



Communities and Localism Select Committee - VAWG Partnership Plan update report.

Date: 8th February 2023

Title: Violence Against Women and Girls update

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Recommendations:

- *To note the update of the Violence Against Women and Girls Subgroup*

1. Background

1.1 The United Nations Declaration (1993) on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Article 1 defines Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harms or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”

1.2 Everyone has the right to go about their lawful business and not be subject to violence or other criminality. The VAWG Subgroup of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has developed an action plan which sets out how agencies in Buckinghamshire will ensure everyone plays their part in preventing and identifying these crimes, creating the safety that we all deserve. The approach of the VAWG Subgroup underpins the Government’s Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (published in September 2021), focussing on four key areas – Early Intervention and Preventing VAWG; Supporting Victims; Pursuing Perpetrators; and Strengthening the Partnership Response.

2. Main content of report

2.1 The following provides an update on the partnership action plan, within the above four areas:

2.2 ***Objective One – Early intervention and preventing VAWG***

- The Community Safety Officers attended Freshers fairs in Amersham, Aylesbury, Buckingham and High Wycombe where, along with general community safety information, crime prevention and personal safety guidance was provided to new students.
- Hotel Watch is a scheme designed to link hotels with the police and local authorities aiming to tackle exploitation. Hotel staff are provided with materials to help them spot the signs of exploitation and modern slavery and guidance on how to report any concerns. Community Safety Officers have been working the TVP Neighbourhood Policing teams to visit local hotels and we currently have over 80 hotels across Buckinghamshire signed up to the Hotel Watch scheme. Following on from these visits, two test purchase operations have been carried out, one in Aylesbury and the other in High Wycombe. Five hotels were visited within High Wycombe, and two failed the test purchase (feedback from the Aylesbury operation have not been provided as yet). Action plans are now being developed for those premises that failed, and Children's Services are developing a safeguarding training package for Spring 2023 which will be delivered to hotels every two years.
- Ask for Angela is the name of a campaign that is used by bars and other venues to keep people safe from sexual assault by using a codeword to identify when they are in danger or are in an uncomfortable situation. When an establishment signs up to the scheme, a person who believes themselves to be in danger can ask for "Angela", a fictitious member of the staff, and will receive assistance from staff. Community Safety Officers, Street Wardens and Neighbourhood Policing teams have undertaken visits throughout November and December to encourage premises to sign up to the scheme.
- The Public Health PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) Lead supports high quality Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in primary and secondary schools. There are key strands which focus on promoting positive, healthy and safe relationships and accessing support, help and advice either online or via commissioned local authority services such as BSHaW (Bucks Sexual Health and Wellbeing Service) where needed. There is a continued focus on sexual harassment and abuse (child on child is an Ofsted focus). There is also now a duty on schools to recognise and challenge sexual harassment and abuse.
- Buckinghamshire Council and NHS England have recently completed a procurement exercise for Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Buckinghamshire, including Outpatient HIV Treatment and Care. As a result of this procurement exercise, all outreach work, training and health promotion has been awarded to Brooke Young people. This service will include working with school leaders, mental health services, the Youth Offending Service, the voluntary and community sector, along with those who are high risk vulnerable or those with poor sexual health (such

as sex workers). Brooke will start implementation in April 2023. The new provider will develop and deliver training activities.

- White Ribbon Day (WRD) is a national campaign that asks men and boys to help end violence against women and girls. WRD aims to unite all men to work towards #TheGoal to end violence against women and girls. This year Buckinghamshire Council partnered with Thames Valley Police for the campaign working together for 16 days of action. This included pop up information stalls, training, Domestic Abuse Board website launch and TVP operations.
- Paladin and Aurora New Dawn, our local stalking agency, spoke at the Domestic Abuse Champion's Network meeting during the 16 days of activity.

2.3 ***Objective Two – Supporting victims***

- Bucks Domestic Abuse Partnership website has been launched. It includes information for victims and guidance for professionals. There is a toolkit for practitioners and also previous event recordings to watch. Our multiagency training catalogue, Domestic Abuse strategy and referral pathways can also be accessed from the new website.
- The Community Safety Team is working with Thames Valley Police to develop VAWG guidance for organisers of larger community events, along with looking at the feasibility of developing multi-agency protection plans.
- The Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service, formally known as Wycombe Rape Crisis, are reopening their service post covid. Based in the High Wycombe Council offices, they are hiring an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) and have plans for counselling and long term support.

2.4 ***Objective Three – Pursuing Perpetrators***

- In November 2022 Police and Community Safety officers did a radio interview on Wycombe Sound, talking about the actions being taken to address VAWG in Buckinghamshire and providing information on how to access further details through the council and police websites.
- A bid has been submitted to the Home Office via the OPCC by TVP to bring DRIVE (domestic abuse perpetrator programme) to Buckinghamshire. Buckinghamshire Council is supportive and is exploring match funding options. Their aim is to tackle repeat, high-risk domestic abuse, but TVP are considering commissioning them to target medium risk also.

- TVP are in the top quarter for the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO) and Bucks officers have higher levels of use than other areas of the Thames Valley with 46 of the total 133 across TVP. However, it has been identified that once the DVPO has been obtained, more work is required to support victims.
- TVP have seen a modest rise in the use of Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) in Bucks from 25 applications in Q1 of 2022 to 46 in Q2 of 2022, however volumes remain low and there is a focus on training officers to use these more widely. There is now a link to the TVP DVDS application form on the new DA website.

2.5 ***Objective Four – Strengthening the partnership response***

- A multi-agency DA and VAWG training strategy has been produced and in December 2022 a fully funded training catalogue launched to internal colleagues and partners. In total there are 15 types of course, which include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and “Honour” Based Violence (HBV). Since the launch last month, 184 people have attended training. Attendees are from Bucks Council, DA and VAWG specialist services, Police, OPCC, NHS, education, housing associations, solicitors and many more. There are many sessions to follow, and the feedback is positive.
- Statistics report that an average victim will go to as many as 5 different agencies before they get the help they need. To reduce this number there has been a champions network in place in Bucks since 2014. In that time a successful network has grown and more recently there has been a rapid increase in numbers of Bucks Council and multiagency partners signing up to the champions hub. Since the fully funded DA training catalogue launched in November, 186 more people have joined which has strengthened our network to 636 multiagency professionals who are able to positively engage and signpost victims for expert help. Additionally, as part of the White Ribbon Campaign, 33 BC Councillors have signed up to attend DA Champions training and they will be contacted shortly to book onto their sessions.
- The Serious Violence Task Force, which is chaired by Richard Nash and reports into the Safer Buckinghamshire Board, has been briefed about VAWG and DA being added to the Serious Violence Duty. Direction of travel is to maintain current governance processes and ensure that subgroups and plans are cross referenced with the Serious Violence Strategy (which needs to be published by 2024).
- The first Lived Experience (of domestic abuse) Forum was held in October 2022 with a small group, intended to grow over time. It has been established as a subgroup of the Bucks Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to improve support for victims/survivors of DA/VAWG. Each meeting focusses on a key topic or question for discussion and allows victims/survivors to use their experience to help improve

services. The group is running well, with improvement strands being voiced. Feedback has been positive including one member saying, “the setting of the forum made me comfortable to share my story”. We are working on increasing the membership and ensuring diversity.

- A Sex Worker Multi-Agency Group has been established for Buckinghamshire. The first meeting was in October and the aim of the group is looking to discuss individual women, putting support plans in place to address their needs and vulnerabilities, with the ultimate aim of encouraging them away from sex work.

3. Next steps and review

The VAWG Subgroup will continue to meet to discuss the delivery of the action plan, any identified gaps, and new areas of work. Reports from the Subgroup will be submitted to the Domestic Abuse Board.

