

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	20 JULY 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY FOR READING 2015-2018		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	NEIGHBOURHOODS	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the post consultation draft of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2015-18, with associated action plan, and seeks endorsement of the draft as the live strategy for Reading.
- 1.2 The Domestic Abuse Strategy establishes the Community Safety Partnership's priorities in order to prevent domestic abuse, and reduce the risk by supporting both those that are experiencing and those perpetrating abuse. It also outlines a commitment to ensuring an improved understanding of the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse in Reading. The action plan outlines how the priorities will be delivered and this action plan will be refreshed each year. This draft incorporates the responses to the consultation on the draft strategy which ran from the 16th March to the 18<sup>th</sup> May this year.
- 1.3 The draft Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading is attached at Appendix 1 and the draft Action Plan is attached at Appendix 2.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee endorses the attached documents as the live Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2015-18 and associated action plan.

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2011, the Home Office launched its strategy 'A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls' along with an action plan which was developed following consultation with statutory and voluntary organisations. This programme aims to prevent violence against women and girls happening in the first place as well as challenging attitudes and behaviours which foster this violence. The strategy reports that the financial cost of violence against women and girls in the UK is £37.6bn. Although a strategy aimed at addressing violence against women and girls, the principles of the strategy can also

be applied to men, boys, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans\* (LGBT) community.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, the definition of domestic abuse used across Government changed. Under the new definition adopted by the Government, young people who are 16 and 17 are now included. In addition the definition was extended to include coercive control - a systematic pattern of abuse and control. The definition includes Harmful Cultural Practices (HCP) such as forced marriage. Finally, the definition makes clear that victims are not confined to one gender or to particular ethnic groups.

- 3.3 Responsibility for Reading's response to Domestic Abuse lies with Reading's Community Safety Partnership, working closely alongside both the Adults' and Children's Safeguarding Boards. Domestic abuse remains a top priority for Reading's Community Safety Partnership which places a focus on high risk groups in its most recent strategic plan.
- 3.4 In addition Reading Borough Council's corporate plan states that reducing domestic abuse remains a focus for the Council and the publication of the Domestic Abuse Strategy directly supports the delivery of priorities 'Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active' and 'Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable'. This strategy will help to narrow the gap between the life experiences of those who are and are not affected by domestic abuse. It also supports the delivery of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for Reading and aligns with the Reading 2030 vision of ensuring residents feel comfortable, safe, secure, and well-housed. The service empowers victims and children to find safety and security from perpetrators, thereby increasing the amount of choice and control they have over their lives.

#### 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Reading's draft Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-18 outlines Reading's focus for tackling domestic abuse over the next three years. Reading provides a good and improving level of support for victims of domestic abuse, within the challenging financial restraints facing public services. However statistics indicate that the number of incidents in Reading remains above average for the Thames Valley area. The draft strategy aims to continue to improve the offer for those experiencing domestic abuse and their families, and deliver the best possible coordinated response to the challenge of domestic abuse in Reading.
- 4.2 The draft strategy is multi agency in its approach and reflects the work of Reading Borough Council, Thames Valley Police, Probation, local NHS and commissioned services as well as various other local partners.
- 4.3 The draft strategy identifies four key areas which the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group will prioritise over the next three years:
  - **Encouraging people to seek support earlier** - Improving information, education and prevention
  - **Providing the right response first time** - Improving identification, encouraging disclosures and ensuring an appropriate immediate response.
  - **Having the right services available** - Improving support to move from victim to survivor or to change abusive behaviour.
  - **Understanding of the challenges in our town** - improving data analysis and community engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "Trans" is used within this strategy as an inclusive term which recognises the wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella

- 4.4 These priorities will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (a delivery group of the CSP), chaired by the Head of Housing & Neighbourhoods and attended by the various partner agencies currently working to tackle domestic abuse in Reading, as well as by internal service leads.
- 4.5 A period of public consultation was completed between 16<sup>th</sup> March and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015. Predominately respondents supported the content and priorities of the draft strategy. The key areas of comment were as follows:
- People endorsed the objectives set out in the strategy with no challenges to the priorities highlighted. In particular there was support for the need for increased training to standardise the referral pathway into support for those experiencing domestic abuse.
  - There was positive feedback on the strategy's focus on supporting those that are experiencing domestic abuse, but some commentators were keen to see further development of plans to reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse by working with perpetrators. Further workshops focusing on this area were added into the consultation plan to address this, and the updated draft of the strategy reflects this.
  - More detail/ emphasis was requested on the issues of Mental Health, substance misuse, and a clearer move towards Domestic Abuse services working in partnership with others through shared support plans, rather than an individual having to access support in 3 different places. Again, additional workshops have been completed during the consultation period to develop the action plan to address this point.
  - Many support workers felt that support for people who have experienced historic domestic abuse, and have not moved on from the experience psychologically or emotionally, needs to be reviewed due to the long term impact these experiences have on a person's behaviour.
  - Feedback from users of support services indicated that many residents are still not aware of where to access help and support until the point of crisis intervention, and they suggested increased publicity and awareness raising. They also felt that it was confusing and chaotic at the point that they made the decision to make changes to their lives, and therefore they struggled to negotiate a route through the various services and workers potentially involved. Therefore they felt that clear referral pathways that set out what they could expect from who would help provide them with the confidence to move forward. Both these issues are addressed in the final draft.
- 4.6 Key areas of work within the action plan to help deliver the priorities of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading are:
- Working in partnership with the LSCB to increase the universal prevention activity and education to young people regarding Healthy Relationships. This would be delivered in conjunction with the CSE agenda.
  - Standardise and increase the training for both RBC and partnership agencies regarding domestic abuse and the MARAC.
  - Improve the coordination of support services where there are complex cases and review support services to ensure they meet demand.
  - Improved outcomes for residents engaged in the criminal justice process
  - Increase understanding of issues and communication with specific groups to understand why some minority communities are under-represented in terms of reporting.
  - Implement a new performance structure to monitor domestic abuse prevalence and activity in the town to better support strategic delivery of services.

- Complete the commissioning process for support services so that new contract arrangements are in place by April 2017.

4.7 It is proposed that the current version of the documents in appendices 1 and 2 are endorsed as the live Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading and associated action plan.

## 5 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

### 5.1 Sustainable Communities Strategy for Reading

The draft Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading directly aligns with the Reading 2030 vision of ensuring residents feel comfortable, safe, secure, and well-housed. The service empowers victims and children to find safety and security from perpetrators, thereby increasing the amount of choice and control they have over their lives.

### 5.2 Community Safety Partnership

Domestic Abuse remains a top priority for Reading's Community Safety Partnership which places a focus on high risk groups in its most recent strategic plan.

### 5.3 Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan

The service priorities of Reading Borough Council's 2015-18 Corporate Plan outline the Authority's commitment to "Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable" and "Keeping the town Clean, Green, Safe and Active". These priorities are directly supported by the Domestic Abuse Strategy.

### 5.4 Local Safeguarding Children's Board Action Plan

Domestic abuse remains a key focus for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Action Plan.

### 5.5 Public Health

Domestic abuse is addressed as an indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework. With the responsibility for Public Health now transferred to local authorities, there is now more opportunity than ever for the local NHS to work in partnership with local authorities and the police to address the health implications of domestic abuse.

## 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 Please see main report.

## 7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 *Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—*

- *eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- *advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- *foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

- 7.2 The following actions in the strategy will have the potential to improve equality of opportunity for groups which are under-represented in terms of accessing support services or receiving interventions from Thames Valley Police:
- Tailored programme of awareness raising and target information to be produced to ensure disabled and vulnerable adults have an increased understanding of Domestic abuse and are aware of where and how to seek support.
  - Tailored programme of awareness raising and target information to be produced to ensure LGBT individuals have an increased understanding of Domestic abuse and are aware of where and how to seek support.
  - Amend Safeguarding training across all agencies to ensure that there is a consistent message about the referrals required if a vulnerable adult is experiencing DA.
  - Review recording to develop a clear understanding as to the number of MARAC referrals involving an LGBT individual.
  - Improve data collection for Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence
  - Consult with representatives of the needs of the LGBT community in order to understand their needs

The impact on these protected groups will be positive.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Although best practice, there is not statutory obligation to have a local domestic abuse strategy.
- 8.2 As part of the standard commissioning cycle new contracts arrangements regarding the RBC commissioned domestic abuse support services are required by April 2017. Separate papers regarding the commissioning exercise and implications will be submitted in due course, but the procurement will need to be completed in line with the Public Contract Regulations 2015.
- 8.3 Agencies in Reading have a number of statutory duties:
- To act in accordance with the European Convention of Human Rights (Human Rights Act 1998, particularly Articles 2 and 8);
  - To provide for the wellbeing of its citizens (Local Government Act 2000);
  - To do all it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (Crime and Disorder Act 1998);
  - To assist people fleeing domestic violence with finding suitable accommodation
  - & to secure alternative accommodation for those who are accepted as homeless through domestic violence (Part VII the Housing Act 1996);
  - To protect children and young people (Children Act 1989, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991)
  - To comply with domestic violence, Crime and Victims (Amendments) Act 2012

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The proposed actions will be managed within existing budgets.
- 9.2 As part of the standard commissioning cycle new contracts arrangements regarding the RBC commissioned domestic abuse support services are required by April 2017. Separate papers detailing the commissioning exercise and financial implications will be submitted in due course.

# Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2015 - 2018



## Foreword

Last year alone, 1.4 million women and 700,000 men experienced domestic abuse - and these are just the cases that were reported. Sadly, every week that passes sees two more women killed by their current or former partner. This national picture of domestic violence is terrifying and must be changed. But when we scratch the surface, the picture gets even more alarming.

There are more people on the receiving end of domestic violence than the person being directly abused. Indeed, this kind of abuse affects the whole household. More than 750,000 British children and young people a year witness domestic abuse. In fact at Reading Borough Council, it is the highest presenting factor in Children's Social Care assessments.

So behind the statistics I opened with are many more. Such as the 52% of children affected by domestic abuse who suffer behavioural problems or social development challenges. Or the 39% who struggle to adjust to school. Or even the 29% who engage in risk-taking behaviour. Unless we take decisive action, domestic abuse will continue to impact vulnerable families for generations.

This is why I am extremely pleased to introduce the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading, on behalf of the Crime and Disorder Partnership. Spanning the next three years (2015 - 2018), this document sets out exactly how we can reduce domestic abuse in Reading and support those who experience it to live safer, more secure, lives.

As a busy urban centre with a dense population, it is perhaps unsurprising that Reading sees higher levels of domestic abuse in comparison to its counterparts in the Thames Valley. However, it is therefore imperative that we play a major role in tackling the issue.

The product of extensive consultation, this strategy outlines four key areas for the Domestic Abuse Strategy group to focus on. These include improving information, education and preventative measures; boosting identification and disclosures of domestic abuse while ensuring an appropriate immediate response; supporting those affected to move from victim to survivor or to change offending behaviour; and understanding the specific challenges we face in our town.

The Domestic Abuse Strategy is designed to be a practical tool to encourage direct and effective action in support of those experiencing domestic violence, those affected by it and those who perpetrate it who are motivated to change their behaviour. Finally, let me be clear; domestic violence crosses every known demographic - so it is up to all of us to tackle it. The Community Safety Partnership is committed to leading the way. Together, by implementing the objectives of this strategy, we will keep our residents safer and our communities stronger.

Cllr Jo Lovelock  
Leader of the Council

## Glossary

SAB	Safeguarding Adults Board
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BWA	Berkshire Women's Aid
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
DARIM	Domestic Abuse Repeat Incident Meeting
DAIU	Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit
DASG	Domestic Abuse Strategy Group
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GP	General Practitioner
HCP	Harmful Cultural Practices
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Adviser
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children's Board
MARAC	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MAPPA	Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MASH	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PCC	Police & Crime Commissioner
PHE	Public Health England
PSCHE	Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education
RBC	Reading Borough Council
TVP	Thames Valley Police
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
YOS	Youth Offending Service



## WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

*In order to implement a coherent strategy to tackle domestic abuse effectively, it is essential to maintain a thorough understanding of the terms used to describe and legislate against destructive behaviours. The following information illustrates how broadly the term can be applied and, therefore, how nuanced our approach must be.*

### Domestic abuse & domestic violence

Domestic abuse and domestic violence are terms used interchangeably by many organisations. It is recognised that a number of acts committed by perpetrators are abusive but not always violent. For clarity, this strategy uses the term 'domestic abuse', acknowledging the range of abusive non-violent behaviours which may be perpetrated against individuals.

### Government definitions

The Government defines **domestic abuse** as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

**Controlling behaviour** is defined as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour** is defined as an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their partner or family member.

\*This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage (now collectively referred to by the term 'Harmful Cultural Practices), and is clear that people experiencing abuse are not confined to one gender or ethnic group. N.B. While there is no specific reference to FGM it should be noted that the LSP is currently focusing on this issue and the CSP will work with them on any actions which are agreed.

Domestic abuse can affect anybody, regardless of their gender or sexuality, and it occurs across all of society, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography<sup>1</sup>.

This definition, while not a legal definition, is used across all Government departments.

While the Government definition of domestic violence applies to young people aged 16 and above, it is important to also acknowledge that domestic abuse can have far reaching impacts on children and young people under 16 who are often caught up in and affected by the abuse carried out in the household. Young people can also be involved in abusive partnerships and it is vital that they have opportunities to learn about healthy relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence>

## Domestic Abuse in the Law

*While a wide variety of behaviours defined as domestic abuse are universally recognised as destructive, not all such behaviours are illegal. While this situation is changing, it is important for the purposes of this strategy to recognise the current legal boundaries we must operate within.*

In criminal law, domestic abuse is an umbrella term used to refer to a number of different offences against a family member or intimate partner, such as assault. However not all reports to the police can be recorded as a crime, such as verbal aggression towards a partner, and therefore get logged as a 'non-recordable' domestic abuse incident.

However legislation around domestic abuse is changing, with the Home Office recently introducing a new offence as part of the **Serious Crime Act 2015**. The new offence criminalises patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour where they are perpetrated against an intimate partner or family member.

Other recent changes in legislation have included the introduction, since the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2014, of **Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs)** and **Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs)**.

These notices and orders have been introduced to help remove the issue of perpetrators that are arrested, but not charged, returning directly to the location of the victim. Previous to this development, there were no restraints on the perpetrator since bail conditions would not apply without charge. Deliberately temporary in nature (DVPNs and DVPOs can last a maximum of 48 hours and 28 days respectively) the orders are designed to provide individuals with the space to make decisions for the future and potentially apply for a civil injunction.

In addition, the Government has also introduced the **Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme**, commonly known as Clare's Law. This development allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of violence.

## Forms of domestic abuse<sup>23</sup>

Men and women, whether in a same-sex or heterosexual relationship, experience domestic abuse in a variety of forms. However, research clearly shows that women are more likely to experience physical injury and serious injury. This is not to underestimate the impact of psychological abuse, with 94% of those experiencing abuse citing mental cruelty as more painful to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.domesticviolencelondon.nhs.uk/1-what-is-domestic-violence>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/pdf/UNiTE\\_TheSituation\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/pdf/UNiTE_TheSituation_EN.pdf)

endure than physical violence (White Ribbon campaign UK). Within this context, currently recognised forms of domestic abuse include:

**Domestic /intimate partner violence:** A pattern of coercive control, which includes combinations of physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse by a current or former partner or person in the household. In extreme cases this includes murder.

**Inter-familial violence/ parental abuse:** Violence between adult family members.

**Stalking:** repeated (i.e. on at least two occasions) harassment causing fear, alarm or distress. It can include threatening phone calls, texts or letters; damaging property; spying on and following a person.

**'Honour' based violence:** Violence committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family and/ or community. Women, especially young women, are the most common targets, often where they have acted outside community boundaries of perceived acceptable feminine/sexual behaviour. In extreme cases the woman may be killed.

**Forced marriage:** A marriage conducted without valid consent of one or both parties, where duress or lack of capacity is a factor.

## NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

*Tackling domestic abuse continues to be a national priority for the Government. In response, local authorities are expected to outline their approach to reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse in their area, addressing the particular challenges presented by local demographics.*

### National context

In 2011, the Home Office launched its strategy 'A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls' along with an action plan which was developed following consultation with statutory and voluntary organisations. This programme aims to prevent violence against women and girls happening in the first place as well as challenging attitudes and behaviours which foster this violence. The strategy reports that the financial cost of violence against women and girls in the UK is £37.6bn. Although a strategy aimed at addressing violence against women and girls, the principles of the strategy can also be applied to men, boys, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans\*<sup>4</sup> (LGBT) community.

In terms of domestic abuse prevalence nationwide, research indicates that:

- 8.5% of women and 4.5% of men reported having experienced any type of domestic abuse in 2013/14 (that is, partner/ex-partner abuse (non-sexual), family abuse (non-sexual) and sexual assault or stalking carried out by a current or former partner or other family member). This is equivalent to an estimated 1.4 million women and 700,000 men.
- 6.8% of women and 3% of men reported having experienced any type of partner abuse in the last year, equivalent to an estimated 1.1 million women and 500,000 men.
- Overall, 28.3% of women and 14.7% of men said they had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16, equivalent to an estimated 4.6 million women and 2.4 million men.<sup>5</sup>
- Two women a week are killed by a partner or former partner in England and Wales<sup>6</sup>
- Women experience an average of 35 incidents of domestic violence before reporting an incident to the police<sup>7</sup>
- 76% of all domestic abuse incidents are repeat incidents<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The word "Trans" is used within this strategy as an inclusive term which recognises the wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella.

<sup>5</sup> 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), Feb 2015

<sup>6</sup> Doh 2005

<sup>7</sup> Yearnshaw 1997, accessed at

[http://safer.sthelens.gov.uk/SITEMANV2/publications/40/0901316LeafletsforDVVictims\\_3.pdf](http://safer.sthelens.gov.uk/SITEMANV2/publications/40/0901316LeafletsforDVVictims_3.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Home office 2010 <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb1210.pdf>

At this point, it should be noted that national agencies all agree that a significant number of incidents of domestic abuse go unreported which means that national statistics do not necessarily indicate true prevalence.

## Local context

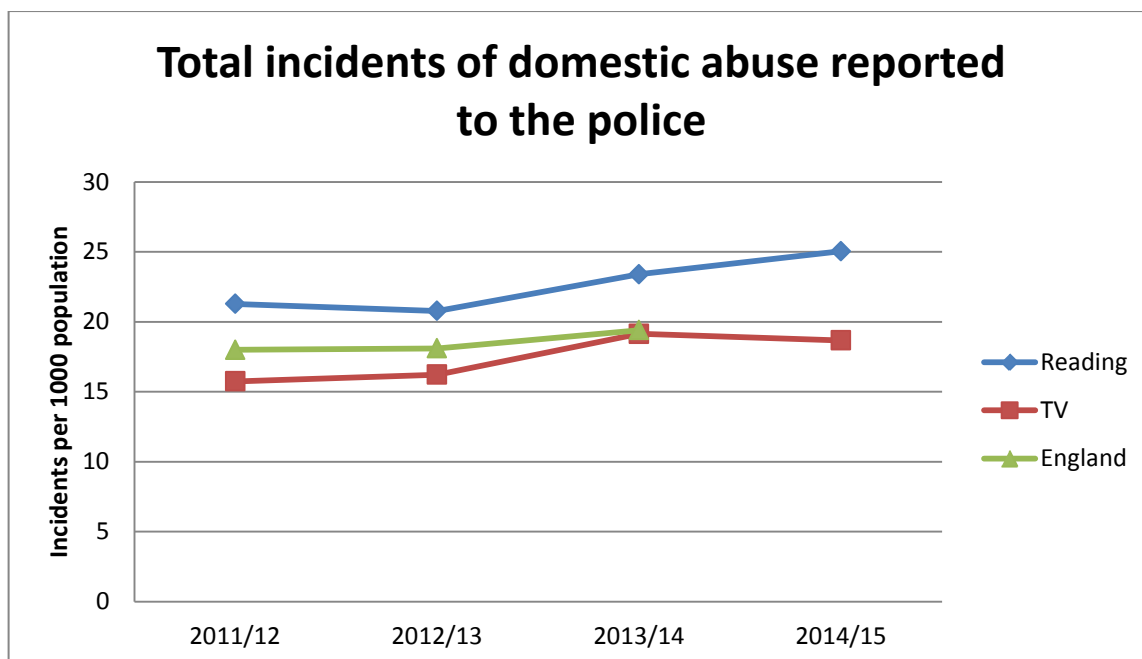
*The national picture identifies high levels of domestic abuse around the country. Unfortunately, the information below shows that Reading is experiencing levels of domestic abuse slightly above the national average. However, these statistics also highlight a robust local response to support affected residents - a response we will refine even further over the course of the period covered by this strategy.*

The table below shows the number of domestic abuse incidents in Reading reported to the Police for the last three years. It highlights percentage change from the previous year and the number of incidents per 1000 population against the equivalent Thames Valley-wide figure.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	% Change 2013/14 to 14/15	Number per 1000 population Reading	Number per 1000 population - Thames Valley
Domestic Abuse Incidents - Recorded Crime	951	1,035	1,284	24%	8.06	4.72
Domestic Abuse Incidents - non recordable crime <sup>9</sup>	2,536	2,847	2,704	-5%	16.98	13.95
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,487</b>	<b>3,882</b>	<b>3,988</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>25.04</b>	<b>18.67</b>

This figure shows a 3% rise in all domestic abuse reports to TVP when compared to the previous year, with the number of incidents consistently increasing for the last three years. The recent increase in incidents relate to a 24% increase in recorded crimes with the number of non-recordable crimes decreasing from 2013/14.

<sup>9</sup> A non-recordable incident of domestic abuse is not regarded as an offence and does not contribute to Home Office crime statistics. Recordable incidents of domestic abuse are those which are considered pursuable as an offence.



The above graph shows how this data as crimes per 1000 population compared with the Thames Valley and England figures for the same period. This confirms that the prevalence of domestic abuse in Reading is consistently higher than both the Thames Valley and the national average. The percentage of crimes against repeat victims in Reading is 29%, this compares to a Thames Valley average of 27%.

#### Significance of changes to crime recording

The increase in recorded crimes could in part be attributed to changes in recording practice. Recent changes to police guidance on the recording of historic incidents means that additional crimes, outside of the current incident the police may be attending, will now also be recorded. This will have had an impact on the number of domestic abuse related crimes recorded within 2014/15, and show an increase, even if there has not been an increase in actual incidents. The number of incidents reported in 2015/16 will be monitored closely as the new guidance on recording incidents will continue to be adhered to, and therefore any change in numbers will represent a real change in prevalence.

#### Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Data

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies. By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the individual experiencing abuse is represented, a risk focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the individual. There are currently over 270 MARACs operating across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland managing more than 64,000 cases a year.

The Reading MARAC, co-chaired by Thames Valley Police and the National Probation Service, aims to review and co-ordinate service provision where the victim is assessed as being at high risk of harm.

The table below shows the number of cases referred to the MARAC:

Indicator	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2011 - 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2012)	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2012 - 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	1st July 2013 - 30th June 2014
Number of cases discussed	112	100	148
Referrals from partner agencies	22%	27%	32%

In 2013/14 148 cases were referred to the Reading MARAC; a 48% increase compared to the previous year which evidences the positive progress Reading agencies have made in publicising and engaging with the MARAC process. However the figure is still below (60%) of the SafeLives recommendation of 250 cases per year (number of high risk cases they project are in the borough), and their suggested target of 200 cases (80%) a year referred. MARAC data over the previous three years also indicates that the percentage of referrals made by partner agencies, rather than the police, has continued to increase from 22% to 32%. A recent audit of the impact of the MARAC upon children in Reading indicated that 62% of MARAC referrals relate to households that include children.

Increasing the number of referrals to the MARAC from partner agencies has been a clear strategic priority for Reading during the previous strategy period. The corresponding increase in partner referrals reflects this focus. The number of partner referrals now meets the recommendations outlined by SafeLives which monitors MARAC performance across the country.

The table below provides more detailed information for high risk cases presented to Reading's MARAC for 2014.

***MARAC performance data: Cases discussed between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 - 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014***

Indicator	Reading	Thames Valley	National data
Number of cases discussed	155	1,426	76,336
Cases per 10,000 of the adult female population	25	16	32
Referrals from partner agencies	30%	44%	38%
Referrals from police	70%	56%	62%
Repeat referrals	22%	16%	24%
BME referrals	39.4%		
LGBT referrals	0.0%	<1%	0.90%
Referrals where the victim has a disability	0.0%	<1%	3.50%
Referrals with a male victim	1.9%	2.70%	4.40%
Number of cases where victim is aged 16 - 17	1	243	1335
% of cases where victim is aged 16 - 17	<1%	1.70%	1.70%



Number causing harm aged 17 and below	1	130	733
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The table indicates that a higher number of MARAC cases are referred by 10,000 population in Reading compared to the Thames Valley figure, but referrals per 10,000 population are below the national figure. Again this indicates that there is still a under reporting of cases to the MARAC as the prevalence rate in Reading is believed to be above the national average.

The table also highlights a below expected rates of referrals for LGBT cases and referrals for individuals who have a disability. This is despite an already low national average. Over the 12 months to 31<sup>st</sup> December no referrals were recorded for these groups. This may be due to incorrect recording or may be due to referrals not being made appropriately by agencies. These possible causes are further addressed later on in the strategy (Understanding the Challenges in our Town) and will be reviewed by the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group.

### Accommodation needs of people experiencing domestic abuse

Many residents that require alternative accommodation as a result of domestic abuse will approach the Reading Borough Council Housing Advice Service. The Housing Advice Service will then seek to prevent homelessness by supporting residents to secure alternative housing, for example with the private rented sector via the Deposit Guarantee scheme. In some cases it is not possible or suitable to quickly secure new housing and the household may then formally be accepted as homeless by the council and placed in temporary accommodation.

In the last three years, there has been no marked increase in approaches to the Housing Advice Service by individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Reading Borough Council spoke to 141 people in 2011/12, 162 people in 2012/13 and 136 people in 2013/14.

However, following a long term downward trend in homelessness since 2004, homeless acceptances have been increasing nationally and locally, significantly due to evictions from and pressure in the private rented sector, along with a limited supply of housing which is affordable to those on low incomes. This means that a higher percentage of households that approach the Housing Advice Service are being accepted as homeless rather than supported into alternative accommodation. It therefore follows that this increase in homeless applications will also be reflected in presentations from those fleeing domestic abuse.

This is evidenced by the number of homeless households presenting due to domestic abuse the last four years, as below. However, as stated above this is likely to be due (at least in part) to increasing housing market pressure and fewer housing options being available to those in need rather than necessarily an increase in the prevalence of domestic abuse.

Year	Number of Homeless Applications
10/11	10
11/12	30

12/13	75
13/14	116

However, ultimately this leads to more individuals experiencing domestic abuse being housed in temporary accommodation including Bed and Breakfast. This will have a significant impact on a person's resilience and ability to maintain a safe environment for themselves and their household.

An alternative housing solution is to access specialist domestic abuse refuges. Reading Borough Council continues to invest in refuge provision for those leaving their home due to domestic abuse and, with 25 refuge places provided in the town, Reading has the second highest level of provision in the Thames Valley after Milton Keynes. In 2014/15 46 households accessed refuge provision in Reading.

However, refuge provision is not suitable for everyone leaving an abusive relationship and people locally may need to seek refuge out of area which is not always available. People may also decline refuge; may have additional needs which mean that refuge cannot accommodate them; or may be presenting from out of area. This means that some are housed in non-specialist temporary accommodation and provided with outreach support. Limitations on this accommodation being available, and its suitability, combined with the overall pressure on housing supply nationally and locally continues to have a corresponding impact on those looking to leave an abusive relationship.

Specialist outreach support is provided by BWA for households requiring support that are not placed within a refuge, including those that choose to remain in their own home. In 2014/15 363 new referrals were received for outreach support, in 39% of which the situation was classed as high risk.

### **Children's Services**

17.5% of the referrals in to the current, multi-agency safeguarding hub for children's service were due to domestic violence in 2014/15. We also know that domestic abuse is the highest presenting factor in Children's Social Care assessments, currently present in 19% of cases.

For the same year, 2014/15, the Children's Action Teams supported 95 families where domestic abuse was an aspect of the family's life (14% of their caseload). Of cases closed during that period, 48% showed significant improvement and 22% showed limited improvement.

Reading Borough Council's Children's services department also commission a Family Choices programme, run by BWA and aimed at supporting the whole household with the desired outcome of reducing repeat referrals in to Children Social Care. In 2014/15 60 families were offered support through this service. Outside of the family choices programme an additional 125 children and young people affected by domestic abuse were supported by BWA.

### **Court outcomes**

In 2013/14 763 domestic abuse trials were listed within the Thames Valley courts. Of these trials 276 (36.2%) were effective (proceeded as planned), 124 (16.3%) were classed as ineffective (case did not proceed as one party not ready) and 363 (47.6%) were classed as failed/cracked cases and could not proceed.

Cases are 'cracked' for a number of reasons but the most significant is the withdrawal of either the victim or witness. The likelihood of a victim of crime withdrawing from the prosecution increases significantly the longer it takes for a trial to come to court.

The six-month position for 2014/15 shows the percentage of effective trials staying consistent at 36.9% and a slight reduction in cracked cases to 42.9%.

#### **Domestic homicide review:**

In March 2014, a summary of learning was published following a review of a domestic homicide in Reading. The key recommendations are outlined below:

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to request that Reading Housing department consider the following: -

- How to ensure a better co-ordination of services for victims of domestic abuse. This was a particular concern when the person experiencing domestic abuse was also a Council tenant and new processes are now in place ensuring that there is one 'key-worker' who will manage a case and explore all options of re-housing.
- Whether there are sufficient resources available to address the needs of victims of domestic abuse.

The CSP to initiate a MARAC Steering Group to conduct a review of systems and training. The purpose of the review being to ensure:-

- That all agencies use the DASH assessment for referrals of those experiencing domestic abuse;
- That professionals are confident to make referrals into the MARAC process;

The CSP to request member agencies to consider how best to develop mechanisms/training to strengthen professionals' knowledge of domestic abuse, particularly focussing on how to best engage with those experiencing abuse who aren't able to trust people and deny the abuse.

The CSP to request that the Primary Care Trust<sup>10</sup> ensure that the GP service develop a more holistic approach to families experiencing domestic abuse. In particular that GP training should emphasise the importance of including the whole family and that recording should ensure that information is available on all family members' records.

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<sup>10</sup> Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) were abolished on the 31 March 2013 as part of the Health & Social Care Act 2013. A general practice-based domestic violence and abuse training support and referral programme is now commissioned by Reading's Public Health team.

The implementation of these recommendations, to date and in the future, are captured in the strategic priorities within this document and associated action plan.

### Thames Valley Police HMIC Inspection

Within Thames Valley Police, domestic abuse remains a priority for the force and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This was reflected in the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary (HMIC) report "Thames Valley Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse" published in March 2014<sup>11</sup>. The report confirms that TVP provides a good service for victims of domestic abuse and works hard to keep them safe with a good immediate response. The force is one of only eight in the country deemed to be providing appropriate services for victims. However the review did include a number of recommendations which are listed below:

1. The force should review the longer term management (risk and safeguarding) of standard and medium risk victims to include the arrests of outstanding offenders and the ongoing review of victim safety.
2. The force should develop further the investigative process for domestic abuse, to ensure that officers collect all available evidence, to help build strong cases against perpetrators.
3. The force should review how victims are contacted and kept updated if a perpetrator is released from custody and ensure that risk assessments and safety plans are reviewed at this stage.
4. The force should work with partner agencies to establish a consistent approach to assessment and referral of high risk cases to MARACs.
5. The force should work with the PCC and partner agencies to increase the numbers of Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) available to work with victims in the Thames Valley Police area.
6. The force should publicise the role of the specialist team in order that all staff understand what they do and how they can help make victims safer.
7. The force should develop an overarching multi-agency strategy for domestic abuse covering the force area to provide a more consistent approach to tackling domestic abuse.

Thames Valley Police have since published an action plan to address the areas for improvement identified by the HMIC report. Delivery of this action plan is monitored by the Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Strategy Group.

### Costs to Reading

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/thames-valley-approach-to-tackling-domestic-abuse.pdf>

It is estimated by The Against Violence and Abuse Project that the cost of domestic abuse to Reading is £18.6m (this does not include human and emotional costs).<sup>12</sup>

This figure is comprised of:

- Physical and Mental Healthcare: £5.6m
- Criminal Justice: £4.1m
- Social Services: £0.9m
- Housing and Refuges: £0.6m
- Civil Legal Services: £1.2m
- Lost Economic Output: £6.2m

**Key actions implemented by the 2011-2014 Domestic Abuse Strategy have included:**

- ✓ Introduced triaging of notifications between Children's Social Care and Thames Valley Police in partnership with Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) in order to improve the speed that cases are referred to the relevant support agency
- ✓ Family Choices programme commissioned by RBC, Children's Services which includes support for those experiencing Domestic Abuse, the perpetrator and any young people in the household that are affected.
- ✓ Increase in referrals to the MARAC, and increasing the proportion from agencies other than the Police.
- ✓ Commissioned the IRIS project to provide training and support to GPs
- ✓ Sanctuary Scheme (to enable those at risk to remain safely at home through physical measures to the property) reviewed and re-launched
- ✓ Safeguarding Adults Training reviewed and now includes forced marriage and honour based violence content
- ✓ Programme of briefings on legislative changes completed
- ✓ Introduced protocol between RBC housing service and BWA to increase referrals for outreach support (and refer in at the earliest stage possible)
- ✓ Introduced keyworker approach in the Housing Service for cases of domestic abuse

### **Current Resources in Reading**

Within Reading there is a comprehensive range of resources to provide support for those experiencing domestic abuse. A recent independent Thames Valley-wide

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.avaproject.org.uk/media/60461/costs%20of%20dv%20by%20local%20authority.pdf>

report, which examined resourcing across the region, recommended a core provision of support services. Reading currently meets all of the requirements identified in this report and provides the following core services:

**Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA):** Funded by Reading Borough Council, BWA is a comprehensive source of information on domestic abuse, running several key support services across the town.

**Crossing Bridges/ Drop in support:** A one-stop-shop based in the town centre for those experiencing domestic abuse providing an accessible safe venue for members of the public to 'drop in' or attend appointments. The service offers face-to-face support, a weekly free legal surgery, referrals to BWA and external support services, Child Protection and Children's Services assistance and DIY injunctions.

**Refuge Provision:** 25 bed spaces provided by BWA and includes specialist refuge, Sahara for Asian Women. All Reading refuges also have refuge-based support staff.

**Helpline:** A 24 hour helpline run by BWA for those experiencing Domestic Abuse to seek information and support. In 2014/15 the helpline received 1,702 calls.

**Outreach Support:** Outreach support workers including a specialist support worker for Asian women. Two outreach workers in the Reading area have recently completed the IDVA training and will act as IDVAs in Reading.

**Young People's Support:** Children and young people's education and awareness raising in schools, Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) referral integration and the Family Choices therapy programme. Within Reading, children's outreach workers also support children affected by Domestic Abuse in both refuge and the community.

**Counselling:** Within Reading the talking therapies service provides counselling support for those experiencing, or have experienced domestic abuse.

**Support Groups:** A number of active groups within Reading are available to support women to become survivors such as Choices and the Comfort Group.

**Sanctuary Scheme:** Reading's Housing Service operates a sanctuary scheme in order to help people to remain safe within their own homes.

**Working with Perpetrators:** BWA runs a perpetrators' programme in order to work with those who have committed acts of domestic abuse.

**Training:** Level 1 and Level 2 domestic abuse training for Reading Borough Council staff, the voluntary sector and providers, delivered regularly throughout the year and commissioned by the Local Authority.

Further resources can be found in the table below:

## Reading Domestic Abuse Strategy Matrix of Resources

	Individual experiencing abuse	Child	Perpetrator/offender
<b>High risk management and enforcement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Service (MARAC)</li> <li>Support to those in high risk through Crossing Bridges</li> <li>Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVC)</li> <li>Refuge provision</li> <li>IRIS project</li> <li>TecSOS phones (supplied by TVP and provides direct emergency link to their control room)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Protection processes aligned with MARAC</li> <li>Children's Action Teams (multi-agency)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements</li> <li>Statutory probation supervision (which will include community sentences and licences)</li> </ul>
<b>Effective support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach support</li> <li>Sanctuary Scheme</li> <li>Civil law remedies (DIY injunctions)</li> <li>Support groups (evening, daytime and one specifically for Asian women)</li> <li>Use of locally available counselling services (Talking Therapies)</li> <li>IRIS project</li> <li>BWA Choices Programme (also available in Asian language and specifically for those with LDD)</li> <li>Berkshire Mediation                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women can receive 1:1 support at Alana House, a women's community project in Reading and West Berkshire. - although not specialist DA support, engagement with services enable appropriate referrals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Age appropriate support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BWA Family Choices Programme</li> <li>BWA programme offer to primary and secondary schools for children and young people where domestic abuse is identified in the household</li> <li>Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service</li> <li>Children's Action Teams</li> <li>Time to Talk Youth Counselling Service</li> <li>Children's Group Work Team (BWA)</li> <li>Child and Family Court Advice &amp; Support Service (CAFCASS)</li> <li>Youth Offending Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Domestic Violence Programme (Probation)</li> <li>Healthy Relationships 1:1 Programme (Probation)</li> <li>BWA Family Choices Programme</li> <li>Talking Therapies</li> <li>National Respect Helpline</li> </ul>
<b>Early intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff training</li> <li>IRIS project</li> <li>Awareness raising</li> <li>Helpline</li> <li>Website</li> <li>Materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff training</li> <li>Children's Action Teams and Children's Centres</li> <li>Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child</li> <li>Youth Offending Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff training</li> <li>BWA Family Choices Programme</li> <li>Programmes to address behaviour</li> <li>Changing faces programme delivered by BWA to YOS</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's Centres</li> <li>Parenting/family relationship programmes and services</li> <li>Healthy relationships (PSHE) in school</li> <li>Community awareness campaigns (intermittent)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's Centres</li> <li>Parenting/family relationship programmes and services</li> <li>Healthy relationships (PSHE) in school</li> <li>Community awareness campaigns (intermittent)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parenting/family relationship programmes and services</li> <li>Healthy relationships (PSHE) in school</li> <li>Community awareness campaigns (intermittent)</li> </ul>



## STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

*The background information previously outlined - from formal, legislative definitions through to contextual indicators - provides a solid foundation from which to form an effective Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading. Using this data and the identified resources, the strategy for 2015/18 will encourage those experiencing domestic abuse to come forward early in order to keep themselves and their families safe. And it will ensure that, when they do come forward, staff are equipped with everything they need to support individuals to build a more secure future.*

Reading residents have access to a robust set of services with committed resources supporting people to resolve and reduce incidents of domestic abuse. However data indicators, for example the low number of MARAC referrals in Reading in comparison to that above average incidents reported to the police, and the feedback from those who have experienced domestic abuse, suggest that awareness of services could be improved and referral routes are not always clear. Therefore activity to prevent domestic abuse and the distribution of information has to be a priority so that residents of Reading access support earlier before the situation escalates and has a significant impact on themselves and any children in the household.

All front line services across Reading Borough Council and partner agencies have the potential to interact with someone experiencing domestic abuse. The Community Safety Partnership is committed to making sure that in Reading people get the right response first time from professionals, and that it does not take the average five contacts with services that national research suggests. Effective training to notice the signs of domestic abuse and respond appropriately will mean that more domestic abuse concerns are resolved at an earlier stage and the impact on those experiencing it and their children will reduce. This in turn will lead to less call on crisis intervention services such as Children's Social Care.

Commitment to maximising the impact of services continues throughout the support pathway where it is acknowledged that better joint working and coordination of services would further enable those households experiencing domestic abuse to have a safer future. It has also become clear that further information and data is required to fully understand and improve services in the town.

The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading is divided into four priority areas each of which has a number of associated target outcomes:

1. Encouraging people to seek support earlier - Improving information, education and prevention



- Ensuring Reading residents are able to access the information they need to stay safe and protected.
  - Providing comprehensive education to young people in order to facilitate healthy, happy and safe relationships.
- 2. Providing the right response first time - Improving identification, encouraging disclosures and ensuring an appropriate immediate response.**
- Professionals across agencies are equipped to notice the signs of and encourage disclosures of domestic abuse.
  - Identification of domestic abuse and disclosures are responded to with appropriate referrals so that people experiencing domestic abuse gain the help and support they need.
- 3. Having the right services available - Improving support to move from victim to survivor or to change abusive behaviour.**
- Improved outcomes for those accessing the criminal justice system, including the support provided to victims during the court process.
  - Improved coordination of high-risk cases and cases with multiple incidents.
  - Comprehensive support provided for those that have experienced domestic abuse who wish to seek alternative accommodation or remain in their own homes.
  - Appropriate services are available to both those experiencing and those that are perpetrators of domestic abuse in order to reduce incidents
- 4. Understanding of the challenges in our town - improving data analysis and community engagement.**
- A clearer understanding of the needs of minority groups in the town, reasons for under reporting and the prevalence and impact of Forced Marriage and “so-called” Honour Based Violence.
  - Ensure comprehensive monitoring of domestic abuse in Reading and the impact of services.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

**Priority 1: Encouraging people to seek support earlier - Improving information, education and prevention**

**Target outcomes:**

- Reading residents are able to access the information they need to stay safe and protected.
- Comprehensive education is provided to young people in order to facilitate healthy, happy and safe relationships.

**The current situation**

- Information on domestic abuse is available to Reading residents from a range of sources with good access to support and advice.
- Schools are supported to enable pupils to have the opportunity to engage in age-appropriate PSHE education which encourages young people to have healthy and happy relationships, although this is not consistent across the borough.
- BWA provides an information and awareness programme within secondary schools on healthy and safe relationships.
- The Reading-based telephone service for those experiencing domestic abuse continues to provide advice to a significant volume of callers.

**Improving information...**

Reading Borough Council is committed to ensuring that those experiencing domestic abuse, as well as those who may need information on domestic abuse, are able to access up-to-date localised information quickly and readily. It is recognised that for those experiencing abuse, and the children in their household, accessing support at the earliest possible opportunity is critical to reducing the impact of domestic abuse and preventing escalation. In addition to BWA's website, many people will access the Reading Borough Council website. In order to streamline the information and ensure that it remains up to date, RBC will be reviewing the current information available online and work with partners to ensure that information remains consistent across agencies.

Feedback from service users of support services have shown that many of those experiencing domestic abuse are still unaware of where they can access help early enough, and only engage with services at the point of crisis intervention from either the Police or Children's Social Care - often after living with the abuse for a number of years. We will ensure that general awareness of domestic abuse and sources of support continues to be promoted in key locations such as

hospitals and GP surgeries. Locations with high levels of footfall, such as leisure facilities, and large employers in the town will also be targeted, and opportunities to work with influential organisations such as Reading Football Club will also be reviewed. In order to achieve this, we will continue to work in partnership to ensure that publicity and materials are made available wherever possible via a joint communications plan. Berkshire Health Care NHS Foundation Trust employs a designated Domestic Abuse Practitioner within their community services. This role works strategically across Berkshire and will support the delivery of the communications plan throughout health services.

We will also ensure that the communications plan includes targeted and tailored information and distribution towards disabled and vulnerable adults. This will have a focus on residents with a learning disability due to the disproportionate prevalence identified in national data which is not reflected in the use of local support services, suggesting a potential issue of under reporting. Tailored information will also be available for other minority groups within Reading and for young people. The Community Safety Partnership is also committed to continue its programme of short tailored briefings for staff working on the front line about specific information issues.

### **Education and prevention...**

A key element in tackling domestic abuse is working with children and young people in a school setting to provide information and education on how to have successful relationships and keep themselves safe.

Whilst information and support regarding domestic abuse is available to young people in the town, the Reading Youth Cabinet Domestic Abuse survey clearly shows that there is a need to improve upon the level of information, education and awareness around healthy

relationships. This is currently being delivered through non-statutory PSICHE lessons and BWA's universal education sessions. However, because this approach is not mandatory, too few schools are adopting it. Therefore, we plan to work in partnership across agencies to produce an offer for schools, which includes focused lesson plans and options for delivery, and encourage engagement from Head Teachers.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has also agreed to integrate domestic abuse awareness raising into the work plan of the Education Sub Group of the LSCB which hopes to ensure that more schools actively participate in wider

### **Reading Youth Cabinet Domestic Abuse Survey Results**

- 82% of young people who responded received no education in school on domestic abuse
- 43% knew where to seek advice on the issue
- 10% of young people would contact the police in instances of domestic abuse

### **Youth Cabinet recommendations:**

- Local support services should be advertised online
- Young people's lack of confidence in contacting the police should be investigated
- Education on the issue of domestic abuse should be improved across the board

social education. Where appropriate, this activity will be delivered in conjunction with the LSCB's Strategy to Safeguard Children and Young People at Risk of or Experiencing Sexual Exploitation in Reading 2014 - 2017<sup>[1]</sup>.

As part of the aim to improve education and information for young people, the Youth Offending Service and the specialist youth service will roll out a programme of consistent advice and support to young people.

Joint working and referrals between support agencies in the town, for example Trust House and Alana House, will enable the right specialist support to be provided where previous life events have increased the risk of an individual experiencing domestic abuse.

### Summary

- We will develop an information and awareness-raising communications plan.
- We will improve online localised information available to Reading residents (across agencies).
- We will seek to ensure the delivery of a consistent programme of education on healthy relationships working in partnership with schools.
- We will increase the information that youth services across are providing to young people regarding domestic abuse and healthy relationships.
- We will work in partnership with the Reading Youth Cabinet and LSCB to review and implement the recommendations of the Youth Cabinet Domestic Abuse Consultation.

### How Will We Measure Success?

- Young people report a higher awareness of where to seek support for domestic abuse
- Increased numbers of young people reporting receiving domestic abuse education
- Increase in promotional material in the community
- Increased usage of online information
- Increase in self-referrals to support services

**Priority 2: Providing the right response first time - Improving identification, encouraging disclosures and ensuring an appropriate immediate response.**

### Target outcomes

- Professionals across agencies are equipped to notice the signs of and encourage disclosures of domestic abuse
- Identification of domestic abuse and disclosures are responded to with appropriate referrals so that people experiencing domestic abuse gain the help and support they need.

### The current situation

- Thames Valley Police have been identified as providing a good response to domestic abuse by HMIC and are recognised as one of eight police forces in the country providing a good service for victims<sup>13</sup>.
- Building on the recommendations of the Domestic Homicide Review, the IRIS project works with GPs to encourage appropriate referrals from primary care.
- Statutory agencies work in partnership with BWA to deliver regular training for staff.
- A multi-agency practitioner forum has been relaunched and encourages practice learning and development.
- Reading MASH works effectively to identify children who may be at risk as a consequence of domestic abuse.

### Improving identification and disclosures of domestic abuse...

Within Reading a significant effort has gone into ensuring we identify incidents of domestic abuse, encourage disclosure and develop an effective immediate response. Level 1 domestic abuse training, commissioned by the Local Authority and run by BWA, is provided regularly throughout the year and is available to all professionals and voluntary sector organisations working in Reading. Those who require more detailed and specialist knowledge are invited to attend Level 2 training which is also delivered by BWA in partnership with other specialist officers. In addition to the Local Authority's training, partners such as Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust offer specialist training for frontline health professionals. Thames Valley Police also offer comprehensive staff training with HMIC noting that frontline staff are effectively trained in responding to domestic abuse and undertaking risk assessments.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/thames-valley-approach-to-tackling-domestic-abuse.pdf>

However, a number of the issues highlighted as concerns in the local Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) action plan were a result of a lack of understanding regarding domestic abuse and associated processes. Similarly, a Thames Valley DHR Learning Report has indicated that 54 out of 99 DHR actions across the region (55%) related to the need for improved understanding of processes, awareness raising and training. Additionally, feedback locally has indicated that understanding of referral pathways could be improved. This training is critical as on average those experiencing abuse assessed as high risk live with abuse for 2.6 years and medium risk for 3 years<sup>14</sup>. During this period the risk is often escalating the impact on any children in the household is increasing, so it is important that professionals offer the right support and interventions early enough. The same study by SafeLives has also shown that 85% of individuals sought support from professionals five times in the year before they received effective support, so training across all frontline professionals is required to ensure that people get the support they need first time.

The training sub-group of Reading's Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (DASG) will review the content of the training offered to ensure it is meeting the requirements of those working in Reading, and to increase the publicity and therefore take-up of the training available.

In recognition that many professionals, for example within health services, work across the West of Berkshire, Reading Borough Council is committed to working with other Local Authorities in the area to align the training packages delivered and maintain a consistency of message. The priority for all is to ensure all staff are able to provide the right environment to encourage individuals to disclose any incident of domestic abuse, and feel confident as to who to and how referral for additional support should be made.

### **Ensuring an appropriate and immediate response...**

The training package agreed by the training sub-group will outline the referral pathways to ensure individuals can access the right level of support. This training will also be cross referenced with the Adult and Children Safeguarding training in the town to ensure a consistent message. It is essential that cases of domestic abuse assessed as high risk are referred into the MARAC process to enable appropriate and effective safety planning. We have identified specific MARAC training as being necessary to ensure that all agencies are referring in to the multi-agency meeting and that appropriate actions are agreed and completed by representatives in attendance. This training will again be standardised across Berkshire and will be supported by a Berkshire-wide MARAC Standard Operating Procedure, which provides a written reference guide for new and existing Designated MARAC Officers (DMOs). This is being produced by a cross Berkshire working group led by Bracknell Forest Borough Council.

The importance of specific training being available to GPs has been recognised nationally, and is also a local priority. The IRIS (Identification and Referral to

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<sup>14</sup> SafeLives (2015), Getting it right first time: policy report. Bristol: SafeLives.

Improve Safety) project is a General Practice-based domestic violence and abuse (DVA) training, support and referral programme which works with practices to train GPs to ensure effective referrals to specialist support. The programme has been running for 18 months and at the end of March 2015, nine GP surgeries in Reading had been trained via the IRIS programme leading to 42 referrals to BWA directly from GPs.

In addition, Reading has re-launched a Domestic Abuse Forum. This is an opportunity for front line practitioners working in Reading to come together for training and to share good practice and concerns.

Domestic abuse has serious and far reaching impacts on **children and young people** in the household and it is essential that we work to identify children and young people who may be witnessing domestic abuse. A quarter of all children affected by domestic abuse are under three years old, a critical period for early development, and 62% of children in a household where there is domestic abuse are also directly harmed.<sup>15</sup>

Exposure to domestic abuse has significant long term negative impacts on a young person with SafeLives reporting that the negative impacts identified are:

- Emotional wellbeing - 89%
- Feelings of Blame - 60%
- Behaviour - 52%
- Social Development - 52%
- School Adjustment - 39%
- Risk taking Behaviour - 29%
- Physical Health - 22%

There are opportunities for a wide range of front line staff engaging with young people to create a safe environment for them to disclose any concerns or fears.

As part of the implementation of Reading's Early Help Strategy 2013-16, a single Pathway for Early Help Service support will be created - therefore ensuring there is a single referral and allocation of resources process. It is expected that the benefits will include:

#### **MASH**

Reading's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub facilitates information sharing across all agencies involved in safeguarding. The MASH collects and analyses information that is already known within separate organisations in a coherent format to inform all safeguarding decisions about children and young people under the age of 18 years.

All partners work together to provide the highest level of knowledge and analysis to ensure that safeguarding activity is timely, proportionate and necessary. A domestic violence risk assessor from Thames Valley Police is part of the MASH team providing an expert lead on domestic abuse. In addition the hub meets regularly with BWA.

Following the successful initial implementation of MASH at Reading, the hub will shortly enter a second phase which will mean the hub has a permanent police presence to assist in safeguarding.

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<sup>15</sup> ibid



- Increased partnership/multi agency working and access to a wider range of services.
- That the journey for the family is clear for families and agencies.
- Processes are more outcome focussed
- Troubled Families, as per the definition in the nation programme, are identified more easily.

This will mean an improved 'early help' response to families affected by domestic abuse and the outcome of the interventions with these families will continue to be monitored closely. Due to the high levels of Children's Social Care cases where domestic abuse is a factor, the development of links between the single Early Help pathway and support services for those experiencing domestic abuse are critical and will be a priority within the implementation plan.

In addition, professionals who work with children and young people should be able to identify and appropriately respond to a disclosure. Training for staff across all sectors, including staff working in schools, such as school nurses, should ensure they are aware of indicators which may suggest domestic abuse is occurring and know what action they should take.

In Reading if there are any concerns in relation to children and young people and safeguarding, referrals should be made into the MASH. The hub is able to take referrals from all professionals as well as concerned members of the public. Processes are already established to ensure that Thames Valley Police notify Children's Social Care of every incident where a child is known to live in the household and or been present at the incident of domestic abuse that they attend. These incident reports are screened, risk assessed and sent on to other relevant agencies and many are then the subject of a social work assessment. This process will be further strengthened as the MASH develops via phase two of the implementation programme.

Referrals concerning the involvement of children and young people in forced marriage (FM) or female genital mutilation (FGM) are followed up by Children's Social Care under child protection procedures.

All agencies should make appropriate referrals whenever they have concerns in relation to children witnessing domestic abuse and it is important to continue to ensure an increased awareness amongst all professionals in how to make use of MASH in handling safeguarding concerns.

## Summary

- The recently established training sub-group will be responsible for monitoring the content, publicity and take-up of all domestic abuse training in the borough. This will include Domestic Abuse Level 1 and 2 training, MARAC training, the Domestic Abuse Forum and targeted briefings.
- We will review the current training offer available to ensure that content, frequency and availability meets the identified need and content aligns across the West of Berkshire.



- We will review the training provided across agencies to ensure that all agencies are aware of the key actions that will encourage disclosures.
- We will establish and publish clear referral pathways for agencies when they receive a disclosure of domestic abuse.
- We will ensure that domestic abuse process are integral to the second phase of MASH implementation resulting in a Thames Valley Police and Reading Borough Council co-located MASH, and the proposed Early Help single pathway.

#### **How Will We Measure Success?**

- Increased number of agencies attending approved training
- Increased referrals from partner agencies into MARAC
- Increased number of agencies referring into MARAC
- Published referral pathways
- Increase in referrals to BWA

**Priority 3: Having the right services available** - Improving support to move from victim to survivor or to change offending behaviour

**Target outcomes**

- Improved outcomes for those accessing the criminal justice system, including the support provided to victims during the court process.
- Improved coordination of high-risk cases and cases with multiple incidents.
- Comprehensive support provided for those that have experienced domestic abuse who wish to seek alternative accommodation or remain in their own homes.
- Appropriate services are available to both those experiencing and those that are perpetrators of domestic abuse in order to reduce incidents

**Current situation**

- Reading has an established and improving MARAC which reviews high risk domestic abuse cases, and a MARAC Steering Group overseeing performance improvement.
- A range of high quality and comprehensive support is provided to those experiencing domestic abuse including specialist support services such as the Family Choices programme and the Crossing Bridges support centre. Reading also provides 25 spaces of refuge provision within the town, the second highest in the Thames Valley.
- BWA and RBC's Housing advice team have taken action to ensure they work closely in order to support those that have experienced domestic abuse to live in a safe and secure environment and access the support they need as early as possible.
- Reading's Sanctuary Scheme helps those who wish to remain safe in their own homes.
- People acting as a witness are guided through the court process with specialist support from BWA.

**Reading Sanctuary Scheme:**

Reading Sanctuary Scheme was developed in partnership with the Council's Housing Team, Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue and Berkshire Women's Aid.

The scheme is one option available to those experiencing domestic abuse or the threat of domestic abuse, as an alternative to temporary accommodation or having to move house altogether.

## Support to move from victim to survivor...

Supporting those who have experienced domestic abuse to move from victim to survivor is crucial in delivering a holistic response, ensuring that those experiencing abuse do not have repeat experiences and can go on to live safely and securely. The support available and how this support is accessed needs to be clear to all agencies to ensure that no opportunity is missed to help someone take steps to keep themselves and their household safe. This includes support for those remaining in their own homes, those seeking alternative accommodation and those who may also be involved in a case in the courts.

### ...through the criminal justice system

Domestic abuse cases assessed as high risk reported to Thames Valley Police are investigated by the specialist Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU). With the support of BWA the DAIU are also responsible for safety planning for the individuals reporting the incident, and also the safety planning for medium risk cases. The responsibility for investigating medium and standard risk cases, and safety planning when a case is assessed to be standard risk remains with the neighbourhood team. Often, investigating officers will refer individuals to BWA for additional support. Everyone who reports a crime to Thames Valley Police will also be referred to Victim Support, and if a referral is required for specialist domestic abuse support, cases are further referred to BWA. All domestic abuse incidents attended by Thames Valley Police where there is a child in the household automatically trigger a referral to the MASH.

The police record an outcome when an offence that has been resolved where a suspect has; been charged, cautioned, issued a fixed penalty notice or CPS have decided it is not in the public interest to prosecute the suspect. In relation to domestic abuse the outcome rates for Reading cases for the last three years have been 31.5%, 35.8% and 29.4% respectively. The Thames Valley wide figures for the same period are 38.1%, 39.2% and 38.7%. Therefore it is a priority of this strategy for Thames Valley Police to understand the reasons for the lower percentage of outcomes being achieved and taking action that results in an increase in outcome rates. This will be further affected by the change in law that has created a new criminal offence of Coercive Control.

HMIC's assessment of the Thames Valley's response to domestic abuse notes that there is scope to improve outcomes at court for victims of domestic abuse. The report by HMIC identifies rates of attrition (the number of cases initially reported to police that do not proceed, perhaps because the victim decides not to take the case any further; the police or CPS decide that there is not enough evidence to proceed; or the case is taken to court and the suspect is acquitted) as an area for improvement across the Thames Valley, being one of the highest rates in the Country.

The delivery of consistently high quality files is recognised as a mechanism to address this and a tutor-led training package is in place for police officers in order to help them to deliver files of a good quality.

Another concern is the length of time that it takes for cases to be heard in court and the impact the delay has on victims and witnesses (contributing to the attrition rate) and leading to only 36.2% of trials being classed as effective.

A new 'Fast-Track' court system was piloted in selected areas within the Thames Valley during 2014 and the new approach had a significant impact on the number of successful outcomes at court. The overall conviction rate for domestic abuse cases following the trial was 78 per cent, with 46 per cent of those coming from a guilty plea at the first hearing - historically guilty plea rates at first hearing have been as low as 15 per cent. As a result of this successful pilot Fast Track Courts have been rolled out in Berkshire from December 2014. It is now a priority that the support pathways available to victims are adapted to fully support the new process and maximise the positive outcomes for victims. Court data regarding the outcome of cases under the new fast track system will be closely monitored so that we can review the impact on those experiencing domestic abuse.

Improving the speed with which cases are heard in court and the quality of the files presented will improve the number of successful cases as this will help prevent cases becoming 'cracked' as a result of the victim or witness withdrawing. However, this can also be improved by the right support being provided to victims consistently before and during the court process. Working with both Victim Support and BWA, it is a priority to map the pathway of support available to victims attending court to ensure access to support is as streamlined as possible preventing any victim from attending court without support unless they choose to do so. This process will be further supported by the IDVA training being provided to two Reading based BWA outreach workers.

### ...in high-risk cases

The report produced by HMIC on Thames Valley Police's response to domestic abuse acknowledges that while MARAC is an effective and valuable tool in responding to high risk cases, there is a need for TVP and partner agencies to work to establish a consistent approach to assessment and referral of cases to the relevant MARAC. While agencies individually work hard to protect those experiencing abuse assessed as high risk, there is scope to ensure partners work more closely in order to deliver a coordinated and joined up approach ensuring the best support is achieved for those experiencing abuse. As stated previously, Reading MARAC has made significant progress in increasing the number of referrals from partner agencies, not just the police. This indicates that more cases are being referred before the situation has escalated to the point of requiring police involvement. However the referrals are still not consistent across agencies and further increasing the overall number of multi-agency referrals remains a priority. This will be achieved through targeted awareness raising as well as the introduction of a regular MARAC training programme and designated MARAC officer operating procedure.

A regular audit programme of the MARAC across the West of Berkshire has been agreed and a MARAC improvement plan, supported by SafeLives, is being implemented. Specific focus will be on ensuring emotional risks to individuals as well as physical risks are reflected in the safety planning completed at MARAC,

and that the outcomes of the MARAC decisions are monitored effectively. The recent Local Safeguarding Children's Board's audit of the "Impact of the MARAC process upon children in Reading" observed that children were adequately considered as part of the MARAC process, that there was regular attendance at the MARAC of agencies there solely for the purpose of championing the needs of the child and that all actions relating the child/children were completed in a timely fashion. However it identified a need to cross check that actions were in line with child protection procedures and that the discussions relating to children should be covered in more detail within the minutes. These actions are picked up either in the action plan of this document or the MARAC improvement plan.

### **...in high volume cases**

As stated previously, the MARAC only considers cases where the case is classed as high risk. However a multi-agency approach is also beneficial when reviewing standard or medium risk cases where there is a high volume of calls to the police. These cases are often multi-layered and complex, requiring a high level of resource from a number of agencies. In the West of Berkshire, Thames Valley Police are rolling out the Domestic Abuse Repeat Incident Meeting (DARIM) to discuss these cases and established this approach in Reading in early 2015. The objective is to coordinate the input of the many agencies often involved in order to reduce the number of repeat incidents of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is also now one of the 6 qualifying criteria's for the Troubled Families programme, with a target of reducing the risk to households identified as being affected by abuse. The success of this programme should have a significant impact on a number of households experiencing abuse in the town.

### **...through access to alternative accommodation**

Violent relationship breakdown as a reason for homelessness applications remains the third most common and has shown a significant increase in the last 4 years. This increase could be as a result of increased reports of domestic abuse (as highlighted above) or reduced availability of affordable housing in Reading, most acutely felt in the private rented sector, or a combination of these factors.

Commissioned by the Local Authority, BWA provides access to refuges, either in one of the 25 refuge spaces within Reading or elsewhere in the country. Many of the referrals to BWA for refuge provision are made by the Reading Borough Council's Housing Advice Team.

Many residents approaching the Housing Service do not require, or cannot access, a refuge space and are seeking support to access long-term accommodation. These residents are either helped to access the private rented sector, often via our Deposit Guarantee Scheme, or to make a homeless application which would mean that they are placed in temporary accommodation by the Housing Service whilst they await a more permanent solution.

The Council is considering a range of options to increase supply of and access to affordable housing including for those seeking alternative accommodation after

experiencing domestic abuse. This includes launching a programme of new build council homes; increasing incentives to landlords in the private rented sector to make accommodation available through the Council's 'Deposit and Rent Guarantee Scheme' and refurbishing and bringing back into use two blocks of temporary accommodation.

Protocols between BWA and Reading's Housing Advice Team ensure that outreach support is provided to everyone that approaches the Council for housing and is placed in temporary accommodation including Bed and Breakfast. This outreach support is also available to residents that choose to remain in their own home and all agencies are able to refer in to the service outside of the housing service. Those that access support at the point of resettlement are also able to access other services delivered by BWA.

### **...with outreach support**

As well as being referred by agencies, those that have experienced domestic abuse are also able to approach the domestic abuse one-stop-shop, Crossing Bridges, directly. This may lead to a referral to the Choices programme which works with people to explore the dynamics both of healthy and abusive relationships, the impact of abuse on children, different characteristics of perpetrators and early warning signs. Alternatively they may receive 1:1 support at the same time as agreeing a safety plan for the future. This support is available for everyone experiencing domestic abuse whether it is a partner or family member.

Others may engage with other support services in the area including Alana House (a women's community project that supports vulnerable and disadvantaged women with complex needs) and Trust House (a rape and sexual violence support centre). Effective multi-agency working between support services with different specialisms, but at times the same clients, means that residents receive the most appropriate tailored support for their needs.

A key objective for the strategy is to ensure that all of these support pathways to both refuges and outreach support are clearly mapped and promoted to all agencies to increase the consistency and breadth of the referrals in to BWA and other agencies where appropriate. Also, as part of our commissioning cycle, we will review this provision to ensure the right resources are in place and that we continue to provide a service that meets the needs of Reading residents (and provide refuge provision as part of a national network).

### **...in cases of mental health concerns and substance misuse**

The issues of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse are often interlinked and the combination of factors has a significant impact on a person's resilience and safety.

The 2015 SafeLives report, "Getting it Right First Time" states that:

- **Drug and alcohol abuse:** People experiencing abuse have a higher rate of drug and/or alcohol misuse (whether it starts before or after the abuse): at least 20% cases assessed as high-risk report using drugs and/or alcohol
- **Mental health issues:** 40% of individuals assessed as at high-risk of abuse report mental health difficulties<sup>16</sup>

These multiple risks create a complex set of needs which need to be looked at as a whole. With services for these needs split across different agencies, it is essential that they work together to continue to improve coordination and communication when supporting those experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse.

A working group including BWA, the Community Mental Health Team and IRiS (the adult alcohol & drug treatment and recovery service for Reading) has been formed and reports in to the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group. This working group will ensure the introduction of practices that increase appropriate information sharing between agencies and ensure that, where possible, joint working and shared outcomes are agreed so that those requiring support receive a more holistic response. This work will further supported by specialist complex case workers based at BWA as part of an 18 month pilot funded by the PCC.

### **Support for the whole household...**

In order to support those experiencing domestic abuse, perpetrators of the abuse and children and young people affected by domestic abuse, the Council commissions the Family Choices Programme from BWA. The service provides therapeutic programmes for children and young people, those experiencing abuse and perpetrators. The programme recognises the importance of engaging perpetrators, although sometimes this is not appropriate. When engaging with perpetrators, the service aims to increase their understanding of the impact domestic abuse can have on children and encourage alternative ways to deal with conflict and anger. The programme also works in partnership with other services to identify and manage, with the perpetrator, any factors such as substance misuse which may have contributed to the incident(s).

The service has contributed to reductions in the overall re-referrals to Children's Social Care, and reductions in the total number of domestic abuse related contacts made with Children's Social Care. Qualitative feedback from attendees demonstrates an improvement in their behaviour; improved comprehension of what constitutes domestic abuse; take-up of strategies designed to reduce future incidents, and an improved understanding of the impact it has on children. We will continue to encourage referrals to the BWA Family Choices Programme in order to support children and young people in dealing with the impact of domestic abuse.

Young people are also referred to BWA for support from schools and other agencies outside of the Family Choices Programme. In 2014/15 174 children or

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<sup>16</sup> SafeLives (2015), Getting it right first time: policy report. Bristol: SafeLives.



young people received support from BWA, and coordination with Children's Services regarding referrals to this programme will continue in order to make best use of the resource.

The Choices programme, a group intervention for those experiencing domestic abuse, is also available to people outside the Family Choices programme. This is also available to those that have experienced domestic abuse in the past, regardless of how long ago.

As stated above Reading Borough Council currently supports a perpetrator programme delivered by BWA as part of the Family Choices programme which is specifically aimed at families also engaged with Children's Social Care. Perpetrators not engaged with CSC can also access the same group programme and 1:1 support, although funded separately, but there is limited take up. This voluntary perpetrator programme runs alongside a programme delivered by the National Probation Service, and the Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company for those that are expected to attend as part of their probation order. Both of these formal programmes are only available to male perpetrators with female perpetrators being supported by BWA or Probation on a 1:1 basis. The newly formed Perpetrators Working Group, which reports in to the DASG, will be reviewing the current provision for perpetrators in Reading to ensure it meets needs in the future. This group will also be reviewing the support for perpetrators to change their behaviour whilst in prison. A close working relationship with MAPPA regarding high risk perpetrators will continue.

## Summary

- We will clarify and publish clear support pathways for people experiencing domestic abuse
- Improved file preparation by Thames Valley Police to increase the speed and effectiveness of cases heard in court.
- We will ensure the support for victims through the court system works effectively with the new fast track court system to be rolled out across the Thames Valley Region.
- We will seek to improve the response to high volume repeat low/medium risk incidents via the DARIM
- We will develop and deliver a coordinated programme of MARAC training
- We will roll out the Berkshire Standard Operating Procedure note for Designated MARAC Officers
- Following on from the recent MARAC audit commissioned by the LSCB, we will ensure that regular audits of the MARAC process from the perspective of both the victim and the child inform a rolling MARAC improvement plan.
- We will monitor the implementation of the MARAC improvement plan.
- We will improve the coordination of services when sharing information regarding risk for individuals experiencing domestic abuse, with a focus on the links to mental health and substance misuse.
- We will review the support available to perpetrators to prevent future abusive behaviour.



- We will review and recommission support services for both those experiencing and perpetrating domestic abuse. Currently, much of the support available is commissioned by the Local Authority and is delivered by BWA. Specifically the Family Choices Programme, refuge provision and outreach support. As part of the commissioning cycle for the Local Authority new contract arrangements for these services will need to be in place by April 2017. This commissioning exercise will be informed by this strategy and further analysis indicated within the strategy.

#### How will we measure success?

- Decrease in the percentage of repeat crimes against the same individual
- Decrease in 'cracked' domestic abuse cases at court
- Increase in successful outcomes at court
- Published referral support pathways for:
  - Those experiencing abuse that wish to remain in their own home
  - Those experiencing abuse that require alternative accommodation
  - Those experiencing abuse pursuing a case in the court system
- Reduction in high volume repeat incidents involving standard or medium risk cases.
- Reduction in repeat incidents

**Priority 4: Understanding of the challenges in our town - improving data analysis and community engagement.**

### **Target Outcomes**

- Achieve an understanding of minority groups in the town, and prevalence and impact of Forced Marriage and 'so-called' Honour Based Violence.
- Ensure comprehensive monitoring of domestic abuse in Reading and the impact of services.

### **Current situation**

- Reading is one of the most diverse towns in the South East, with this diversity comes an awareness of particular domestic abuse challenges.
- Reading's MARAC provides information regarding high risk domestic abuse incidents in Reading.
- Reading exhibits good examples of agencies working together to share information and understand risk.
- Through specialist outreach workers, and services commissioned by RBC and delivered by BWA, a detailed knowledge of the specific challenges which Asian women face has been established.

### **Challenges of our town...**

Reading is a diverse community and the most recent census data reflects this. Our BME residents represent 33% of the total population - the largest BME population community in the South East after Slough and Oxford. We also know that 13% of Reading's population reported in the 2011 census to be living with a long term life-limiting illness or disability. While we have no definitive estimate for the size of the LGBT community in Reading, the Government's Women & Equalities Unit suggests that the community would be around 5-7% of Reading's Population which equates to around 9,000 people.

### **Improved understanding...**

In order to deliver the best possible response to the challenge of domestic abuse in Reading, we recognise that we need to know as much as possible about what domestic abuse looks like in the context of our diverse local community.

The MARAC data presented at the beginning of this strategy highlights under-reporting and/or under-recording for both LGBT residents and residents with a disability. Whilst referral rates have improved slightly, we will develop a better understanding of the needs of these groups, the challenges they face and how

they can be supported in order to help ensure appropriate and timely referrals are made to MARAC and support agencies. A particular focus will be on the needs of adults with a learning disability as national research suggests this is a high risk group that is under represented in the use of local support services and cases reported.

We will also have a focus on improving the data available regarding the prevalence of forced marriage and honour based violence in the town in order to better focus resources and enable a tailored response.

Similarly, building on the consultation completed when drafting the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading, capturing the views of those who have experience of the various elements of Reading's support pathways will allow a detailed understanding of how services work for those experiencing abuse, where processes can be improved and, how best to implement changes which reflect the needs and concerns of individuals.

Equally we recognise that there are some aspects of domestic abuse, such as stalking by a current or previous partner, where the current level of information is not as detailed as we would expect. We will work in partnership to improve our understanding of the prevalence and support available for people experiencing all types of domestic abuse.

There are already a number of sources of data and information which help us to understand our local context. The MARAC provides a valuable source of information and our partnership with SafeLives also provides us with information to use. In addition, we receive regular detailed data from our partnerships within the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group.

However, there has not previously been a coordinated central collection of data relating to domestic abuse in the town. This has limited the analysis completed in terms of trends, pressures, activity relating to this agenda. In order for the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group to affectively monitor the activity, and impact of services and interventions, an Activity and Performance Dashboard has been developed. This dashboard will capture agreed data from across the strategic partnership and will be reported to the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group every quarter.

With this information, and a better understanding of risk within Reading's communities, we can continuously monitor and adapt our

#### DATA FOCUS

The Activity and Performance Dashboard will include, but is not limited to, the following information:

- MARAC & DARIM activity data
- Reports of abuse to the police
- Police outcome rates
- Numbers of trials and % of effective cases at court
- Activity and impact of support services
- Children Services activity data
- Housing Services activity data
- Information from across the health services
- Training activity data
- Data relating to targets in the strategy action plan

approach to raising awareness, training, interventions and support in order to reduce abuse in the town and ensure more households lead safe and secure lives.

### Summary

- We will work with partner agencies to pool information on Forced Marriage and 'so called' Honour Based Violence to enable a targeted approach to training and awareness raising.
- We will work with partners and communities to identify how minority groups use their services and how referral rates for underreporting groups can be increased.
- We will Increase our understanding of the prevalence and impact of stalking by current or ex partners.
- We will Increase the information recorded in order to effectively monitor domestic abuse and our response.
- We will develop clear mechanisms to record the views of those who have experienced the various elements of Reading's support pathways and journey from victim to survivor.

### How Will We Measure Success?

- Improved and comprehensive dashboard monitoring of domestic abuse with partner agencies providing regular information.
- Increase in consultation with residents with identified influence on services

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE**

*Having clearly outlined our strategic priorities and target outcomes, the delivery of the strategy will be achieved through the associated action plan. When implemented effectively, the Community Safety Partnership's Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading will ensure those who experience domestic abuse can access the support they need for a safer life and more secure future.*

As well as touching many lives throughout the town, the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading will also complement other key strategies aiming to improve day-to-day life for residents. These include:

### **Sustainable Communities Strategy for Reading**

The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading directly aligns with the Reading 2030 vision of ensuring residents feel comfortable, safe, secure, and well-housed. The service empowers those experiencing abuse to find safety and security from perpetrators, thereby increasing the amount of choice and control they have over their lives.

### **Community Safety Partnership**

Domestic abuse remains a top priority for Reading's Community Safety Partnership which places a focus on high risk groups in its most recent strategic plan. The Domestic Abuse Strategy Group is one of five partnership delivery groups which report into the CSP.

### **Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan**

The service priorities of Reading Borough Council's 2015-18 Corporate Plan outline the Authority's commitment to "Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable". This priority directly aligns with the goals of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading.

### **Local Safeguarding Children's Board Action Plan**

Domestic abuse remains a key focus for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Action Plan.

### **Early Help Strategy**

The Early Help strategy 2013-16 outlines Reading Borough Council's aim to strengthen joint working and consistency across partners providing Early Help services to ensure that we work together to identify needs and provide support to children, young people and their families at the earliest possible stage, improving outcomes and reducing costs. Supporting families who are experiencing domestic abuse with an objective of reducing repeat incidents is a key part of this strategy.

## **A Strategy to Safeguard Children and Young People at Risk of or Experiencing Sexual Exploitation in Reading 2014 - 2017**

The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading has key objectives in common with the above strategy, in particular a shared aim to work with schools and other youth organisations to educate young people about healthy relationships.

### **West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board**

The West of Berkshire Adult Safeguarding Board is in the process of developing their Strategy for Safeguarding Adults in the West of Berkshire 2015-2018. The draft commitment of the Board is to work together to ensure that adults who may be at risk are:

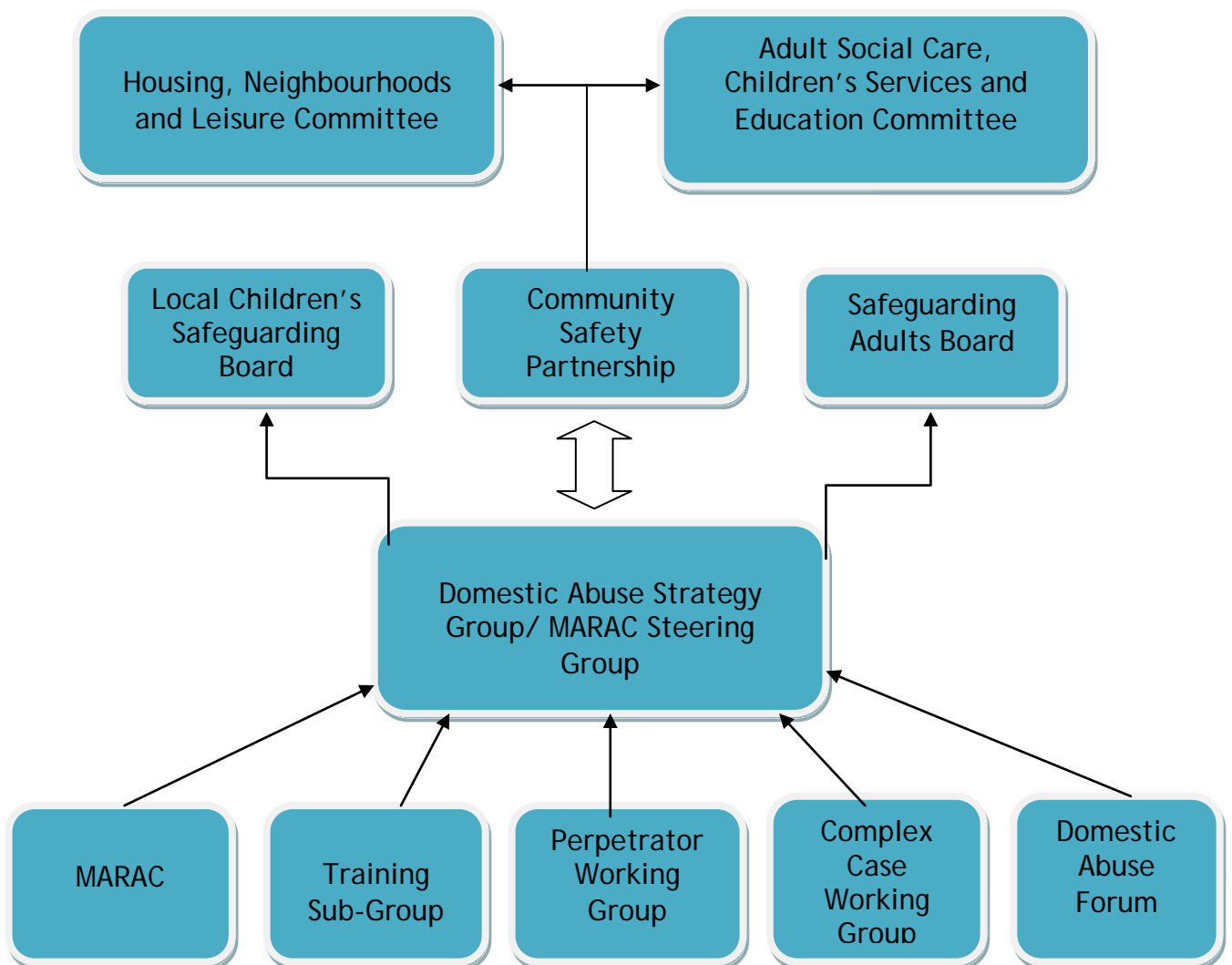
- Able to live independently by being supported to manage risk;
- Able to protect themselves from abuse and neglect;
- Treated with dignity and respect;
- Properly supported by agencies when they need protection.

Actions to help vulnerable adults live free of domestic abuse as outlined in this strategy supports the delivery of this commitment.

## Accountability

The structure chart below illustrates the governance of the strategic approach to domestic abuse in Reading.

The action plan which accompanies this strategy will be implemented by the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group. The Strategy's progress will be regularly reported to the CSP. Strategy progress will also be regularly reported to two public committees: Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee and Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee.



### Domestic Abuse Strategy 2015-18: Action Plan

This action plan will be refreshed at the end of year 1 and 2 of the 3 years strategy. It this time measures and targets will be reviewed to reflect the previous year's activity.

#### Priority 1: Encouraging people to seek support earlier - Improving information, education and prevention

Outcome	Action	Lead	Measure	Target	Comments
Ensuring Reading residents are able to access the information they need to stay safe and protected.	Clear, comprehensive and up to date information provided online for Reading residents.	DA Strategy Lead	Information on RBC statutory partner's websites reviewed and updated.	Updated by September 2015	
			Length of time people tolerated abuse before seeking support (monitor at point of assessment at BWA).	Need to obtain baseline - reported every quarter for cases opened in that period	
	Information on RBC and partner agencies websites reviewed annually to ensure information is comprehensive and up to date.	DA Strategy Lead	Number of times info in RBC partner agencies websites are reviewed	1 per year - Every September	
	Domestic Abuse Forum hosted regularly	Training Sub-Group	Number of Forums held  Number of attendees	4 per year  No target - activity data for year 1.	



	Develop an information and awareness raising campaign to be used in areas of footfall and usage. This includes encouraging large employers, shopping centres and leisure facilities within the town	DA Strategy Lead	Details of campaign agreed	January 2016	
			Self-referrals in to support agencies.	Increase in self-referrals to support services report every quarter for cases opened in that period	
			Length of time people tolerated abuse before seeking support (monitor at point of assessment at BWA).	Need to obtain baseline - reported every quarter for cases opened in that period	
	Tailored programme of awareness raising and target information to be produced to ensure disabled and vulnerable adults have an increased understanding of Domestic abuse and are aware of where and how to seek support.	DA Strategy Lead/ Safeguarding team	MARAC referrals for people with a disability	Regular increase of MARAC cases involving an adult with a disability - reported once a quarter for rolling year.  17% of all cases is SafeLives	

				Recommendation	
			Number of disabled or vulnerable adults accessing specialist support services (BWA)	Increase in number of disabled or vulnerable adults accessing specialist support services - number reported once a quarter for cases opened in that period.	
	Tailored programme of awareness raising and target information to be produced to ensure LGBT individuals have an increased understanding of Domestic abuse and are aware of where and how to seek support.	DA Strategy Lead	MARAC referrals regarding an LGBT individual	Increase of MARAC cases involving an LGBT individual  5% of all cases is Safelives Recommendation	
	Reviewing written information available to young people regarding	BWA	Review complete	Leaflets available for all age groups by October 2015	

	domestic abuse - including those of a primary school age.				
	Referral and joint working protocol agreed between BWA, Trust House and Alana House to ensure appropriate support available for those at high risk of domestic abuse or is still impacted by historical of domestic abuse.	DA strategic lead and support agencies	Clear referral and joint working processes agreed	April 2016	
Providing comprehensive education to young people in order to facilitate healthy, happy and safe relationships.	Work with the LSCB to finalise the PSCHÉ 'offer' to schools, Youth services and the voluntary sector to be delivered to young people regarding domestic abuse. This is to be combined with preventative information about CSE and Sexual Violence.	Tracey Daniel DA strategic lead	Package developed and formally agreed.	September 2015	December 2014- LSCB agreed to include DA in schools subgroup which will lead on developing the 'offer' and encouraging school engagement.
	Deliver the expanded Healthy Relationship education package in schools	Tracey Daniel/ LSCB sub group	% of secondary schools engaging with programme at the end of year 1.	50% at end of year 1 70% end of year 2 100% at end of year 3	

			% of YP reporting receiving DA education at repeat of Youth Cabinet Survey (after 2/3 year period)	Increase of 25%	
			% of YP with an understand of where to seek support at repeat of Youth Cabinet Survey (after 2/3 year period)	Increase of 25%	
			Number of young people referred to BWA	10% increase by April 2016	
			Number of YP self-referring in to BWA	Need to obtain baseline in year 1	

	Deliver the improved and expanded domestic abuse education package within the Youth Service	Tina Heaford	Number of sessions delivered in Youth Centres each year	Target to be agreed once package finalised.	Reliant on the Youth Cabinet being able to repeat survey.
			% of YP with an understand of where to seek support at repeat of Youth Cabinet Survey (after 2/3 year period)	Increase of 25%	
			Number of young people referred to BWA	10% increase by April 2016	
			Number of YP self-referring in to BWA	Need to obtain baseline in year 1	
	Package offered to voluntary sector	DA strategic lead	Number of groups engaging with	Activity data	

	organisations who work with YP		agenda		
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Priority 2: Providing the right response first time - Improving identification, encouraging disclosures and ensuring an appropriate immediate response.

Outcome	Action	Lead	Measure	Target	Comments
Professionals across agencies are equipped to notice the signs of and encourage disclosures of domestic abuse.	Improved engagement with A&E to improved data collection and referrals.	Public Health DA lead	BWA referrals from A&E  A&E data reported to DASG	10% increase by April 2016  By April 2016	
	Content of level 1 and level 2 DA training to be reviewed to ensure it meets the local requirements, whilst also meeting the key outcomes agreed across the west of Berkshire	Training Sub-group	New training packaged agreed	July 2015	
	Develop and publicise a detail training programme with committed dates for both Level 1 and Level 2 training. RBC staff in front line roles to all attend a session as part of their induction. Refreshed every	Training Subgroup	Number of level 1 training sessions delivered	6 per year	

	3 years.  Will included DASH training and MARAC overview		Number of level 2 training sessions delivered	2 per year	
			Number of delegates trained on level 1	60 per year	
			Number of delegates trained on Level 2	20 per year	
	Complete options appraisal regarding the use of an e learning tool for refresher level 1 training.	Training Sub-group	Decision made regarding use of e-learning tool	March 2016	
Identification of domestic abuse and disclosures are responded to with appropriate referrals so that people experiencing domestic abuse gain the help and support they need.	Develop and publicise a clear programme of bespoke MARAC training using the package agreed across Berkshire - will be aimed at Designated MARAC officers.	Training sub-group	% of DMOs to be trained	100% by March 2016	
	Increased referrals to MARAC	Training Sub-group	Number of cases referred	Current referral rate is at 60% of Safelives	Safelives have changed target to be 80% of

				<p>expected figure.</p> <p>Target of:</p> <p>65% by April 2016</p> <p>70% by April 2017</p> <p>80% by April 2018</p>	<p>expected levels of high risk victims referred to MARAC as 100% is unrealistic.</p>
	<p>Continue to implement IRIS project and support GPs to make appropriate referrals in respect to DA.</p>	<p>Public Health DA Lead</p>	<p>Number of GPs surgeries engaging in programme</p>	<p>12 in year 1</p>	
			<p>Number of GP referrals to support services</p>	<p>Will collect activity data</p>	
	<p>Ensure that DA services and processes form an integral part in the development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.</p>	<p>Service Manager - Access</p>	<p>% of cases with a DA element at MASH referred to Support Agencies at screening or after confidential MASH info sharing</p>	<p>Will collect activity data in year 1</p>	<p>Will also monitor % off number of MASH cases with DA element</p> <p>Activity data should show if the processes</p>



			% of cases with a DA element at MASH referred to A & A	Will collect activity data in year 1	are embedded correctly.
			% of cases with a DA element that received a service for CSC	Will collect activity data in year 1	
	Ensure that DA processes are captured in the roll out of the Single Pathway for Early Help	DA Strategy Lead/ Programme Manager	Number of CAT team cases with a DA element	Activity data	Monitoring the numbers will show the impact of the Single Pathway on DA cases.
	Publish and publicise the expected referral pathway for support, including in to Housing and Social Care Services, so that it is clear for all agencies or individuals that may receive a disclosure of DA.	DA Strategy Lead	Referral pathways mapped and Published	September 2015	
	Amend Safeguarding training across all agencies	Safeguarding Manager/ Training	Percentage of cases referred to MARAC	Safelives target: 17 %	

	to ensure that there is a consistent message about the referrals required if a vulnerable adult is experiencing DA.	team	where individual has a disability		
	Complete regular audits of DA related Safeguarding cases to ensure appropriate recording and referrals	Safeguarding Team	Percentage of closed cases per month with appropriate referrals	80%	
	Review recording to develop a clear understanding as to the number of MARAC referrals involving an LGBT individual.	MARAC chairs	Regular Audit show cases recorded accurately	2 Audits per year	

*Priority 3: Having the right services available - Improving support to move from victim to survivor or to change offending behaviour.*

Outcome	Action	Lead	Measure	Target	Comments
Improved outcomes for those accessing the criminal justice system, including the support provided to victims during the court process.	Implement robust referral processes so that appropriate support is available for all victims attending court if requested.	BWA	% of individuals going through court process offered support by BWA	100%	Speak to witness care unit/ TVP to check relevant data available to measure this action
	Improved outcome rates for cases reported to Thames Valley police.	Detective Chief Inspector, Reading LPA	% of cases with a recorded outcome	Annual improvement	
	Improved file preparation for cases by TVP.	Detective Chief Inspector, Reading LPA	% of cases deemed to have concerns at the point they are presented to the CPS	Annual improvement	
	Review use of specialist courts in order to make recommendations for future processes	DAIU Inspector/Strategy lead/ Courts working group	Review completed	April 2016	
Improved coordination of high-risk cases and cases with multiple incidents.	Programme of MARAC audits to be introduced to monitor timeliness of actions completed and appropriateness of original decisions.	MARAC Steering Group	Audits completed	One per year	
	DARIM to be embedded and regular meetings	Detective Chief Inspector, Reading	Number of meetings held per	12	

	held.	LPA	year		
	Reduced number of reports to police by cases discussed by the DARIM.	Detective Chief Inspector, Reading LPA	% of cases showing a reduction in calls	Baseline to be set in year 1	
	Implement Troubled Families programme which now includes and DA criteria	Troubled Families Coordinator	% of cases showing a reduction of risk for 6 months	Activity data to be obtained for year 1	
	Introduce process of regular management meetings across DA, MH and Substance Misuse to ensure appropriate information sharing and coordination.	Complex Case Working Group	Number of meetings completed each year	6 per year	
	Implement new working practices that allow joined up support plans and interventions for both those experiencing DA and perpetrators where there is also substance misuse or MH concerns	Complex case working group	Number of cases recorded by BWA where there is a joint working with either MH or Substance misuse services.	Baseline to be obtained	
Comprehensive support provided for those that have experienced domestic abuse who wish to seek alternative accommodation or remain in their own homes.	Review availability of support services and complete needs analysis regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to refuge provision</li> <li>• Outreach support whilst in temporary</li> </ul>	Strategy Lead/Commissioning Team	Review completed with clear description of required services outlined to feed in to future commissioning	April 2016	

	accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for people who wish to remain in their own home.</li> </ul>				
	New 3 year contract arrangement in place for refuge, outreach provision and family choices programme in Reading	Commissioning team	New contracts in place	April 2017	
	Embed protocol with Housing Needs that ensures those in B & B and temporary accommodation receive appropriate outreach support, including those out of area	Housing Needs Manager/ BWA	% of cases placed in temporary accommodation that are offered support from BWA	100%	
			% of cases placed in temporary accommodation that engage with support from BWA	70%	
	Deliver 'Sanctuary Scheme' to improve safety of victims who wish to remain in their own home.	Housing Needs Manager	Number of sanctuary requests	Obtain baseline	

			Number of cases where work is completed	Obtain baseline	
Appropriate services are available to both those experiencing and those that are perpetrators of domestic abuse in order to reduce incidents	BWA to continue to contact cases triaged at MASH.	BWA	% of those contacted by BWA that engage with the service	50%	
	Continue to provide a flexible, tailored support programme for the whole household via the Family Choices Programme. This will also be available to perpetrators with a disability and those under 18.	BWA	% of those experience DA referred that engage with the service	>70%	
			% of YP referred that engage with the service	>70%	
			% of perpetrators referred that engage with the service	>40%	

			% of repeat incidents logged with MASH	<40%	
			% of crimes against repeat victims	reduction	
	Choices/ self-esteem programme (outside out family choices) continues to provide support to those experiencing DA	BWA	Self-assessment - pre and post questionnaire	70% of cases reporting an improvement	
	Children's group work programme (outside of family choices) supports young people effected by DA	BWA	Self-assessment - pre and post questionnaire	60% of cases reporting an improvement	
	Review availability of support for female perpetrators	Perpetrator Working Group	Review complete	March 2017	
	Complete options appraisal for how additional work with perpetrators can be completed whilst in prison.	Perpetrator Working Group	Appraisal complete	March 2017	

Priority 4: Understanding of the challenges in our town - improving data analysis and community engagement.

Outcome	Action	Lead	Measure	Target	Comment
A clearer understanding of the needs of minority groups in the town, reasons for under reporting and the prevalence and impact of Forced Marriage and (so-called) Honour Based Violence.	Improve data collection for Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence	DA strategic Lead/ TVP	Accurate information available to DASG	April 2016	
	Domestic abuse section of the JSNA published and available online	Public Health Domestic Abuse lead.	Document uploaded on to RBC website	July 2015	
	Consult with representatives of the needs of the LGBT community in order to	DA strategic Lead	Number of LGBT residents accessing services	Increase in representation in support services	



	understand their needs		Number of LGBT residents referred to the MARAC	5% of MARAC cases	
Ensure comprehensive monitoring of domestic abuse in Reading and the impact of services.	Domestic information and performance dashboard reported to DASG every quarter	DA Strategy Lead	Dashboard reported	4 times a year	
	Understand the prevalence and impact of stalking between current or previous intimate partners to influence future action planning	DA Strategy Lead	Baseline information obtained	April 2016	