

# COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 28<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2021

## DOMESTIC ABUSE DRAFT STRATEGY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse is a cruel and complex crime that can affect anyone, leaving physical and emotional scars that can last a lifetime. While there has been a welcome gradual fall in the incidence of domestic abuse in recent years, there are still some 2.4 million victims a year (aged 16 to 74), the majority of whom are women. Far too many individuals have their lives destroyed by abuse. We need to build a society that has zero tolerance towards domestic abuse and actively empowers victims, communities and professionals to confront and challenge it and to provide victims with the support they deserve

In relation to impact on children - those children affected by domestic abuse in their early years are 4 times more likely to go on and experience or perpetrate domestic abuse later in life. Further studies have also concluded that children affected by domestic abuse are at greater risk of falling into substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy and criminal behaviour than those raised in homes without violence.

According to the Mayor of London Policing and Crime (MOPAC) domestic and sexual violence dashboard for the calendar years 2019 and 2020 there has been an increase in domestic abuse related incidents (8%) and offences (6%) in London, whilst Bexley has seen an increase between the two periods of 7% and 2% respectively. This increase in victim's willing to come forward may be due to a better awareness of the services available to help them.

#### Recorded incidents Bexley compared to London (calendar year 2019 and 2020)

Year	Area	Count	Rate per 1,000 population	Population
2019	Bexley	3,835	15.6	245,655
2019	London	144,138	15.9	9,056,800
2020	Bexley	4085	16.5	247,444
2020	London	156,193	16.8	9,304,000

During the Covid-19 period (March 2020 to December 2020) Bexley saw an increase in Domestic Abuse. On average Bexley saw an increase of 9% in the number of police reported incidents from March to December 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. In addition, Bexley also saw a significant increase of 39% in DA MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) referrals when comparing 2020 to the corresponding period in the previous year.

The councils interim domestic abuse strategy was developed before the restructure of Domestic Abuse Services in 2019 and recommissioning of our domestic abuse provider, Solace.

This refreshed strategy sets out our four-year ambitions for addressing and reducing domestic abuse in Bexley and the harmful impact it has on victims, families and the wider community. The strategy will set out our responsibilities across our partners. Success will be measured through an annual delivery plan. The strategy will be monitored by the Bexley DA Strategic Partnership Board which will also use these measures to report into the GLA (Tier 1 partner?) as part of the statutory duty coming into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 through the Domestic Abuse Bill 2020

*The strategy has been developed in consultation with statutory and voluntary partners through our Domestic Abuse Operational Group. The victim's voice has been embedded into the process with interviews and our domestic abuse commissioned provider Solace have reviewed the strategy and made comments and amendments.*

**The draft Strategy is attached at Appendix 1.**

There has also been a Member Task and Finish group which met with victims of domestic abuse from our Solace SASS (Solace Advocacy Support Service) service and refuge. This provided insight to their experiences within Bexley and how things can be further improved and also reviewed good practice within the borough.

***The separate report from the Member task & finish group is attached at Appendix 2.***

#### **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

*That the Committee consider the draft strategy and the findings of the Member task and Finish group and consider and make any comments and/or propose/agree any recommendations that the Committee would like to make.*

## **2. THE STRATEGY – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The refreshed strategy sets out Bexley's four-year ambitions for addressing and reducing domestic abuse in the Borough, as well as the harmful impact it has on victims and families and the wider community. The strategy has been informed by national guidelines and policies, as well as by the Mayor of London's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy and the Bexley Community Safety Partnership Joint Strategic Assessment. It has been developed in partnership with a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations across Bexley, including an engagement exercise with survivors, service users and professionals.

The strategy represents a partnership commitment and is founded on the invaluable and pioneering role played by specialist support services in the voluntary sector. It provides a strategic perspective and policy framework to inform partnership working and contains specific objectives aligned to our key priorities aimed at reducing

domestic abuse and the impact abuse has on victims, families and communities in Bexley.

Domestic abuse is an horrendous crime with substantial impact. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience abuse at some point in their lifetime. 1 in 10 women will experience stalking and harassment and 2 women a week in the UK are killed by their ex-partner or current partner. There is a strong correlation which overlaps with other types of VAWG (violence against women and girls) and our approach to addressing harm caused by these other strands will also be informed by our domestic abuse approach and wider pan-London's VAWG Strategies.

This strategy has been written to help partnerships and agencies across Bexley to deliver appropriate responses to people affected by domestic abuse. It will promote the maximisation of limited resources through close collaborative, multi-agency working, and will seek to enable:

- Strategic partners to have a clear understanding of our agreed priorities and recommendations for the next four years and to embed these within their own organisations / agencies strategic plans
- Bexley residents to feel able to contribute towards making Bexley a safer place
- victims, children and families to feel supported and able to seek high quality and timely support at the earliest possible stage
- perpetrators to know that their behaviour will not be tolerated.
- greater support for the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, those who identify as BAME and those from the diverse range of communities within the borough.
- To make domestic abuse 'everybody's business

### **3. OUR COMMITMENT TO RESIDENTS OF BEXLEY**

Alongside our commissioned specialist service provider, Solace, and together with our partners agencies we will:

- Put victims and families at the centre of service delivery
- Have a clear focus on perpetrators in order to keep victims safe
- Take a strategic, system wide approach to commissioning
- Be locally led and safeguard individuals at every opportunity
- Raise awareness of the issue of domestic abuse and involve, engage and empower communities to understand and challenge domestic abuse
- Improving joint working between agencies, including information sharing, to enable a co-ordinated community approach to addressing domestic abuse
- Provide on-going accessible training

- Develop a Bexley Coordinated Community Response

The new strategy seeks to build on the national commitment to transforming the response to domestic abuse, including through the Domestic Abuse Bill. The prevention of abuse and the protection of victims lies at the heart of the Bill and the wider programme of work.

The measures in the Bill seek to:

- promote awareness - to put abuse at the top of everyone's agenda, including by legislating for the first time for a statutory definition of domestic abuse
- protect and support victims, including by introducing a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Order
- transform the justice response, including by helping victims to give their best evidence in the criminal courts through the use of video evidence, screens and other special measures, and ensuring that victims of abuse do not suffer further trauma in family court proceedings by being cross-examined by their abuser
- improve performance – the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner will help drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas and agencies
- The Bill will create, for the first time, a cross-government statutory definition of domestic abuse, to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable and actively challenged across statutory agencies and in public attitudes
- The Bill also recognises that domestic abuse can impact on a child who sees or hears or experiences the effects of the abuse and it treats such children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right where they are related to either the abuser or the abused
- introduce a new duty on local authorities in England to provide support for victims and their children in domestic abuse safe accommodation.
- Under the Duty, local authorities will be required to assess the need for, and commission support to, victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation services in their areas, and report back to central government that they have met these obligations.
- The guidance will be aimed at statutory and non-statutory bodies working with victims and perpetrators and commissioning services, including the police, local authorities and the NHS to increase awareness and inform their response to domestic abuse. It will also be aimed at support organisations working with victims
- The Domestic Abuse Bill has been through Parliament in 2020 and on 5<sup>th</sup> January had its first hearing at House of Lords. Following any recommendations and amendments it will be heard at House of Lords before receiving Royal Assent anticipated on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

Bexley has already started to review and amend provision in anticipation of the Domestic Abuse Bill. In 2018 we established the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board which oversees our response to domestic abuse and will report into the GLA (Tier 1 authority) and we are planning to undertake a needs assessment and mapping that will inform our position in relation to the new statutory

duty. Bexley's lead Domestic Abuse officer is also a member on the Board for the DA Commissioner for England & Wales

#### **4. KEY PRIORITIES**

Our strategy focuses on five strategic aims to help achieve our vision. We will ensure that our strategic priorities are embedded throughout the partnership and within our 4-year delivery plan to develop our local response to domestic abuse.

##### **Prevention**

We support communities to prevent domestic abuse and intervene at the earliest stage to prevent escalation. We ensure that we are identifying domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity.

##### **Partnership**

We bring together professionals from specialist voluntary sector, health, housing, community safety, children's and adults' social care, education, public health, police, probation, substance misuse and other voluntary agencies to achieve shared goals and outcomes. Ensuring a coordinated community response to domestic abuse is embedded

##### **Provision**

We ensure the services provided by a wide range of agencies reach every community, and support victims, perpetrators and children, and that they deliver the appropriate outcomes in a sufficient and timely manner

##### **Protection**

We respond to risk, protecting vulnerable victims and families affected by domestic abuse.

##### **Progression**

We improve our response, benefit from innovation and learn from experience both locally and nationally to continue to improve outcomes for victims, perpetrators and children and reduce the incidence of abuse

#### **5. MEASURING SUCCESS**

A targeted Delivery Plan has been created featuring the above Overarching Themes and will be monitored and implemented by our Domestic Abuse Operational Group which is made up of statutory and voluntary agencies. This delivery plan will be a standing item agenda to the Bexley DA Strategic Partnership Board and provide an annual report to monitor our success. These reports will also be shared with Bexley's local statutory Boards. This will include relevant data, gaps in service, best practice and how we are measuring success against the delivery plan

## 6. SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The implementation of this strategy is achievable within existing budgets and the Medium Term Financial Strategy. There are no additional financial implications.

## 7. SUMMARY OF LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. There will be a statutory duty.

## 8. SUMMARY OF OTHER IMPLICATIONS

### HR Implications

N/A

### Community Safety

The proposals outlined within this report support community safety

### Environmental Impact

N/A

### Local Government Act 1972 – section 100d

### List of background documents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets>

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