending.



4. Supporting professionals to make a difference.



OUR PRIORITIES

1. Early intervention and prevention

Sadly, domestic abuse continues to be a crime that people do not feel they can report. Individuals and families may live with domestic abuse for a significant period of time and suffer a multitude of incidents before asking for help.

Together, we must change this. We must talk and educate about domestic abuse and look out for our friends, colleagues, neighbours and communities to support victims and reduce the tolerance for behaviour that has lifelong impacts on health and wellbeing.

This priority focuses on prevention and enabling appropriate interventions as early as possible, as well as proactively educating, raising awareness and promoting services.

Commitments under this priority are:

We will be proactive in communications

- Deliver a programme of public-facing campaigns and culturally relevant communications which raise awareness of abuse in all its forms, how it is everyone's business and educate on how to get support from local and national services. This will be driven by data to focus on specific locations and populations.
- White Ribbon seasonal campaigns, Ask Ani codeword schemes and heightened coverage around key sporting events (Such as the Football World Cup '22). Information will be consistently available in a range of accessible formats and languages, with the use of digital platforms, community and universal settings to offer help or signpost to specialist services.
- We want anyone affected by domestic abuse to know that it is ok to talk about it and know where to access support - we will listen, we will give you choices, we will support you to be in control.
- Enable friends, colleagues, family and neighbours to be aware of what domestic abuse is and be confident to reach out to those experiencing it safely and know what services are available locally. Engaging audiences in bystander training.

We want to increase numbers of people disclosing domestic abuse to services (including demographics we believe are most underrepresented). Professionals need to be aware of services available and their referral pathways to support quicker access to help that is needed. We will aid this through cross-agency training.

Ensure a wide range of support is available at the earliest opportunity which can be tailored to individual needs. This will also include 'during' and 'post' abuse support offers to help rebuild lives through multi-agency working, learning from the innovative pilot in adult social care which sees a multi-agency front door.

Promote and increase the use of the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) (Clare's Law) to allow early identification of potential risk.

A 'Tell Us Once' Referral Pathway, limiting the amount of times a victim has to revisit their trauma by retelling their ordeal, as well as developing a Safeguarding Information Sharing agreement between partners across Buckinghamshire.

Prevention Through Engagement in Schools as prevention starts with changing attitudes. Developing a toolkit for primary and secondary schools, delivering positive relationship education with children and young people from an early age in order to raise their awareness, understand healthy relationships (especially those who themselves are in sexual relationships) and to not tolerate unhealthy behaviour.

Develop a comprehensive service map to maintain a clear overview of service provision, to ensure that the development of provision meets changing needs within the community and that we are able to quickly identify any gaps in service.

Empowering victims through ensuring a range of support networks are available for victims and children to access as part of their journey to move forward and recover from domestic abuse. Survivors value peer support groups and programmes; however, they are not widely available.

We will work with businesses to ensure that they have access to employer toolkits and information on how to support staff members who may disclose abuse. All partner organisations on the Domestic Abuse Board will be class leading as an exemplar employer, helping guide the way and ensuring upskilling, education and awareness within their workforce.

Understanding the uniqueness and potential complexities of LGBT+ communities, male victims, minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities, older adults, children and young people, allowing a better understanding of how abuse may be presented by those individuals and establishing communication tools and best practices to overcome barriers to reporting, ensuring early intervention and referrals to relevant services.



OUR PRIORITIES

2. Effective services that meet the needs of victims and their families

Domestic abuse has a devastating effect on families, children and our local communities.

With recent government research showing that domestic abuse costs society £66 billion a year, we have a commitment to continue to work together, across all agencies and sectors, to provide effective and fit for purpose services to tackle domestic abuse.

This priority focuses on making sure services across Buckinghamshire are engaged, informed and responsive and are meeting the unique, individual needs of all victims and their families.

Commitments under this priority are:

All agencies will review service provision and support, focusing on reducing barriers to reporting, identifying how best to reach and engage with minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities and ensuring that support services available meet all the complex needs of victims.

The commissioning and provision of services will be informed by the views of those who have been affected by domestic abuse or are at significant risk of it. Victims are the experts in domestic abuse.

Through our community boards we will be vocal about the issue of domestic abuse. We will give families, friends and colleagues the information and skills they need to support people when they are concerned about them and signpost to where they can get specialist help and support to prevent harm. We welcome working closely with communities to strengthen community enabling and community capacity to support those who have experienced, or are experiencing, domestic abuse.

Take a 'whole family' approach – families do not operate in silos so neither should we. Engaging with the whole family means more opportunity to make people safer sooner, including looking at how perpetrators are managed in, or can be removed from, the family dynamic, creating long-term changes not short-term fixes. Where there are signs of abuse including adolescent to parent abuse, we want to ensure that families are supported to address this behaviour. This will be through access to programmes, including a focus on child victims (especially those sexually harmed) for rehabilitation and behavioural change to positively influence adult behaviours. We will also include support programmes for pregnant or postpartum women.

It was clear from speaking to survivors that recovery from abuse is a long and difficult journey, both emotionally and practically. **We will continue to develop longer term support mechanisms** using the voice of those affected to shape provision. Support services will also look at trauma informed health, welfare and legal options for the whole family, as well as the reflective 'Distance Travelled' model to monitor outcomes.

Specialist Support - Provision of services for LGBT+ communities, male victims, minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities, older adults and those in need of, or receiving social care support. We will provide services from an expert understanding of the victims' unique needs, understanding and overcoming barriers to reporting, to facilitate and engage with effective, long-term support.

Understand the needs of those who need access to safe accommodation and ensure a wide range of safe accommodation options are available for victims, survivors and their children, including collaboration with registered providers to help facilitate urgent moves and management transfers for both those within Buckinghamshire and whose original residence was located out of county. DLUHC define Relevant and Safe Accommodation as:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation for BAME, LGBTQ+, and disabled victims and their children
- Dispersed Accommodation
- Sanctuary Schemes
- Move-on and second stage accommodation
- Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation

Complete a comprehensive needs analysis of housing (refreshed at least every 3 years) which includes a focus on economic abuse and housing – where research has highlighted specific examples relating to mortgages and other debts secured to private owned property.

All victims of domestic abuse will be prioritised as high risk under the housing priority need (not related to DASH risk grading) using the Whole Housing Approach component parts. We will also explore what provisions are currently available in Buckinghamshire and identify gaps.



OUR PRIORITIES

3. Tackling perpetrators to reduce reoffending

In Buckinghamshire between 2020-21 there were 3,212 recorded domestic abuse perpetrators. This is a 13% increase on the 2,839 of the same period the previous year.

72% of perpetrators of known gender were male (aligning with the disproportionate 71% of victims being female) and 64% of perpetrators of known age were 40 years old or under. Perpetrators can be children as well as adults and research and local professionals tell us that teen-to-parent and teen-to-teen domestic abuse occurs locally, highlighting the need for education and behavioural rehabilitation.

Without a focus on the perpetrators we will not be able to prevent domestic abuse or effectively maintain safety for victims. It is vital that we understand more about perpetrators if we are to understand how to prevent abuse and change their behaviour. It is also important to understand that some victims do not see themselves as victims, and that victim engagement, education and support is critical in tackling perpetrators and reducing reoffending.

There is limited evidence for this area of work however best practice will be sought from criminal justice agencies and research and academic evaluation.

Commitments under this priority are:

Develop a multi-agency (risk management) approach to working with perpetrators to reduce and prevent repeat domestic abuse, including increasing the number of cases that progress through the criminal justice system.

Develop an improved approach to dealing with perpetrators which includes equipping frontline professionals with the skills to engage and work with them.

Work with probation services to gain valuable insight from their expertise and experiences, utilising this information to adapt and inform current and new perpetrator prevention services.

Address the issue of perpetrator plans being seen as a 'quick fix' and raise awareness that real change comes from getting to the source of offending. Increase referrals both voluntary and compulsory into perpetrator plans and raise awareness of 'disguised compliance' where a perpetrator may go along with a risk reduction plan for an ulterior motive (such as securing child visitation).

Go further in working with perpetrators in both prevention and bringing them to justice.

This includes engaging with victims and offering support services around providing police with statements and securing support of police/criminal action, as without this, criminal charges can be difficult to achieve.

Review and increase the use of protection orders, including Domestic Violence Protection Orders, FGM Protection Orders and Forced Marriage Protection Orders, as an effective tool for limiting perpetrators' actions. Along with this look at perpetrator accommodation policies to avoid unnecessary rehousing of victims and minimise risk of orders being breached due to perpetrators being of 'No Fixed Abode'.

Promote and increase the use of the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(Clare's Law\)](#).

Work with schools to educate early on acceptable relationships behaviours, family dynamics and an understanding of where support services are available.

Work with minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities, groups and cultures to increase perpetrator engagement, through understanding of perpetrator circumstances and causes, but also through education, increased awareness and a reduction of risk to individuals to identify, challenge and report abusive behaviour without fear.

Raise awareness of abuse pertaining to Family Courts and work with service providers for victim care around the Family Courts process. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 highlights new legislation that perpetrators cannot cross-examine victims in Family Court, however abuse outside of the Family Court environment can still take place, such as harassment, threats and coercive behaviour around child visitation and child custody. **We will explore ways to improve the criminal justice pathway and court room experience, including family court**, in line with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and New Witness Charter

Work with all services that have regular contact with victims and survivors of domestic abuse to ensure that they are systematically assessing risk and are using the preferred risk assessment tool: DASH RIC. We will ensure that services take up appropriate training in risk assessment and have a good understanding of how to respond, including the aforementioned proposed Safeguarding Information Sharing agreement between partners across Buckinghamshire.

Undertake work to ensure compliance with the Safe Lives national quality assurance framework for MARACs, with the aim of developing a more systematic approach to the identification of who is at risk, what risks they face and from whom, and how the risk can be reduced or removed.

Explore options to address the needs of women offenders with a history of domestic abuse. This will include the **consideration of community-based alternatives to a custodial sentence** to divert vulnerable women away from crime and tackle the root causes of their offending.



OUR PRIORITIES

4. Supporting professionals to make a difference

This priority focuses on strengthening collaboration and improving the way we work together. This includes ensuring frontline professionals work together well with local authority services and local charities to safeguard children, young people and adults.

Domestic abuse ties in to a number of other elements and offences, including substance misuse. The relationship between domestic abuse and substance misuse is a complex one, both for perpetrators as a cause or catalyst to abuse, and victims as a coping mechanism for the suffering experienced. It will be important to understand the links with substance misuse to domestic abuse, poor mental and physical health, as well as the impact on surrounding family, taking steps to address these.

We will promote a more cohesive approach to tackling domestic abuse, working together to achieve our collective aims. It is important that we proactively approach integrated, cross-agency working across all services and sectors.

Commitments under this priority are:

All agencies to reaffirm their commitment to working together to provide co-leadership, pool resources, and take a more strategic and effective response in meeting our collective aims.

Senior leaders across the sectors will become Domestic Abuse Champions signalling their intent and helping to convey the aspirations within this document back to their organisations. We will also increase the diversity within the champions scheme to reflect the diversity of those affected by domestic abuse.

Agencies and professionals need to feel equipped to handle disclosures of domestic abuse sensitively to minimise the risk to the victim. **We will be committed to cross-agency training** to enable domestic abuse to be identified and responded to swiftly. We will work together to have multi-agency workshops as well as cross-agency scenario-based training that challenges harmful attitudes, language and behaviour. We will promote both online based and evidenced based training for key stakeholders and frontline workers, to better equip frontline professionals with the skills required. We will work with DWP and other agencies to provide training and information on financial abuse and how to identify and support those at risk.

Look at training for all key partners and agencies to understand the uniqueness and potential complexities of LGBT+ communities, male victims, minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities, older adults, children and young people, allowing a better understanding of how abuse may be presented by those individuals and establishing communication tools and best practices to overcome barriers to reporting, ensuring safe referral to effective and relevant services.

Tackle the root causes of domestic abuse to break the cycle. Victims, perpetrators and their children need to be identified early and provided with the appropriate level of support to break cycles of domestic abuse and overcome the impact it has on their lives. We will focus on prevention and early intervention to decrease demand on crisis services (and in the short term maximise rapid response services that are available) utilising a multi-agency reporting dashboard to identify where services may be at capacity and need further support.

Improving systems – Every contact counts and we will make sure that when requests come in about keeping children or adults safe they get shared with the right people as early as possible. We will improve coordination particularly on high-risk cases and cases with multiple incidents, utilising a cross-agency case management system, alongside the aforementioned proposed Safeguarding Information Sharing agreement between partners across Buckinghamshire.

Continue streamlining victim pathways which are fully understood by all frontline staff and can support all victims without prejudice. This will include the creation of a 'Tell Us Once' referral pathway; a single referral pathway minimising risk of cases and multiple/repeat incidents being missed and reducing the number of times someone has to revisit their trauma as they tell their story. This will allow effective triaging and help ensure timely, responsive delivery of services, which will be aided by specialist Domestic Abuse Triage Officers.

Both children's social care and adults social care highlight the prevalence of domestic abuse in the referrals they receive. **We will work with social workers to understand missed opportunities and identify where abuse isn't being identified**, reported or referred, to affect positive changes.

Give staff in all key agencies better tools, advice and understanding to carry out effective safety planning, risk management (DASH assessment tool) and support work with the families they are already involved with. Ensuring people understand when it is right to refer on or to work together, empowering families to be resilient and independent.

Survivors have advised us of barriers preventing access to services that we need to respond to. **We will collectively identify and act on the gaps in service provision** from the needs assessment with an additional focus on those with protected characteristics.

A victim's story is more powerful than numbers. We will continue to **capture survivors' voices and constantly learn from their experiences**.

4. DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT

The Domestic Abuse Bill includes statutory definition of domestic abuse, raising awareness of domestic abuse and the requirement of monitoring local responses to domestic abuse.

Under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 all councils are required to convene a Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, carry out a needs assessment, prepare and publish a relevant strategy from the assessment, commissioning support to victims of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation services in our area.

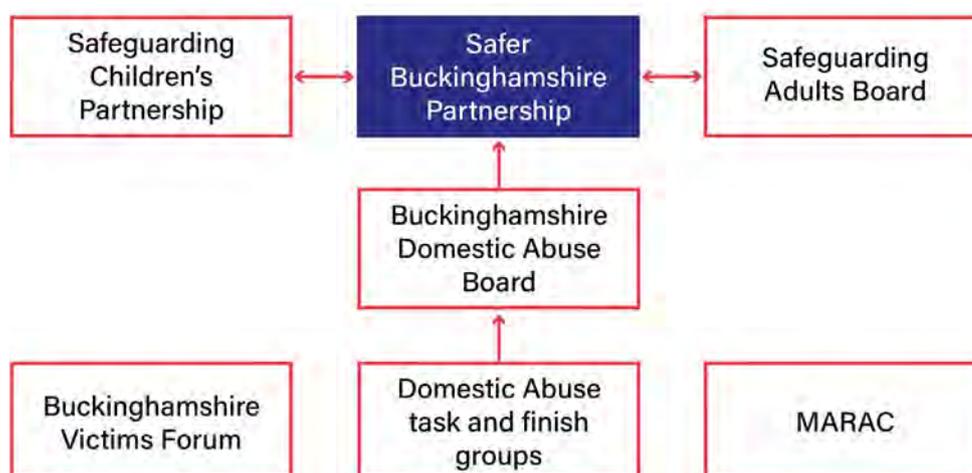
The newly established Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board will oversee plans for compliance with the new duty and look to strengthen work linked to the wider support services available for all those affected by domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire.

The Board will help drive forward the 4 key strategic priorities through programmes of work that address gaps highlighted within the needs assessment and learn from partner agencies, survivor voices and from domestic homicide reviews so tragedies in future can be prevented.

An operational subgroup will be established to lead key deliverables. Progress will be regularly reported to the Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board, who in turn will keep the Safer Buckinghamshire Board updated on outcomes and escalations.

The Domestic Abuse Board membership:

- (Chair) Deputy Chief Executive Buckinghamshire Council and Chair Safer Buckinghamshire Board.
- Member lead, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities.
- Representatives from the local authority including children's, adults, public health, housing and community safety.
- Charity and voluntary sector organisations.
- Health care services.
- Policing and criminal justice.
- Liaison with survivors of domestic abuse (adult, young people and children) and current service users, focussing particularly on reflections of distance travelled.



5. WHAT NEXT?

What success looks like

The purpose of the strategy is to set out our partnership approach to ending domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire. Our strategy is ambitious, and rightly so, as we seek long-term safety in homes, relationships, community and society. We have strong foundations to build on but none of us can do it alone, our partnership is vital. Survivor-focussed outcomes will be central to our action plan, and our class-leading strategy and services will have those affected by domestic abuse at the heart of everything we do.

The Domestic Abuse Board will meet quarterly, monitoring progress against a detailed action plan and the strategy will be reviewed in full every three years.

As well as being compliant with all statutory duties, outcomes and successes we would like to see are:

- A domestic abuse preventative model adopted across the partnership.
- Domestic abuse awareness and understanding healthy relationships (including sexual relationships and sexual violence) as an integral part of education in schools, colleges and universities.
- More perpetrator programmes including increased monitoring of perpetrators.
- Work places and employers taking a proactive approach with employer toolkits, training and communications.
- Increased availability of refuge places for non female victims throughout the authority, as well as utilisation of non-refuge safe and relevant accommodation.
- All services taking responsibility for, and understanding the role they play, in relation to improving responses in relation to domestic abuse.
- Better informed professionals and consistent, easily accessible information (language and format) about domestic abuse across all services.
- An increase in the number of people engaging with services beyond the initial referral.
- More successful domestic abuse prosecutions and increased use and awareness of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's law).
- A mapped and utilised referral pathway to support for victims engaging with the Criminal Justice System, and support through Family Courts.
- Services to help facilitate safe and relevant accommodation for those wishing to stay in their own homes, using tools such as the Sanctuary Scheme.
- All services having a commitment to cross-agency management of risk and delivering improved outcomes for victims, children and perpetrators.
- Utilising a wide range of distribution models to have a consistent 'Zero Tolerance' communications plan with effective publicity.
- Reduction in repeat victimisation to prevent further abuse for victims and families.
- Pathways that consider the whole family (including the management or removal of perpetrators) in referrals, triage and support.

- Specialist services in place (with accessible and relevant information) for minority ethnic groups and other minoritised communities, male victims, older adults, children and young people.
- Utilisation of the reflective 'Distance travelled' model as a way of monitoring successes and effectiveness of all services.
- Continued, trauma informed service developments, through knowledge that a victim's story is more powerful than numbers and that victims are the experts on domestic abuse.

Accountability and governance

Domestic abuse is an ever evolving issue, with changes in society, economy and even technology having a significant impact on both victims and current and potential perpetrators.

This strategy is designed to be flexible in order to adapt to changing needs and national guidance.

The Domestic Abuse Board is responsible for the implementation of this strategy. It will oversee its effectiveness, action plans and direct funding commitments, monitoring progress and deploying working groups as needed.

The strategy is underpinned by an action plan that will be championed by each partner within the Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Board. Actions developed will be directly linked to our identified outcomes and commitments with each agency committing to ensure that they have effective mechanisms in place that contribute to its delivery.

Feedback from those who use interventions and services will form a vital part of service development, our commissioning and our monitoring procedures. We will work to ensure that the voice of survivors, of families affected by domestic abuse and of perpetrators who have interacted with our services, informs and continually improves our provision.

The Domestic Abuse Board will provide annual monitoring reports to the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership, the Police and Crime Commissioners Office, and Safeguarding Boards, setting out progress against our vision and identified outcomes.

This strategy is warmly welcomed by the Partnership 'Joint Chairs' group which brings together Chief Officers and Chairs of Buckinghamshire's statutory partnerships:

- Safer Buckinghamshire Community Safety Partnership Board
- Children's Partnership
- Adult Safeguarding Board
- Health and Wellbeing Board

Across each board, there are several shared priorities which relate to safeguarding communities and improving health and wellbeing. Throughout these shared priorities, domestic abuse is a prevalent theme.

This is a critical time with the introduction of the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021 . This strategy highlights our dedication to victims within Buckinghamshire and to those coming in from out of the county, ensuring those we support are safe, protected, and empowered to rebuild their lives. Together we can achieve real, sustainable progress to tackle domestic abuse with Zero Tolerance. **There's no excuse.**

signature

Rachael Shimmin

Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire Council

signature

Sir Frances Habgood

Chair, Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership & Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board

signature

Sarah Ashmead

Deputy Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire Council
Chair, Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership

signature

Angela Macpherson

Deputy Leader, Buckinghamshire Council
Cabinet Member, Health & Wellbeing
Chair, Health & Wellbeing Board

signature

Gill Quinton

Corporate Director, Health and Adult Social Care,
Buckinghamshire Council

signature

Richard Nash

Corporate Director, Children's Services, Buckinghamshire Council

signature

Dr James Kent

Executive Lead, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire West Integrated Care system. Accountable Officer, Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group

signature

Neil Macdonald

Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

signature

Mike Loebenberg

Chief Superintendent, Thames Valley Police
Vice Chair, Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership



The following links provide Government Guidelines around Local Authority Commitments:

- [Delivery of Support](#): to victims in safe accommodation services.
- [Statutory Guidance](#): for the Domestic Abuse Act.
- [Statutory guidance framework](#): controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship.

For more information about Buckinghamshire's Domestic Abuse Board or any information in this strategy please email: DomesticAbuseProjectTeam@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

In partnership with and supported by:

