

# Supplement for

# Scrutiny Committee

On **Tuesday 2 March 2021** At **6.00 pm**

## Agenda Item 9

### Contents

9. **Reports for approval**

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The Committee is asked to agree the following draft reports:

- Domestic Abuse Review Group report (*to follow*).
- Report to Cabinet regarding Citizen Engagement (*to follow*).

The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the committee meeting webpage.

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 10 March 2021  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Citizen Engagement

Summary and recommendations	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Citizen Engagement report
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	All
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

Appendices
None

## Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 12 January 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report it commissioned on Citizen Engagement. This topic was previously considered by Scrutiny as a potential Review Group topic. Whilst not selected, it is an issue of particular importance to the Committee.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships for presenting the report, Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnership and Communications Manager, for

attending the meeting and proving support, and Hamera Plume for authoring the report and answering questions.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, introduced the report. Engagement with the City's citizens was of paramount importance. All Councillors would share a sense of frustration at the difficulty of face to face engagement with constituents given the constraints imposed as a result of the pandemic. On the other hand, the experience of the pandemic had shown how the Council could be more creative in its approach to engagement as well as building on innovations that were already in place. Engagement with local citizens through the local media was already well established, the Residents' Panel had already been set up, something which did not require face to face engagement. Online meetings had made it clear that audiences and participation for some activities could be greater than would otherwise have been the case. The Council's Citizens' Assembly had been a very significant element of the Council's engagement with residents, both as a process and in relation to possibly the most important issue facing the City and the world. The very rich output from the Assembly was still being worked through. Despite the good work being done already, it was important to be alive to the potential for improvement and finding new and diverse ways of engaging with residents. Councillor Brown sounded one note of caution, the current practice of holding statutory meetings remotely would require the introduction of primary legislation in few months' time and the Government had not yet taken any steps to do so.
4. Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnerships & Communications Manager, said that the process of preparing the report had proved to be very helpful in improving the team's understanding of the full spectrum of engagement activity. At the same time it was important to be clear that the report did not provide an exhaustive account. The report did not mention, for example, the regular contact between Councillors and their constituents, something in relation to which it might be helpful to establish a formal means of recording. Recent months had illustrated the great potential for digital engagement. A virtual Town Hall session, for example, had been "attended" by some 2000 people and seen by some 1000 people after the event. While digital communication was likely to play an increasingly important role, it would be important to ensure that those who could not or would not engage in that way were not disenfranchised.
5. The Committee's discussion and suggestions in response to the report focused on work done by other relevant bodies, namely the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Committee, greater prominence for issues around different types of inequality, clarifying a number of terms within the text, and the desirability of recognising active transport and payment of the Living Wage as strategic desiderata in Oxfordshire.
6. The Scrutiny Committee makes ten recommendations, raising suggestions of new ways in which the Council might engage with its citizens more effectively, with a number aiming to engage those groups currently less represented in

consultation responses, as well as a number of ways to improve existing consultation and engagement activity.

### **New Ways to Engage Citizens**

7. Discussion at the Committee recognised an important point – that engagement with residents is not an end in itself but part of a process that seeks to make the best decisions. It is the suggestion of the Committee that if engagement with residents is undertaken at some points of that process but not others, the ceiling of the best potential outcomes is lowered. Giving communities greater ownership over decision-making has the potential to create a virtuous circle whereby more ownership engenders greater engagement, leading to better outcomes and a willingness to take further ownership. Co-production is an approach which the Committee commends, providing fuller engagement with stakeholders throughout the decision-making process. Likewise, having control of money and selecting the priorities on which Council money is spent on behalf of residents is also an important form of ownership. The Committee encourages the Council to investigate how these two approaches could be taken forward.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council investigates opportunities for co-production with key stakeholders, particularly local residents.***

***Recommendation 2: That the Council runs a pilot project to establish and assess the practicalities of engaging citizens in participatory budgeting.***

### **Less Engaged Groups**

8. Following questioning by the Committee, it was confirmed that there is a tendency for consultation responses to come from more affluent members of the City. Whilst in no way does it wish to denigrate responses made by those groups, the Committee recognises that in order for the Council to achieve its vision to 'build a world class city for everyone', it is important that it engages with and hears the voices of all sections of the City. The first step in doing achieving this is in understanding who does and does not engage with the Council, which can provide a base from which to take corrective action to engage underrepresented communities. The Committee recognises that not all consultations will be suitable to collect this data from, but encourages the Council to collect it as far as practicable.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council monitors the response rates for suitable non-statutory consultations against indices of multiple deprivation, and protected characteristics within the Equality Act.***

9. The increase in digital communication has been, overall, a positive in its enablement of communication with residents. However, as referenced above, that improvement is not necessarily manifested equally across different demographic groups. Non-representative responses to consultations can give a false impression of the public mood on an issue, with the potential that policy might reflect the concerns of the respondents, rather than the general populace. Although it does not yet have detailed data on the issue compared to what is

requested above, the Committee considers that active intervention is required to improve the representativeness of responses to consultations. Many of those who do not respond to consultations are likely to do so because they face some form of additional barrier, meaning they require additional support to engage. Council staff being physically present, who can help facilitate responses, are an important means of this rebalancing. The Committee identifies Temple Cowley Shopping Centre and the community centres around the City as places where a regular physical presence would be of particular value in this regard. It suggests that both analogue and digital forms of response should be available, the first for those unable to use digital, and the latter not only for its greater efficiency but also the opportunity it provides to teach people how to access consultations and participate digitally in the future.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council, when conditions permit, has a regular physical presence, particularly at Temple Cowley shopping centre, but also at its community centres, and that it offers multiple channels, covering analogue and digital, to enable responses to be made.***

10. In its discussion of the issue the Committee noted the importance for those with lower levels of literacy to be able to speak to someone who could support them with making a written response. Both elected members and Council officers could offer this form of support. The Committee highlighted planning consultations, being locally focused and fairly complex, as particularly likely to benefit from additional member or officer support, though not to the exclusion of other forms of consultation.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council includes phone contact details with ward member and/or relevant officer details for those who require support with responding to consultations.***

11. With an estimated 49% of residential properties being privately rented in Oxford, Oxford has one of the biggest private rented sector relative to its size of any housing authority in England. The Council currently holds regular meetings with key specific groups to ensure that it hears and considers feedback on their concerns. This does not, however, occur with the private rented sector. In light of the size of this people group, the challenges it faces in a particularly unaffordable city, and the Council's enforcement role on licensing issues, the Committee considers that it would be worthwhile if this were to change. It suggests the easiest way to hold regular meetings with private tenants would be through the tenant unions operating in the City.

***Recommendation 6: That the Council holds regular meetings with private tenant unions.***

## **Building on Existing Engagement**

12. From discussion, the stand-out success of the Council's approach to engagement with stakeholders and residents was the Virtual Town Hall meeting. The event had brought together senior leaders from both councils, both universities, students unions and the police to answer both pre-submitted and live questions concerning the return of students to Oxford at the start of the academic year. The Committee was clearly pleased at the reach that the event managed, with 2000 people watching live and a further 1000 viewing afterwards on youtube. However, it was felt that a crucial part of its success was that the Council was seen to be

acting in response to the concerns of its residents, rather than being defined by its own responsibilities. Although the Council is not directly involved in the internal affairs of the City's universities, the viewing numbers were a demonstration of the leadership taken and relevance of the Council. The Committee is keen that this approach continues, but for the sake of the digitally-excluded does request a balance between in-person meetings and digital ones post-pandemic.

***Recommendation 7: That the Council, when periods of significant public debate arise (including on areas not the direct responsibility of the Council), considers facilitating a public discussion over them similar to the recently-held Town Hall meeting.***

13. One issue raised regularly throughout the meeting (and indeed prior to it) was the importance of elected members as being a conduit for information. In addition to being councillors, many hold other formal positions, from school governorships, to leading community groups and neighbourhood fora, leadership positions in religious organisations to trustees for charities. All are informally involved in the networks in their wards and other communities throughout the City. This often means that councillors are aware of the multiple viewpoints taken on an issue by different groups affected by it. Having expressed their views to Councillors, individuals or groups may consider themselves to have shared their position. Equally, comments may have been made to Councillors expressing a view as part of a different conversation. Either way, the Committee feels that there is a risk that not all this information will be subsequently shared in a formal response to consultation, resulting in engagement and consultation being lost because of the mode through which it was given.
14. The Committee notes that there is a fine balance in allowing Councillors to speak on behalf of their communities, and letting communities speak for themselves. Both are legitimate sources of information, but there is a degree of tension between the two. At present, the Committee considers that the Council is skewed too far away from Councillor representation but recognises that this is a complex topic to get right. As such, it recommends that further work is done to understand how to achieve the right balance across the different types of consultation undertaken by the Council, and to formalise that through frameworks and guidelines.

***Recommendation 8: That the Council creates frameworks and guidelines around how and when the Council will engage with and use its elected members when undertaking consultations.***

15. A concern of the Committee is how the Council incorporates valuable feedback which, for whatever reason, is not presented within official consultation periods. The Committee recognises that with statutory consultations this is not possible as the Council is required to follow a particular process. However, being mindful of the fact that not every potential respondent to consultations can make their response with the same ease – whether that be through awareness of the consultation's existence, language difficulty or other inequality-related reasons – the Committee considers that flexibility over deadlines where such flexibility is possible is a lesser evil than not including in consideration the voices of those who find responding more difficult than others.

***Recommendation 9: That the Council is flexible in its approach to consultation periods in non-statutory consultations and is willing and able to allow feedback made outside the official consultation to be meaningfully considered.***

#### **Further Consideration**

16. It is expected that the Committee is likely to follow up on elements on the issues raised in the Citizen Engagement report in the forthcoming civic year. However, a direct follow-up is not anticipated.

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# **Preventing and Mitigating the Effects of Domestic Abuse: the City Council's Role**

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**Report of the Domestic Abuse Review Group**  
Commissioned by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee

March 2021

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# Foreword by the Chair



The news over the last year has rightly been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic in which to date two and half million people have died worldwide, and many more people's lives have changed forever.

For too long, however, there has been what the UN refers to of the global shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls and a parallel pandemic of domestic abuse, a crime primarily perpetrated against women.

In the UK, two women are dying every week due to violence carried out by an intimate partner or a former partner. At the same time, the criminal justice system is seeing a backlog of cases with victims and survivors of sexual assault having to wait longer than ever to access justice and support. For many the barriers and challenges to justice are insurmountable and unaffordable.

Former secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan is correct in saying that 'Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation and it is perhaps the most pervasive.'

Kofi Anna's comment is true in that neither class, education, religion nor ethnicity are an insulation from domestic abuse; it pervades all sections of society. What makes it particularly shameful is that its severity is compounded by the systemic inequalities that exist in society. Women are more likely to face domestic abuse, but they are also less likely to be working and earning, and therefore less able to escape their abusive environment. Members of the BAME community, particularly non-English speakers, face far more barriers in accessing and maximising the benefit of the support that is available. These challenges are far more extreme for those with no recourse to public funds who, at a national policy level, are barred from receiving support from the state that would enable them to find safety, other than for a few exceptional cases.

The specific shame of domestic abuse is that it makes the most vulnerable carry the heaviest burden.

Sitting at a cross-roads between public health, gender and racial inequality, the way domestic abuse is approached and victims supported is a microcosm of a statutory body's wider attitudes, and an effective litmus test for those with progressive ambitions to protect the vulnerable. At a point of acute vulnerability and utter exhaustion it is imperative that the statutory services which exist to support victims of domestic abuse are sufficiently flexible and sympathetic to do so. Through insensitivity or inflexibility they must not erect barriers or create additional harm to the trauma already experienced. It is against this mirror that the Council wishes to assess its own performance through this Review Group, as well as giving

consideration to the ways in which it can lessen the impact on those minority groups who are hardest hit by domestic abuse, and reducing its incidence in the first place.

This review is particularly timely. Not only has Covid-19 increased rates of domestic abuse nationally, raising its profile, but central government is also in the process of passing the Domestic Abuse Bill, which at present excludes those with no recourse to public funds. The Domestic Abuse Bill does, however, further increase exposure of the issue and create important opportunities for change.

The Review Group is proud of the work that the Council has undertaken to date for survivors of domestic abuse, particularly its Sanctuary Scheme, which has been described by witnesses to this Review as 'the best'. It hopes through this Review Group it can maintain Oxford's place in the vanguard of support for domestic abuse survivors and make improvements for the most vulnerable women and people impacted by domestic abuse. On behalf of the Review Group I would like to thank all those who participated and contributed to the Review Group's vital work and those who shared their personal experiences of abuse.

Special thanks go to our external guests for their willingness to offer encouragement and challenge to the Council, the Council officers who shared their knowledge of the Council's own workings, and to the members of the Review who dedicated much of their time to overcoming the challenges of exploring such a complex, distressing and challenging issue remotely, due to Covid restrictions.

**Councillor Shaista Aziz, Chair of the Domestic Abuse Review Group**

# List of Acronyms

For brevity, this report uses the following acronyms. To avoid confusion, their intended usage is clarified here:

AFiUK	Africans in the UK (charitable group)
BAME	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic
BAMER	Black, Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee
BAED	Black, Asian, Ethnically Diverse
DAHA	Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance
DASH/ DASH RIC	Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Indicator Checklist
ECP	Exceptional Circumstances Panel
ESOL	English as a Second or Other Language
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MHCLG	Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
NRPF	No Recourse to Public Funds
ONS	Office for National Statistics
ODAS	Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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1. There has been an appetite within the Council to devote the resources of a Review Group to considering domestic abuse within the City for some time. Although already agreed by the advent of Covid, the pandemic has nonetheless increased the importance owing to the increase in domestic abuse. In its work, this Review Group has gathered a wide range of evidence and engaged with numerous stakeholders to explore ideas on key issues concerning how contribute towards reducing the impact of domestic abuse when it occurs, but also taking steps to prevent it from happening in the first place.
2. This report is intended to provide a considered and independent opinion on what the Council and its partners can do to improve its prevention and mitigation of domestic abuse in the City. The report sets out the work undertaken by the Review Group, together with their conclusions and recommendations to the Council's main decision-making body, the Cabinet. Each recommendation is supported by a narrative based on the discussions of the Review Group at each of its meetings.
3. The Domestic Abuse Review Group has a cross-party membership comprising the following City Councillors:
  - Councillor Shaista Aziz (Chair)
  - Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan
  - Councillor Mark Lygo
  - Councillor Craig Simmons
  - Councillor Sian Taylor
  - Councillor Liz Wade

In addition, Councillor Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, the Council's Migrant Champion, participated in the meeting scheduled to consider issues around BAME communities.

4. This report will be presented to the Council's Scrutiny Committee for endorsement on 02 March, and subsequently to the Cabinet. Due to the breadth and importance of the issues touched on by the review it is not anticipated that there will be an immediate response from Cabinet in March. With whole-Council elections taking place in May 2021, and the purdah period running from late March, no Cabinet response is anticipated until after the elections are completed.
5. The Review Group would like to place on record its thanks to all of the people who contributed to the review, which has enabled the recommendations in the report to be made. The City is fortunate to have such passionate, capable and committed people within the Council and without seeking to prevent domestic abuse from occurring and supporting those who experience it. There are also truly inspirational individuals working at a national level. The Review Group wishes to give warm thanks to all those who

contributed their time and knowledge to the Review Group, and to give particular thanks to Liz Jones, OCC Domestic Abuse lead, not only for doing so much work on behalf of the Review Group, but in achieving the huge strides already made in regards to this agenda beforehand.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

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6. The Review Group's work involved a total of 8 meetings which were held between November 2020 and February 2021.
7. With national and local lockdowns in operation during the period in which the Review was being undertaken the Review was the first to be held entirely virtually, with meetings taking place over Zoom. Even with the issues of confidentiality surrounding domestic abuse refuges, this topic would have provided multiple opportunities for meaningful site visits, such as to community groups or to see homes 'target-hardened' by the Council's Sanctuary Scheme. Unfortunately, owing to lockdown no such visits were able to take place.
8. The effect of the pandemic, particularly the additional time pressures of childcare and illness did mean a number of scheduled guests were unable to attend, meaning the Review Group was unable to explore some issues as fully as desired. In particular, it is a matter of regret that it involved professionals as expert witnesses and no individuals with lived experience of domestic abuse. The Review Group recognises this as a weakness in its report, and hopes that the Council can be more effective at hearing the voices of victims and survivors than this Review Group.
9. Whilst the topic of interest to the Review Group was 'domestic abuse' the Review Group recognised that the topic spreads across the responsibility of multiple agencies and sectors, and that the most meaningful interventions would be those over which the Council has a high degree of control. Consequently, it has focused its investigations on the intersection between domestic abuse and i) housing, for which the Council has a statutory responsibility, ii) BAME issues, in which the Council is invested on a large number of levels, iii) the way it uses its money for grants and in its procurement, and iv) the Council's own staff.
10. Key themes and questions the Review Group sought to explore included:
  - What support is available for those suffering domestic abuse?
  - What can we learn from other local authorities?
  - What issues arise for those fleeing domestic abuse in regards to housing; how does the Council address those needs and does it do so successfully?
  - What are the specific challenges faced by members of BAME communities when facing domestic abuse?
  - How can the Council leverage the money it spends on voluntary sector grants and its overall procurement to contribute towards addressing domestic abuse?
  - What changes internally can the Council make to ensure that it is a supportive working environment for those experiencing domestic abuse?

11. The Review Group's findings and recommendations have been informed by evidence provided by 15 external guests and Council officers, as well as a number of written internal and external reports and presentations. Contributors to the review included:

- Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement
  - Liz Jones, Domestic Abuse Lead
  - Fatheya Latif, Options Manager
  - Lydia Ng, Interim Grants Officer
  - Ann Phillips, Tenancy Management Manager
  - Tom Porter, Allocations Manager
  - Becci Seaborne, Domestic Abuse Specialist
- 
- Amna Abdullatif, Children and Young People's Lead (Women's Aid), Councillor at Manchester City Council
  - Sobia Afridi, Trustee (Oxford Against Cutting)
  - Kate Agha, Director (Oxford Against Cutting)
  - Laura Clements, Head of Service: Family Solutions (Oxfordshire County Council)
  - Jonathan Cruz, Team Leader (Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service)
  - Huda Jawad, Faith and Communities Programme Manager (Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse)
  - Jameelah Shodunke, Community Engagement Officer (AFiUK)
  - Trish Walsh, Manager (Reducing the Risk)

# Chapter 3: Background

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## What is ‘domestic abuse’?

12. In common parlance, ‘domestic violence’ is a term more commonly used and understood than ‘domestic abuse’. Although there are overlaps, the two are not synonyms.
13. This topic of this report is the lesser understood term, domestic abuse. Consequently, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the term. At present, the Government’s Domestic Abuse Bill is progressing towards royal assent in parliament. The definition it provides is wordy but comprehensive, and the most relevant part of the definition is provided below:
- (2) Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—  
(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and (b) the behaviour is abusive.  
(3) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following— (a) physical or sexual abuse; (b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour; (d) economic abuse (see subsection (4)); (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.  
(4) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to— (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or (b) obtain goods or services.<sup>1</sup>
14. Given the legal language it is written in, getting an understanding of what exactly domestic abuse is can be difficult, but the key takeaway, as emphasised by the MP for Safeguarding, Victoria Atkins, is that domestic abuse refers “not just physical or sexual violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse.” Violence is not the only means by which relationships can be abusive. The fact that abusive behaviour sprawls far beyond physical violence is key in responding to the regular challenge ‘why don’t they just leave?’. This report hopes to explore and elucidate the barriers that are encountered, and to identify what the Council can do to support victims extricate themselves from their abusive environments.
15. The majority of the recommendations of this report will be made later on, in the Findings and Recommendations section. However, the Review Group does wish to make one which is relevant here. Having a clear definition of domestic abuse is

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<sup>1</sup> Draft Domestic Abuse Bill 2021 Part 1. S.1

an important prerequisite in the Council's wish to reduce its incidence and be more supportive of those who suffer it. This is particularly important given that common understanding does tend to focus on the violent subset of overall abuse and may not recognise those suffering other forms of abuse as being in need of support. The Review Group, therefore, hopes that when the Domestic Abuse Bill is passed, the Council formally adopts its definition of domestic abuse and reviews its policies and other literature to ensure that references to domestic violence are accurately used.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council formally adopts the definition of 'domestic abuse' included within the Domestic Abuse Bill, and reviews its usage of the phrase 'domestic violence' in its policies and literature to ensure correct usage.**

16. Two further clarifications of use of nomenclature are necessary. Firstly, the Domestic Abuse Bill recognises that children who are related to the perpetrator or victim and who see, hear or feel the effects of abuse are victims of abuse also. This report follows the same convention, in that references to victims in the report can, where relevant, include children.
17. Finally, an explanation of the phrases used to describe those who suffer domestic abuse: typically, this report uses the phrase 'individual', 'victim' or survivor. These are all non-gendered words. It is, however, also true that overwhelmingly victims of domestic abuse are female, and that the most acute experience of abuse is experienced much more commonly by women than men.<sup>2</sup> The use of non-gendered words is not intended to create a false equivalence between the experience of men and women, or to airbrush the fact that domestic abuse is overwhelmingly an issue the costs of which are borne by women.<sup>3</sup> Rather, non-gendered words are employed so as not to make the opposite mistake, of giving the impression - that domestic abuse can *only* be experienced by women and invalidating the experience of those men who do suffer domestic abuse.

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<sup>2</sup> In Oxfordshire in the last year, no men accessed the services reserved for high risk victims of domestic abuse, and only 7% of victims accessing medium-risk services were men

<sup>3</sup> A recent newspaper article suggested that 24% of reports of domestic abuse in the Thames Valley were made by men (included as Appendix 1). Having queried this with a number of the Review Group's external guests there are various reasons to believe that this statistic gives an over-estimate. The reasons include perpetrators reporting themselves as being victims as a way of muddying the waters with agencies over their own abuse, the fact that the ONS only records the number of first calls made by a victim for help with domestic abuse (male victims tend to be more mobile and able to extricate themselves more easily, whereas women will tend to suffer longer), and higher incidences of very specific irregular forms of domestic abuse. These include abuse from a partner with dementia or other cognitive impairment, and abuse from a child.

## **Domestic Abuse: The National Context**

18. Accurate estimates of the prevalence of domestic abuse in the UK are difficult. Victims primarily experience their abuse behind closed doors at home. The most comprehensive attempt at estimating its prevalence is the ONS Crime Survey for England and Wales which found that for the 12-month period to year ending March 2020 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year (1.6 million women and 757,000 men).
19. Although the most comprehensive, the ONS figures are not without difficulty. Women often don't report or disclose domestic abuse to the police. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales data for the year ending March 2018, only 18% of women who had experienced partner abuse in the previous 12 months reported the abuse to the police, yet even so on average the police in England and Wales receive over 100 calls relating to domestic abuse every hour, or in numerical terms 758,941 domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police)<sup>1</sup>.
20. Although the ONS figures indicate that men are approximately half as likely to suffer from domestic abuse as women the implication of this figure, that women suffer roughly twice as badly as men from domestic abuse, is misleading.<sup>4</sup> The gendered experiences of domestic abuse are extremely different, with women suffering more acute abuse, suffering longer and perpetrating abuse less often.
- The overwhelming majority of female domestic homicide victims are killed by men; of the 270 female victims of domestic homicide for the year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2018, the suspect was male in 260 cases.<sup>5</sup>
  - In 218 of the 270 female domestic homicide cases between the year ending March 2016 and the year ending March 2018, the suspect was a partner or ex-partner. 43 male victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner in the same time period.<sup>6</sup>
  - For the year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2018, 74% of victims of domestic homicide (homicide by an ex/partner or family

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting note is that one cause of this is the way the ONS statistics are recorded. The ONS only records first reports of domestic abuse and not subsequent reports. Given that victims of domestic abuse will often wait long periods before approaching professionals, and then need to do so an average of five times to receive effective help in stopping the abuse, the ONS figures are an unrepresentative snapshot of domestic abuse experiences, and a snapshot which overestimates the experiences of those who suffer domestic abuse on rare occasions, rather than facing prolonged abuse.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenlandandwalesoverview/november2019>

<sup>6</sup> ibid

member) were female. This contrasts with non-domestic homicides where the majority of victims were male (87%).<sup>7</sup>

- Women experience domestic violence with much more intensity – 89% of people who experience four or more incidents of domestic violence are women.<sup>8</sup>
- One study of 96 cases of domestic abuse recorded by the police found that men are significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators and significantly more likely than women to use physical violence, threats, and harassment. In a six year tracking period the majority of recorded male perpetrators (83%) had at least two incidents of recorded abuse, with many having a lot more than two and one man having 52 repeat incidents; whereas in cases where women were recorded as the perpetrator the majority (62%) had only one incident of abuse recorded and the highest number of repeat incidents for any female perpetrator was eight.<sup>9</sup>
- In the year ending March 2019, the majority of defendants in domestic abuse-related prosecutions were men (92%), and the majority of victims were female (75%).<sup>10</sup>

21. In addition to violence suffered, for victims of abuse leaving their abuser often involves leaving their home. Yet there is insufficient capacity for the number of women who need refuge. Women's Aid's Annual Audit (2019) found a shortfall of refuge bed spaces of 1,715 in England, and that over 30% of service providers had had to cut staffing due to reduced funding. Amidst a capacity shortage of refuge spaces, therefore, fleeing domestic abuse can mean homelessness for victims of abuse. In 2000, a Shelter report found that 40% of homeless women stated that domestic abuse had played a part in their becoming homeless.<sup>11</sup>

22. In March 2020 the UK went into lockdown, with the requirement that people stay at home except in a number of limited circumstances to reduce the spread of Covid-19. With the combination of increased stress from isolation, health worries and finances, increased alcohol intake and the absence of the pressure valve of time apart, demand for domestic abuse advice services increased markedly. The charity Refuge, for example, reported in May a 957% increase in visits to its website.<sup>12</sup> This figure, however, was not matched with as extreme an increase by

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<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> <https://womensaidorkney.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Home-office-research.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Hester, M. (2013) 'Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators in English Police Records', *European Journal of Criminology*, 10: 623- 637

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseine nglandandwalesoverview/november2019>

<sup>11</sup> Shelter (2000), Homelessness: what's gender got to do with it?

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52755109>

the Police or specialist domestic abuse services across the country. The ONS commentary on the period notes that

- there was a 7% increase in police recorded offences flagged as domestic abuse-related between March and June 2020, compared with the same period in the previous year;
- there was generally an increase in demand for domestic abuse victim support services, including a 65% increase in calls and contacts logged by the National Domestic Abuse Helpline between April and June 2020, compared with the first three months of the year;
- increases in demand for domestic abuse support were particularly noticeable following the easing of lockdown measures in mid-May, such as a 12% increase in the number of domestic abuse cases handled by Victim Support in the week lockdown restrictions were eased, compared to the previous week; this reflects the difficulties victims faced in safely seeking support during the lockdown

23. The official ONS commentary is, however, circumspect in its conclusions, suggesting that ‘increases in demand for domestic abuse victim services do not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of victims, but perhaps an increase in the severity of abuse being experienced, and a lack of available coping mechanisms such as the ability to leave the home to escape the abuse, or attend counselling.’

24. The Review Group disagrees with this view; it is most unlikely that the growth in demand for domestic abuse victim services can be attributed solely to new victims, nor can it be attributed exclusively to an increase in severity. A highly pressurised environment such as lockdown is likely to have created new abusive relationships but also exacerbated the strains on existing ones. Practically speaking, however, the point of where demand for domestic abuse services comes from is moot when considered against the simple fact of increasing demand in the first place. Whether lockdown has caused new relationships to become abusive, or simply made existing abusive relationships worse matters much less than recognising the public health and wellbeing implications that the growth in demand presages.

### **Domestic Abuse: The Local Context**

25. The following information was provided by Reducing the Risk, the local charity who are responsible for providing advocates (IDVAs) to those who have been risk assessed as being at the highest risk of harm from domestic abuse. Victims at high risk account for approximately 10% of all cases, meaning the data set is a sample, but it is sufficiently large to be representative. Approximately 2000 calls are made to the Police relating to domestic abuse each year in Oxford.

26. Regarding age and gender, no men were referred to the IDVA service in 2020, and the overwhelming majority have been women. Between 80-90% of clients in each year are women between the ages of 25 and 55. Information provided by the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, who provide similar support for those at medium risk, found that the number of men engaging with their service was growing, but from a very low level. In 2019, males represented 3.5% of all referrals, which doubled to 7% in 2020.
27. The populations of the different OX postcodes covering Oxford City do vary significantly, so the table below presents the number of IDVA clients per 1000 of population as a more accurate indicator.

Table 1: IDVA referrals per 1000 of population by postcode in 2020			
OX1	OX2	OX3	OX4
0.16	0.18	0.37	0.6

28. There are two key takeaways from the figures above. Firstly, to recognise that domestic abuse occurs throughout the City. Secondly, however, that the numbers of IDVA referrals are approximately four times lower in the more affluent OX1 and OX2 postcodes than in the more deprived OX4 postcode. However, caution should be exercised in concluding that domestic abuse is necessarily four times more prevalent in the poorer areas of the City. This is an area where the data set may provide a skewed impression. More affluent victims are liable to have more social capital, which may mean they are able to effect a change in their situation sooner and therefore not be referred to the IDVA service, available to victims at high risk. A safer conclusion is that individuals in less affluent areas more commonly encounter the most extreme forms of domestic abuse.
29. Table 2 below gives a breakdown of the main ethnic groupings accepting the support of an IDVA in Oxford City:

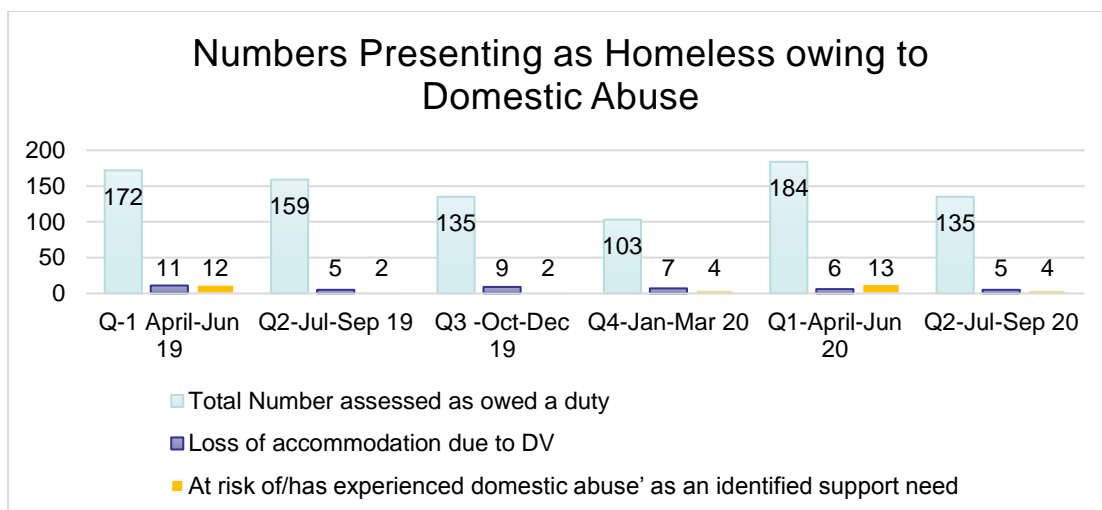
Table 2: IDVA referrals by ethnicity (%age)	
White British	45
Asian	23
White Other	16
Unknown/withheld	12.5

30. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to how representative this is, given that the most up-to-date census data (2011) is almost exactly as out of date as it can be.
31. The most striking issue is the near-absence of African representation, with only two clients of African ethnicity being supported (3%). With a relatively high number of unknown and withheld clients this statistic may indeed be unreflective of experience on the ground, but it is illustrative of an issue highlighted by a report discussed within this report, the 'Thames Valley BAMER Project' report,

which identified poor and inconsistent data collection around ethnicity as a barrier to understanding which minorities do struggle to access domestic abuse services.

### Domestic Abuse in Oxford and the Pandemic

32. As referenced above, the stresses put on relationships by the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a spike in the incidence of domestic abuse nationwide. The picture in Oxford is less clear, suggesting a rise but perhaps not as substantial as elsewhere in the country.
33. Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, which runs the domestic abuse helpline in Oxfordshire actually saw a dramatic fall-off in call volumes in March 2020. In the subsequent quarters, however, numbers not only rebounded but increased to approximately 25% above the levels of the relevant quarters in the previous year, where they have remained. Other services saw a different profile, with a similar fall in March, but with only a gradual increase over the summer and a surge in the autumn.
34. An alternative measure of the increase in domestic abuse can be seen by the number of people approaching the Council for housing. Nationally, the percentage of people presenting as homeless due to domestic abuse has more than quadrupled, from 2.3% to 11.3%. As can be seen in the chart below, relative to the previous year, numbers in Oxford have been relatively stable, with moderate increases in what is a small sample size. Whilst this may seem to indicate that incidences of domestic abuse have been static, a complicating factor is the lag in time between incidences of domestic abuse and a victim seeking to leave. The fact that data is only available up to September may hide a later surge in numbers. Nevertheless, this issue is also true nationwide, where growth has been far steeper. Consequently, the conclusion of the Review Group is that domestic abuse is likely to have increased with the Covid pandemic, but not as sharply as elsewhere in the country. However, as with Covid itself, a more acute second wave could be possible in the future if it is not already underway.

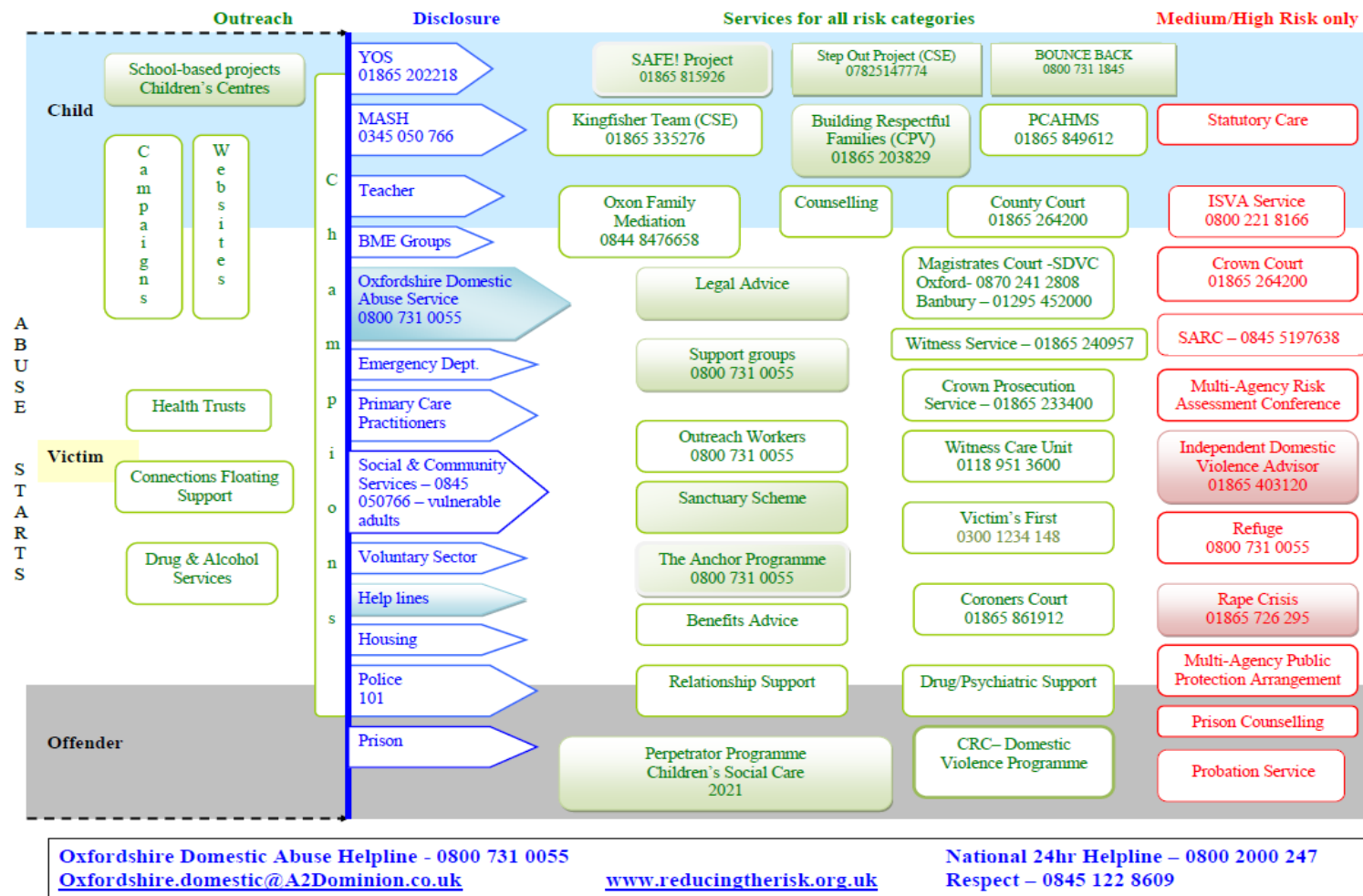


### Understanding the City Council's Role

35. As evidenced by the map of the model of support in Oxford overleaf, the tackling of domestic abuse is extremely complex and dispersed across multiple agencies. A detailed explanation of the workings of the system would be inordinately long. Within this system, however, the Council has three main roles:

- i) To recognise domestic abuse or handle disclosures when they arise in the Council's regular operations, ensuring that a DASH risk assessment is undertaken and high risk individuals join (or are represented at) the multi-agency risk assessment conference (the MARAC), which coordinates the necessary response
- ii) Participation in strategic regional coordination fora, including the co-commissioning of domestic abuse services
- iii) Provision of services, most pertinently housing and target hardening of properties, but also ancillary support for items such as benefits.

Diagram: Map of Domestic Abuse Services in Oxfordshire



# Chapter 4: Findings and Recommendations

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## Part 1: External Witnesses

36. To provide external expertise, perspective and challenge, the Review Group sought the advice and experience of a number of witnesses from outside the Council. The details of their feedback is detailed below.

### **Specialist Local Domestic Abuse Services**

#### **IDVAs and Reducing the Risk**

37. Trish Walsh, Manager for the Independent Domestic Violence Advisory (IDVA) Service at Reducing the Risk presents to the Review Group on the work of her organisation and the major issues encountered by its clients.

38. The IDVA service in Oxfordshire is delivered by the charity Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse. Its work is reserved for those victims of domestic abuse who are risk-assessed as being at high risk of substantial harm. Risk is assessed via the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment Risk Indicator Checklist (DASH RIC) which can be completed by trained professionals from any statutory or third-sector agency. Any agency, using their professional judgement alongside the 'score' from the DASH is able to refer a victim to a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), the conference of relevant agencies where actions needed to protect the victims are agreed.

39. The IDVA attends the MARAC to represent the views and wishes of the victim so they are not subsumed by the concerns of the various agencies responsible for their protection. MARACs are held monthly to discuss the best way to minimise risk and keep the victims and their children safe.

40. Beyond the MARAC, the IDVA's role is broadly threefold: 1) advocating for the victim through any formal processes (e.g. family or criminal court), 2) ongoing, dynamic risk assessment and safety planning, plus 3) other practical and emotional support relating to the domestic abuse, including support to plan a safe exit if desired by the victim.

41. The IDVA's role as an independent advocate is key in ensuring the wishes of the victim are not subsumed by the concerns of the various agencies responsible for their protection. Support is provided by the IDVAs for as long as is required to ensure the requisite safety measures are put in place.

42. Oxford City is covered by one IDVA. The post is not commissioned.

43. When asked to identify the key areas of difficulty clients of the IDVA service experienced, two were identified: housing, and translation.
44. Whilst it was reported that the local IDVA has a really strong relationship with one of the Tenancy Sustainment Officers at the Council, housing remains the biggest single challenge for IDVAs in supporting their clients.
45. The problems with housing are twofold. Firstly, whilst the Council has in its tenancy agreements terms which preclude anti-social behaviour and violence, it is the experience of the IDVAs that too rarely does the Council seek possession of the property on these grounds. It is important to stress that those who are referred to the IDVA service are victims who are deemed at high risk of significant harm to their health or welfare; failure to seek possession of the property and re-let it to the victim alone is a decision not to address perhaps the biggest single risk factor to the victim.<sup>13</sup> Owing to this risk, where the victim is in support of such action, the IDVA service will resort to court to seek an occupation order for the property, which would remove the perpetrator. Largely, however, the courts are unwilling to act when the Council has not, and will not make a perpetrator homeless. As such, it is the experience of the IDVA services that victims are often not safe in their own homes.
46. The other major issue lies directly downstream from this problem. Where a victim does decide they wish not to stay with their abuser (many stay, sometimes with tragic results), a big problem is, because of the risk to the victim in remaining in Oxford, there is a tendency for the Council to be willing only to offer to facilitate an out of area move, or a move to refuge. Too regularly it is not in the best interests of victims to move away from their support networks, particularly to a refuge (described as the option that should be used 'when you are running away in the middle of the night, fearful for your life'). It was reported that having offered those options, if the victim refused what was available, the Council claimed it had discharged its housing duty towards the victim. Trish Walsh shared that she, even as a non-victim, had been reduced to tears by the hostility and lack of sympathy from officers (though it is not clear whether this was specifically in relation to experiences of Oxford City Council, or more generally).
47. To challenge being faced with the choice of moving to inappropriate housing, or losing housing entitlements altogether, it is necessary to take an appeal to the Council's Exceptional Circumstances Panel (ECP). This is not only resource-intensive, but a cause of delay in a context in which speed of decision-making greatly affects the victim's welfare. During discussion on this topic it was noted by Ann Phillips, Tenancy Management Manager, that if such issues were arising, they were doing so outside the

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, however, that this is a complex area. The victim can often not support such action (whether this is free choice or a result of coercion is a judgement call needing to be made by a professional). In some instances it may be that formal intervention could be seen by the perpetrator to supersede the victim's wishes and place them out of scope for retribution or punishment by the perpetrator, but this may not always be the case.

Council's standard operating procedure. This experience was, however, also confirmed by Jonathan Cruz of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service. A discussion was organised outside the meeting to explore the issue.

48. Another issue raised was the regularity with which the offer of a refuge place or a move out of the City would be deemed a discharge of housing duty, even if not necessarily appropriate for the victim. To challenge being faced with the choice of moving to inappropriate housing, or losing housing entitlements altogether, it is necessary to take an appeal to the Council's Exceptional Circumstances Panel (ECP). This is not only resource-intensive, but a cause of delay in a context in which speed of decision-making matters hugely to the victim's welfare. During discussion on this topic it was noted by Ann Phillips, Tenancy Management Manager, that if such issues were arising, they were doing so outside the Council's standard operating procedure.
49. The other major barrier faced by the IDVAs is the difficulty of communication with their non-English speaking clients. Of the three IDVAs in Oxfordshire, only one is commissioned, and that role is not responsible for Oxford City. Cost management is an important feature of running the service. Language Line, the translation service, costs £3 per minute and the service has an annual budget for translation of only £800, allowing less than four and a half hours per year of translation for the entirety of Oxfordshire. Given the number of victims in Oxford who are from immigrant communities (as in the Background chapter, precise ethnicity data is lacking), supply is far outweighed by demand. The fact that this barrier to support is being experienced by those at high risk is reiterated.

#### Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service

50. Jonathan Cruz, a Team Leader at Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, introduced the service to the Review Group and presented the key challenges the service faced in helping create better outcomes for local victims of domestic abuse.
51. The Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS) is part of the A2Dominion housing group, who hold the contract for commissioned domestic abuse services in Oxfordshire. The service is accessed through a helpline, which acts as the gateway to all the other services available. These services include outreach worker support, which is almost identical to the work of IDVAs apart from the fact that their clientele are adjudged to be at medium risk, rather than high risk. Other services provided include the county's refuge provision, which has been subject to reductions in funding over time. At present, there is funding for 16 refuge places, whereas under the previous contract there was provision for 29. Other key areas of support are around courses to help support survivors process their experiences.

52. As with Reducing the Risk above, the two main areas of challenge for the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service concerned housing and issues relating to culturally-specific needs arising from within ethnically diverse communities.
53. With regard to housing, the difficulties experienced by Reducing the Risk were corroborated by the experience of outreach workers for Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, with housing being described as ‘a challenge’. However, in addition to these, a further issue was raised. Although it was recognised that there are reasons for this being the case, finding permanent move-on accommodation for those in refuges was extraordinarily difficult, leaving victims in exceedingly difficult conditions for long periods unless they were willing to seek accommodation away from the city.
54. The issues identified around ethnically diverse communities with ODAS were not the same as for Reducing the Risk. ODAS, as part of A2Dominion, does have access to Language Line. This, however, is no panacea, for their experience shows that clients from diverse and immigrant communities are reluctant to make use of phone-only services, even when interpretation is available. During the two year ‘Thames Valley BAMER Project’ (detailed later in this report) the service hosted two dedicated BAMER support workers who ran assertive community engagement and specialist culturally-sensitive domestic abuse outreach work, including one-to-one casework and drop-in surgeries. Access to ODAS from ethnically diverse communities dropped off when the funding for this service ran out. ODAS has recruited a worker to run similar sessions, but budgetary pressures mean only part of the spectrum of available services can be made accessible in this way.
55. A further issue raised in relation to individuals from ethnically diverse communities was the huge difficulty in accessing support for those with no recourse to public funds. In very tightly-defined circumstances, such as if a person meets all the criteria for a Destitution Domestic Violence concession, or if they have a child also under threat and therefore subject to social service intervention is it possible to get housing support for a person with no recourse to public funds. It was reported that for single women with no children, it is impossible, a source of frustration and regret when confronted by a victim at risk and in need of help.<sup>14</sup>

## **Other Guests**

### **Huda Jawad – Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse**

56. Huda Jawad, Faith and Communities Programme Manager, former Domestic Abuse Housing Coordinator at Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse and Co-founder of

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<sup>14</sup> Since this meeting a domestic abuse pathway has been established for women on spousal visas who have no recourse to public funds. For those needing to flee but unable to access refuge accommodation, Sanctuary Hosting will accommodate them whilst they are given support to seek indefinite leave to remain, which would allow them access to refuge accommodation.

the Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls coalition shared her experience and the learning of the national charity, Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse, on the issues experienced by those seeking to flee domestic abuse in regard to housing, and the particular challenges of people from ethnically diverse communities.

57. Safe and stable housing is probably the most difficult need to meet for domestic abuse victims. Oftentimes victims are expected to relocate at short notice, without consideration of the practical or financial difficulties house moves bring, a problem especially acute for those who have been subject to financial abuse. For example, although train companies have announced that domestic abuse victims can get free train tickets, this alone does not meet the challenge of moving belongings, particularly if a move also involves young children. Whilst individuals can flee to safety, this is not the same as finding stable housing.
58. The problem of moving is not the only issue, however. Simply finding suitable housing is difficult, especially for those with children, who have mobility needs or have cognitive or developmental difficulties. Even when properties are secured, few are without issues, some serious, and which require financial input – for example having to secure a cooker or beds. In cases where refuge provision is sought, refuges can be reluctant to house women with male children over the age of 12 (although some, including those run by ODAS, accept male children up to 16). It has been recognised by Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse that many perpetrators are fully aware of these barriers and seek to make them as insurmountable as possible in order to entrap their victims.
59. A deeply unsettling observation was made, that in the experience of Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse, survivors of domestic abuse most commonly report their engagement with the local authority in relation to housing to be the single most difficult experience they face in escaping and rebuilding their lives. For the second time, the Review Group heard the word ‘hostile’ used to describe homelessness services by an expert witness, which was then further compounded by the unfavourable comparison with the UK’s immigration services. Regularly, the attitude of the local authority is one of disbelief, and there is an automatic assumption that the victim is seeking to trick the authority into providing housing, making additional requests for information such as police reference numbers.<sup>15</sup> Fear of being deemed intentionally homeless and therefore no longer eligible for housing is the primary reason, particularly for those with children, why victims remain with their abuser and do not ‘just leave’.
60. People from ethnically diverse communities face an even sterner challenge regarding housing. As minority ethnic individuals, they are less likely to conform to the decision-maker’s perception of what a victim ‘should’ look like. Simultaneously, however, they will tend to be less, owing to language and unfamiliarity with a new system, to be as forceful self-advocates as non-minority ethnic individuals. Facing hostility and disbelief in a state

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<sup>15</sup> For clarity, these comments were made from the perspective of a national practitioner, reporting on experiences of survivors of domestic abuse with local authorities generally, and not Oxford specifically.

of utterly exhausted emotional distress, those from ethnically diverse communities are even less likely to be able to press their case and are liable to encounter worse outcomes as a consequence. In Oxford, Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service does have a specific worker for supporting ethnically diverse individuals, but the challenge for the Council is to recognise the needs of those who are not supported.

61. In addition, irregular immigration status is a risk factor experienced by people from immigrant communities more regularly than others. Commonly, this vulnerability will be weaponised by perpetrators, who will regularly ensure that victims default on their immigration status, drastically reducing the support available to them to escape their situation at best, or face being moved to a detention centre as an illegal migrant at worst. Confronted with the risk of homelessness or detention and deportation, many (almost all) women will take the risk of staying with their abuser.
62. In addition to introducing the Review Group to the challenges faced by individuals fleeing domestic abuse, two reports were circulated for additional review: reports from Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse. The first on the Whole Housing Approach, which seeks to i) improve access to stable housing across all housing tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership; this also considers the need for move-on options from refuges, supported accommodation and any other type of temporary accommodation), and ii) ensure access to a range of tailored housing options and initiatives to give people experiencing domestic abuse the choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation. The full suite of housing options enables agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively. Effective coordination efforts consider the long-term safety of the victim/survivor, as well as managing crisis situations and removing the perpetrator. It seeks to do this by providing a framework through which domestic abuse and housing sectors can work more effectively together.
63. The report is lengthy, so it is appended at the end of this document as Appendix 2.<sup>16</sup> However, a number of key issues and ideas the Review Group considers important are detailed below.
64. Move-on from refuge accommodation is a major step in allowing survivors of domestic abuse to rebuild their lives. However, it is noted that the supply of move-on accommodation is constrained “There is an urgent need to increase supply of genuinely affordable accommodation and consider move-on options from refuge services and other types of unstable accommodation. Move-on was a significant challenge for refuge services before COVID 19 and has become an increasing problem during the pandemic. Women’s Aid England reports that refuge services in England are posting fewer vacancies since the start of the pandemic, with the average number of available bed spaces falling by half in comparison to the same time last year. As a result of this, a call

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<sup>16</sup> It is also available for download at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5fa2ac5610356f02dc759054/1604496477948/Whole+Housing+Approach+Y1+Report.pdf>

for action was made by DAHA, Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), National Housing Federation and Women's Aid England asking housing providers to prioritise move-on from refuge as we came out of lockdown. There is further work to be done here including the opportunity of asking and legislating for housing providers to allocate a proportion of any new-builds and their existing stock to respond to domestic abuse, whether this is rehousing the family or perpetrator." (p. 28).

65. The report makes two practical suggestions to help domestic abuse victims secure move-on accommodation. The first is to increase priority, and the second to increase supply available.

66. The second issue of interest is that of the existence of an accreditation scheme for housing providers run by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).<sup>17</sup> This gives housing providers, including local authorities, the opportunity to benchmark their own provision against best practice for domestic abuse victims in the areas of

- Policies & Procedures
- Case Management
- Risk Management
- Inclusivity & Accessibility
- Perpetrator Management
- Partnership Working
- Training

The cost of accreditation is a minimum of £3000 plus VAT and usually takes a year to become ready for assessment. Once granted, accreditation lasts for 3 years.

67. Finally, of interest to the Review Group is the concept of Flexible Funding.<sup>18</sup> The full introduction to this concept is included as Appendix 3 to this report. Briefly, however, flexible funding is made available to victims of domestic abuse, usually by payments to service providers rather than to the individuals themselves, to overcome the financial barriers to extricating themselves from their abusers. It is accessed via domestic abuse services, but not dependent on engagement with other parts of the service. What makes it unusual and particularly suited to the needs of domestic abuse victims is its speed, the absence of a need to provide documentary proof of abuse or their financial situation, and is available to those who have no recourse to public funds. Indirect costs, such as car repair, can be funded as well as direct costs, such as a bus ticket, so long as it serves the purpose of helping victims to access safe and stable accommodation.

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<sup>17</sup> More information can be found at <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/accreditation-for-housing-providers/>

<sup>18</sup> It is available online at [https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10657/11\\_-wha-flexible-funding.pdf](https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10657/11_-wha-flexible-funding.pdf)

68. The Review Group's recommendations in response to these are included within the Housing chapter of this report.
69. The second item introduced to the Review Group was the 'Keeping the Faith' report, a report from survivors who are members of faith communities on what they wish both faith leaders and statutory agencies to know. The report is included as Appendix 4 to this report.<sup>19</sup>
70. On review, the most relevant issue raised is the role of 'by and for' organisations in preventing domestic abuse by removing many of the barriers faced by members of faith communities. 'By and for' groups are those which are run by the same demographic as those they seek to support, for example, a Muslim women's group would be run by and on behalf of Muslim women. There can be a reluctance on equality grounds to fund such groups, but the report recognises how instrumental such groups can be in creating access to services from otherwise disadvantaged demographic groups. The Review Group's report around this is included in the discussion of grant funding.

Kate Agha and Sobia Afridi - Oxford Against Cutting

71. Kate Agha (Director) and Sobia Afridi (Trustee) from Oxford Against Cutting presented to the Review Group on the work of their organisation, and the particular issues they identified for ethnically diverse communities regarding domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.
72. The main aim of the organisation is education on harmful practices, which is primarily delivered through training by individuals from affected communities on Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriages. In 2018 training was delivered to over 1000 individuals, and in 2019 to 2000. Given the restrictions caused by the pandemic, that training has not taken place in the same way in 2020 but the group has run web cafes with guest speakers invited to share their experience and knowledge on relevant topics as well as anti-FGM and anti-forced marriage safeguarding training for teachers and professionals.
73. Another aspect of the organisation's work is the BAED (Black Asian and Ethnically Diverse) WORLDS group. The group is a multi-agency group set up to explore recovery support for women from BAED communities suffering abuse during the Covid-19 outbreak in Oxfordshire. The new group is part of a wider recovery group, Mapping of Domestic Abuse Recovery Services in Oxfordshire, hosted by Oxfordshire County Council and has special focus on the specific challenges faced by BAED women, informed by the 'Thames Valley BAMER' project (see Part 5 for further details). Other participant organisations to the group include Asylum Welcome, Refugee Resource, Oxfordshire Mind, Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services and Elmore Community

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<sup>19</sup> It is available for download at:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5fe1d167fdf2bb19a0be17e5/1608634729601/Keeping+the+Faith+FINAL.pdf>

Services. In December 2020 the group published best practice guides for running groups to support women from BAED communities who have suffered domestic abuse.

74. The organisation has a diverse workforce and board members, with 75% of the former group, and 40% of the latter identifying as from BAME communities.
75. Oxford Against Cutting are in support of the learning and conclusions of the BAMER report, and drew particular attention to the need to address both internal factors – thinking patterns, concern over community reactions or failure to recognise abuse as abuse – as well as external factors such as the availability and accessibility of services.
76. Key barriers on the internal side include concern over community reactions to raising the issue of harmful practices, or the inability to recognise them, marital rape especially. Suspicion of services, particularly over whether the involvement of children's social care would involve the removal of children from the victim is also common. Concern amongst victims with no recourse to public funds around information sharing by services with immigration officials is an important barrier in seeking statutory support.
77. External barriers, those issues that make it difficult for services to reach communities effectively, include inconsistency of data collection around ethnicity, which creates difficulty for decision-makers in knowing which groups are and are not accessing services. The organisation also felt it important that victims are offered a choice of advocate or support worker, as some people are more comfortable with workers from the same cultural group and others with workers from different cultural groups.
78. The issues that would improve the situation would be:
- Increased funding of direct, front-line ethnically-specific roles in community settings, such as in domestic abuse services as occurred within the 'Thames Valley BAMER Project.'
  - Funding of projects which indirectly tackle domestic abuse through reducing the vulnerability and building the resilience of potential victims, such as English language classes or support to enter and maintain employment.
  - Increased funding of interpretation services. Without them, abuse victims struggle to access those services which would provide an avenue of support. If services rely on interpretation by family or friends, there is a risk that information will get back to the perpetrator.
  - Sharing resources to raise community awareness of the services that are available locally. Each year, Oxford Against Cutting develops a poster campaign with the input of the groups to highlight how to access specialist helplines on a victim's first call, a key factor when time away from a perpetrator can be extremely limited.
  - Training. Harmful practices such as FGM and honour-based abuse should be of concern to everybody. The Council is encouraged to access the expert training on the issue provided by Oxford Against Cutting.

79. The Review Group asked the view of Oxford Against Cutting on the value of preventative activity. Intervention through education of children and adults is absolutely fundamental, but the sensitivity of its delivery is key to its efficacy. It is vital to focus challenge not on specific cultural values, such as honour and shame, or the importance of pre-marital virginity, but on the harm that can arise from those values, which can manifest themselves in honour-based abuse and FGM. It is extremely helpful in this regard to have training delivered by those who have come from cultures in which these values have led to their lived experience of harmful practices. The Review Group discussed, however, that it was also vital for non-ethnic minority community members to be equipped with the language to challenge harm, not culture, to ensure that fears over addressing these issues in another culture would not cause them to go unchallenged.
80. Within training, an under-served area is the training of boys and men, over girls and women, and Oxford Against Cutting hope to explore how peer education in this regard might be implemented.

Jameelah Shodunke – AfiUK

81. Jameelah Shodunke, Community Engagement Officer at African Families in UK (AFiUK) was invited to the Review Group to share her experiences of supporting BAME community members facing situations of domestic abuse.
82. The charity, AFiUK exists to equip African and other ethnic minority families in the UK to take their rightful place as fruitful members of our society, and to make the most of the available opportunities in their adopted country without adversely affecting the strong family and community networks that Africans are known for.
83. The primary areas of difficulty were identified to be housing, and the support for those with no recourse to public funds. Although there are areas for improvement, the feedback was prefaced with an overall sense of happiness and gratitude for the statutory services provided.
84. Housing problems experienced by clients tended to fall into two common themes. Firstly, the regularity with which housing tended to be offered outside Oxford, with refuge placements as far away as Scotland being offered. An example was given of a victim who did not wish to move to refuge in the middle of her child's GCSE exams. Similar to the feedback of Reducing the Risk and ODAS, finding local housing once a refuge placement had been refused, was problematic. The victim had to wait 56 days to be entered on the Housing Register.
85. The second housing-related issue concerned the suitability of placements for people from ethnically diverse communities. Many reported an absence of suitable cultural support and facilities, for example, shops catering to religious dietary requirements or others of the same ethnicity. The absence of others from the same or similar ethnic backgrounds also was a cause of difficulty, in that a number of these people faced hostile and racist treatment, and were left feeling particularly unsupported owing to their being in

the significant minority. For those without access to cars, this situation can be particularly acute.

86. Lack of support is a theme which extends beyond housing, however. The experience of those with no recourse to public funds was often that they felt that support services were withdrawn too quickly. Whilst national policy does make it particularly difficult to support these individuals to find better outcomes, at the same time, by virtue of their immigration status they have very few other sources of support. The withdrawal of support is therefore of greater negative impact, and can have the consequence of leaving individuals feeling abandoned or having no option but to remain with their abusers.

## **Part 2: Partner Agencies**

### **Oxfordshire County Council**

87. As referenced in the Background, responsibility for managing and reducing domestic abuse is multi-agency in nature with the health service, the Police and the County Council all playing key roles from the statutory sector, as well as formal services and informal support provided by the voluntary and community sector. Whilst the Council does provide a number of unique services, such as housing and the sanctuary scheme, a lot of its work is strategic, being involved in a coordinated community response to domestic abuse with the specific aims to prevent domestic abuse, provide high quality support services, hold perpetrators to account and to work in partnership.
88. The Council works out these aims primarily through the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board, on which the Council's Domestic Abuse Lead sits. The Board is Chaired and managed by the County Council with representatives from Thames Valley Police, District Councils, Children & Adult Social Care, Oxford University NHS Foundation Trust, Public Health, Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and the Clinical Commissioning Group. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Board is responsible for developing the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy and for its delivery through the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Operational Board by overseeing the different strands of work to tackle domestic abuse in Oxfordshire. The Strategy Board also reviews and oversees the commissioning of local domestic abuse services.
89. In addition, the Domestic Abuse Lead represents Oxford City Council on the BAED Partnership Board which is Chaired and managed by the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner. The purpose of the Board is to ensure the recommendations from the BAMER Report (2020) are taken forward across the Thames Valley, the domestic-abuse relevant issues of which have been detailed elsewhere in this report.
90. Regrettably, illness and unavailability meant the Review Group did not hear from County Council representatives on two relevant topics – translation and domestic abuse – meaning it has not covered these issues with the thoroughness it would have wished.

However, an area of enquiry throughout the Review Group process was on preventative activity, its availability and its efficacy. Laura Clements, Head of Oxfordshire County Council's Family Solutions Service, provided an update to the Review Group on the status of such perpetrator work in the county.

91. The Family Solutions Plus service's primary responsibility for the protection of children, either through statutory interventions where a child is at risk of serious harm, or consent-based support where a risk to the child is present but does not meet the threshold for statutory intervention. What makes the Family Solutions Plus service novel is the linkage between meeting the needs of parents and protection of the child. Oftentimes, harm or neglect of a child arises out of inadequate support for a parental problem, most often mental health, substance or alcohol misuse, or domestic abuse in the home. Instead of focusing on 'fixing' the child's immediate problems whilst not addressing the causes, the service's approach seeks to prevent harm to the child by supporting parents and has dedicated adult-facing practitioners. Family Solutions Plus has 10 dedicated frontline domestic abuse workers provided by Elmore, five of which work with the non-abusive parents providing them with support and identifying additional needs. The other five work with the abusive parents to motivate and support them to change their abusive behaviour.
92. Perpetrators undertake eight two-week modules including gender roles and responsibilities, reducing threatening and violent behaviour, conflict resolution and sexual respect.
93. The first cohort of perpetrators have commenced their course in February 2021, meaning that as-yet there is no feedback on the efficacy of the intervention. Indeed, a full picture of its efficacy can be measured only over periods beyond the course: whether participants avoided returning to their abusive behaviours three, six, twelve or more months after completing the intervention. The Review Group is keen that Scrutiny and the wider Council should be provided with the early monitoring data, and suggests that it be included as part of this report's six month review in order to bring to the Council's attention any issues and ideas it considers important that the Council should consider.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council requests from the County Council early monitoring data from the Family Solutions Plus domestic abuse perpetrator monitoring programme and includes that information within its six month review of progress made on agreed recommendations from this report.**

94. The Review Group is of the view that whilst its efficacy is yet to be shown, prima facie the perpetrator programme addresses a lot of crucial issues, issues which are of relevance beyond the set of people who have recently perpetrated domestic abuse and who have children, which is the remit of the Family Solutions Plus service. In discussion, it was asked what similar courses were currently more universally available. A women-only course for victims of domestic abuse is also available from the Family Solutions Plus service as part of its non-mandatory offer the Early Help Service and its 'Own My Life'

course. This is for victims of domestic abuse rather than perpetrators, and also specifically for women with children. The course contextualises domestic abuse within wider issues around institutional sexism, messaging about the roles of women in society and relationships, and challenges the normalisation of dysfunctional relationships. For perpetrators, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is currently consulting with professionals on a new perpetrator programme, including the Council's Domestic Abuse Lead.

95. The likelihood is that more funding will become available for other perpetrator programmes in the future; the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, though not yet passed, includes encouragement for the funding of perpetrator programmes, a departure from previous policy. This is a welcome change in approach; the Review Group considers that for too long the easier path of getting victims to modify their behaviour has been taken, effectively a policy-level form of victim-blaming. The Review Group is keen that the Council continues to engage in and support the development of a universal perpetrator programme in a way appropriate to its position as a junior partner.

**Recommendation 3: That the Council engages with Thames Valley Police and provides appropriate support for the development of a universal domestic abuse perpetrator programme.**

96. The above recommendation notwithstanding, the Review Group does note that there is an ongoing unmet need for groupwork programmes to support victims and survivors in Oxford and the wider county also. What provision there is does not sit within an overarching framework of support. The Review Group would welcome the development of more of these programmes within the wider domestic abuse framework of services.

**Recommendation 4: That the Council works with partners for the development of additional groupwork programmes for victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and that these programmes be embedded within the broader multi-agency framework for managing domestic abuse.**

## **Part 3: Learning from Other Authorities: Barking and Dagenham Domestic Abuse Commission**

97. Looking beyond local partnership working, the Review Group has sought to learn from the experience of leading Councils elsewhere, specifically from Barking and Dagenham's Domestic Abuse Commission.
98. Barking and Dagenham established a Domestic Abuse Commission in early 2020, following recognition of the particular severity of the problem in the area. In 2017/18 Barking and Dagenham had the highest number of reported domestic abuse incidents of anywhere in London, at 12.8 cases per 1000 people (more than twice the rate of Oxford's

highest postcode, OX4). Equally alarmingly, however, an attitude survey of 2500 secondary school children in the area showed clearly a deeply unhealthy attitude towards relationships being passed down to the younger generation, with 26% believing it was acceptable to hit one's partner.

99. The Barking and Dagenham Domestic Abuse Commission drew in a panel of 12 national experts, not all with a direct focus on domestic abuse, to work with local communities and survivors of domestic abuse in order to consider how the local area, led by the council, could improve its response to domestic abuse, and importantly the role of addressing culture and the normalisation of abuse within that. The outcomes of the Commission were to:

- a) understand the attitudes relating to domestic abuse in the community;
- b) look at the services of council's and partner agencies;
- c) create a blueprint for other local areas to follow.

100. Contributors to the panel included Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Shelter, and Jess Phillips, Chair of the All Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence and Abuse. The Review Group were very fortunate to be briefed on the Commission by Amna Abdullatif, national lead on Children and Young People for Women's Aid, a councillor at Manchester City Council, and a member of the Panel.

101. Originally, the outcomes of the Commission were anticipated to be published in late autumn 2020. The disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the full report was delayed, with its launch date now scheduled for 10 March 2021. This does mean that the finer details of the report have not been seen by the Review Group and are not considered by this report. However, one of the stated intentions of the Barking and Dagenham Commission is to provide a blueprint for other areas to learn from, and whilst it is not possible that this learning should be included here, the Review Group is strongly of the view that the Council should avail itself of this opportunity, particularly as Barking and Dagenham have been kind enough to offer to discuss issues arising on a one-to-one basis if desired.

**Recommendation 5: That the Council reviews the recommendations and outcomes of the Barking and Dagenham Domestic Abuse Commission, and as part of the Review Group's six-month progress update reports on the steps it has taken to adopt and implement learning and actions from the Commission into the Council's own activity.**

102. Though the Review Group has been unable to consider the specific recommendations and conclusions of the Commission, it fully endorses the approach taken and details this approach and the learning of how to implement it because it considers it to be a foundation of good practice for any future work which would be relevant even in a demographically different context such as Oxford.

103. One of the issues that makes domestic abuse such a difficult issue for its victims is not simply the trauma of the abuse itself, but the challenge of getting help from a system whose perceptions and attitudes towards victims often misunderstand their situations, but which can also at times be actively discriminatory. The Commission was undertaken on the basis of the following principles. That it would:

- a) Believe survivors. It is worse than pointless to listen to survivors only to deem what can often be an emotionally-costly testimony invalid.
- b) Be led by survivors. It is necessary to recognise that the people who have lived through domestic abuse and come out the other side are the people best placed to explain what is helpful and what is not.
- c) Change attitudes by changing behaviour. If the same patterns of behaviour are repeated over and over there is little to no stimulus to change thought patterns. Changing behaviour which embodies abusive attitudes allows for new, non-destructive thought patterns to emerge.
- d) Avoid creating additional harm. Being well-intentioned is not sufficient defence for an individual seeking to escape domestic abuse. It may not be robust enough to foil a perpetrator intent on causing harm. Equally, simply by being inflexible to the specific challenges faced by a victim of domestic abuse the bureaucratic process can cause unintended negative results. It is necessary, therefore, to take proactive steps to avoid harm, not simply not intend to cause it.
- e) Be anti-racist and pro-feminist. With the existence of entrenched societal inequalities around race and gender, ethnic minorities and women facing domestic abuse do so with fewer reserves of social capital to support them. Addressing domestic abuse for these individuals cannot be properly done without addressing and challenging the underlying inequalities that make them particularly vulnerable.<sup>20</sup>
- f) Be trauma informed. This means understanding and interpreting an individual's circumstances in the context of the trauma they have experienced. This is well illustrated by the use of the question 'what has happened to you?' as opposed to asking 'what is wrong with you?'

104. Practically, the Review Group were informed of some key learnings from the approach taken, which it agrees with.

105. Firstly, a key factor must be a focus on what works, rather than what is novel or innovative. Domestic abuse is both a widespread and a longstanding problem with which society has had to contend. This means that there are examples of successful

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<sup>20</sup> A good illustration of this is the difference between the experience of men facing domestic abuse, and women. Men do face domestic abuse (though less commonly than women). When they do, however, they are less likely to have children, and if they do have children, they are less likely to have childcare commitments. This fact means that many more men facing domestic abuse do so whilst in employment, and therefore with an income. Whilst men still face the trauma of domestic abuse, less often do they face the entrapping factors of not wanting to abandon children, having no financial resources on which to rely whilst extricating themselves and having to choose between remaining with an abuser and possibly being homeless.

programmes which can be replicated. Investing time to know what is already working is a much better use of resources than coming up with novel solutions.

106. Secondly, knowing the local community, its diversity, its assets, its strengths and weaknesses is vital. A crucial foundation for this is a strong and interconnected voluntary and community sector, which can help communities scale up from identifying a need to owning its solution. The Review Group considers that this is an area in which Oxford does well and which the Council is facilitating through its grants programme.
107. Thirdly, all Council officers with a responsibility for an area relevant to domestic abuse were engaged in the process. Clearly, for a London Borough it is easier to deliver a comprehensive review than in a two-tier local authority structure such as Oxfordshire. Nevertheless, domestic abuse is a broad spectrum issue which requires holistic responses to bring about effective change, meaning there must be corporate ownership of the issue to see victim-friendly policies and practices implemented throughout all the Council's relevant functions.
108. Fourthly, perhaps less of a relevant point for the Council unless it too decided to bring in national experts, is a consistent need to invert any sense of hierarchy which puts experts and professionals at the top, and survivors at the bottom. Throughout its duration, the Commission ran meetings every two weeks for survivors to share their views and experiences. At present, this work is undertaken at the County level, given its wider remit for issues relating to domestic abuse. This fact, however, only became apparent to the Review Group very late on in the process, indicating that whilst such work is taking place, it is not necessarily well-publicised. The Review Group suggests that there is potential for the voices of these groups to be reviewed or strengthened to ensure that they are connected with Council services appropriately.<sup>21</sup>

**Recommendation 6: That the Council works with strategic partners to review and, if necessary, strengthen the connection between existing lived-experience groups and the Council's services.**

109. Finally, the importance of engaging with the local community. The Commission recognises that the Council has its responsibilities around domestic abuse, but it has neither the capacity, the resources, nor the reach to bring about lasting change on its own. That change relies on ownership by local communities, and for that sometimes significant effort must be made to involve them meaningfully in the conversation. For an illustration of the investment made in community consultation, the Commission undertook over 55 focus groups with over 500 residents, plus interviews, as well as a resident survey. Again, the Review Group recognises that the Commission is a particularly well-

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<sup>21</sup> For readers who have lived experience and would like to contribute towards shaping Council and wider domestic-abuse work please contact Liz Jones, Domestic Abuse Coordinator at [ljones3@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:ljones3@oxford.gov.uk)

resourced case, but the overall point that working with communities to bring about change remains valid, even when the problem of domestic abuse appears not to be as acute.

110. An aspect of community engagement that was brought to the Review Group's attention was the importance of being sensitive to the way in which engagement is done and information is shared. In discussion, the Review Group talked about the positive feedback experienced by residents from the hubs, which the Council set up following the pandemic, and the increased willingness of some members of the community to access information through this route. If the hubs are being more effective at reaching certain sections of the community, the Review Group suggests that it would be appropriate to undertake a project specifically to consider how that increased accessibility can be leveraged to support victims and reduce incidences of domestic abuse.
111. One issue to note in this, however, is that sensitive handling of domestic abuse issues is a skill which requires training; workers operating beyond their capability and experience increase risk both for themselves, for the organisation and the victim. As such, the strongest use of the hubs would be for low-risk work, recognising the signs of domestic abuse and what to do if they arise, knowing who to contact if a disclosure is made, and being aware of the existing domestic abuse services and pathways in order to signpost or help residents access them.

**Recommendation 7: That the Council trains the staff at its hubs to recognise domestic abuse and know how to respond, to know who to speak to in the event of a disclosure, and to be able to signpost appropriately to support services.**

112. Related to this, Councillors are often involved in similarly 'front-line' engagement with their ward members and other residents. As such, in the course of their responsibilities they too are in a position where they may suspect, witness or have domestic abuse disclosed to them. The Review Group suggests, therefore, that Councillors are given the same opportunities to be trained around domestic abuse awareness, signposting options, and where to find suitable professional support to manage suspected, witnesses or disclosed domestic abuse sensitively and in a risk-managed way.

**Recommendation 8: That the Council makes available training and resources to Councillors to enable them to recognise domestic abuse and know how to respond, to know who to speak to in the event of a disclosure, and to be able to signpost appropriately to support services.**

113. As a final point to note, although the detail of the outcomes of the Commission are not yet known, the issues that they cluster around are. The Review Group is pleased to note that they mirror closely its own lines of enquiry, and are a confirmation of its approach. For reference, the areas on which the Commission intends to report are on

- Professionals and services
- Healthy relationships
- Children and young people
- Trauma-informed support
- Community awareness
- Perpetrator intervention and challenging abusive behaviour
- Empowering community groups

## Part 4: Housing

114. As referenced in the Background, the Council's responsibilities around housing form its most direct intervention into issues of domestic abuse. These responsibilities primarily break down into two: supporting those who are or are at risk of homelessness when domestic abuse is a factor, and managing the housing issues which arise when domestic abuse is perpetrated.
115. The Review Group sought to understand the outworkings of these responsibilities, and to identify particular weaknesses.

### **Victims at Risk of Homelessness**

#### Housing Options

116. Under the Housing Act 1996 part 7 as amended, the Council has a duty to provide housing advice and assistance to customers who are homeless or may be threatened with homelessness. Fatheya Latif, Housing Options Manager, presented to the Review Group on how the Council fulfils this duty in regard to those who face homelessness due to domestic abuse, and the impact of Covid on the number of people presenting as homeless or at risk of homeless owing to domestic abuse. The second of these issues has been included within the Local Context section of this report.
117. An individual who contacts the Council's Housing Options team as homeless or at risk of homelessness is given an appointment at which the available options are discussed. Meetings can be arranged on the same day if necessary. This is the same for those facing domestic abuse as for other causes of homelessness. As part of this appointment, information regarding proof of identity, income and the details of any children are requested, but this documentary proof can be provided at a later date.
118. For those facing domestic abuse, the main options are as follows. If an individual is facing imminent danger, refuge is an option. There are, however, drawbacks to refuge, which may not make it suitable to all. It is and should be a last resort for those who need to flee from their current home to a location unknown (outside of Oxfordshire) and

unknowable to the perpetrator. For many survivors it is neither required nor desired. When it is needed, there are still issues to overcome, such as rules on the age of male children who can be housed, as well as the prohibition on housing those whose immigration status gives them no recourse to public funds. If those obstacles are overcome, fleeing to refuge comes with significant costs including the removal of family and other support networks, taking children out of school, moving away from formal support networks and known services.

119. An alternative option is temporary accommodation. This is not as secure as refuge accommodation, in that the location of the Council's temporary accommodation is not confidential. This is particularly the case at present under the 'Everyone In' policy, where the Council is relying on a small number of providers who can offer the requisite individual bedrooms and washing facilities to prevent the spread of Covid. Further, this accommodation is not suitable for families. However, the County Council is in the process of developing three additional 'places of safety' to the two that currently exist, individual properties to act as temporary accommodation which are capable of housing families and not just individuals. At present, those with no recourse to public funds are being temporarily accommodated through the Everyone In policy, but this situation is likely, when the pandemic situation eases, to reverse.

120. On the subject of 'places of safety' the Review Group makes a recommendation. Places of safety are preferable to refuges in a number of ways. Firstly, they are a much more stable environment for families to move to; those fleeing domestic abuse to a refuge are expected to share space with other families who have also undergone significant trauma. Sharing living space is challenging at the best of times, and the situations leading to refuge accommodation could not be described as that. A place of safety is particularly valuable for those with religious or cultural needs, such as Sabbath rituals and strictures, or prohibitions on the consumption of alcohol. In addition, places of safety can accommodate males, whereas some refuges will not cater for male children over 12 and typically do not accept adult men. Finally, although seemingly small, for some, the welfare of pets can actually be sufficient to make victims stay with a perpetrator.

121. For the reasons above, the Review Group is strongly in support of additional development of places of safety and welcomes the news that ODAS are in the process of working with the County Council to identify three additional homes, which would take the number to 5 in total. As one of the major house-builders and house owners in the City, the Review Group is keen that the Council work with ODAS and the County Council to explore whether any of its own current or future stock would be suitable to be made into a 'place of safety'.

**Recommendation 9: That the Council continues to work with ODAS and the County Council to explore the suitability of its own current or future housing stock being recommissioned as a 'place of safety'**

122. In discussion of 'places of safety' a concern was raised in relation to a County-Council run housing project for young mothers on Bullingdon Road. Once it had become known that vulnerable women were living there, the site attracted a lot of men seeking to prey on the residents. The Review Group both recommends that this is brought up with the County Council, but also that steps are taken with 'places of safety' to ensure that they do not become well-known as a site for housing vulnerable women.

**Recommendation 10: That the Council contacts the County Council with its concerns over the safety of vulnerable women from predatory behaviour by men at the Bullingdon Road Young Mothers project.**

**Recommendation 11: That the Council seeks that steps are taken to ensure that houses designated as 'places of safety' do not become well-known as such and a target for predatory behaviour.**

123. Returning to the ways the Council can help individuals through the Housing Options team, those who are happy to move to a property in the private rented sector may be given support to do so, with the Council providing support to find suitable properties, and also providing financial assistance with the deposit or advance rent.

124. For those who wish to stay in their property, a referral to the Sanctuary Scheme can be made to 'target harden' the property (more info below).

125. Individuals presenting with a risk of homelessness, so long as they meet the eligibility criteria, will be offered support with being registered on the Housing Register, or if they are already on it, support with moving. The way that this relates to those fleeing domestic abuse is detailed in the section below.

126. One issue questioned by the Review Group was the cause of people applying for a Housing Options assessment, but then not proceeding to a homelessness application, and whether that was suggestive of an issue causing unnecessary vulnerability to those facing domestic abuse. It was suggested to the Review Group that this was unlikely to be the case. Reasons for not progressing are multiple. Some simply want to know their options, others will prefer to apply for housing elsewhere, referrals to the Sanctuary Scheme would not be counted as proceeding but would still be a positive outcome.

### Allocations

127. The Council's Allocations Scheme is used to assess housing need and to prioritise between the needs of different households for the limited pool of social housing as it

becomes available. Tom Porter, Allocations Manager, spoke to the Review Group on how the Council's scheme works in relation to housing domestic abuse victims.<sup>22</sup>

128. The Oxford Register for Affordable Housing covers, with some very minor exceptions related to older-people's housing, access to all social housing in Oxford – Council properties and those provided by Registered Social Landlords. The Housing Register is managed by Oxford City Council, which applies the Allocations Scheme to determine priority for housing.
129. Within the Housing Register there exist three different housing lists: the homeless list, for those the Council has a statutory duty to house and are waiting in temporary accommodation, the transfers list, for those within the City wishing to move house, and the general list, for those who are not included in the other two. It is possible for individuals in refuges, if they are not deemed homeless (for example, if they are fleeing domestic abuse but are a home owner), to be placed on the general list.
130. As with others seeking to be put on the Housing Register, those fleeing domestic abuse must meet the eligibility criteria. Eligibility is based on immigration status; those with no recourse to public funds are unable to be put on the Housing Register. In addition to eligibility criteria, qualifying criteria are usually imposed, such as having a local connection, having less than £16k in savings, and not being responsible for anti-social behaviour or arrears.<sup>23</sup> However, in the case of domestic abuse these can be waived.<sup>24</sup> This means, for example, that a victim of domestic abuse is not prevented from finding accommodation elsewhere because the abuser has developed debts on their behalf. The Council tends to be more accommodating and applies exceptions more readily than some of the other Registered Social Landlords locally, particularly around rent.
131. As part of an individual's application to go onto the Housing Register, the urgency of their housing need is assessed. The basis for this assessment is laid down in legislation which identifies 'reasonable preference groups' who hold particular needs for housing. Individuals facing domestic abuse tend to fall into two of these groups, either being homeless or facing homelessness, or needing to move due to health or social and welfare grounds.
132. As the means of prioritisation, those applying to go onto the Housing Register will have their housing need banded, with the majority falling into Band 5 (low or no priority need) and very few being placed in Band 1 (exceptional need). Domestic abuse does not automatically correspond to a specific band, but instead the level of risk is assessed on the facts of the case. Generally speaking, those who are moved into temporary

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<sup>22</sup> Though by law the Council must have an Allocation Scheme, councils have some flexibility over how it operates, meaning that there are similar but not identical approaches between Councils.

<sup>23</sup> Having a local connection is also the way that a person fleeing domestic abuse to Oxford can move to the City, and is dealt with the same way through the Allocations Scheme.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, for reasons of risk the local connection criterion cannot be applied in domestic abuse cases.

accommodation are placed in Band 3. The Council does have, for those who are in higher priority bands, the ability to make a direct match, which enables it to avoid the delay of the Choice Based Letting system. This can be particularly useful for high-risk individuals with uncommon housing requirements, such as five bedroom houses.

133. Although a general recommendation has been made about the Council adopting the definition of domestic abuse as contained within the Domestic Abuse Bill, the Review Group is keen to point out a good example of the changes that need to be made. The current Allocations Policy makes reference to domestic violence, but domestic abuse is far broader than just violence. The Review Group considers this to be an important omission; non-violent forms of abuse can have a compounding effect on risk levels. An individual with no access to their money is more vulnerable than one with money, such that they are more likely to stay with someone even if they do become violent. Embedding the broader definition of domestic abuse is key to ensuring that the systems that are in place to support vulnerable people do not accidentally exclude them through poor definitions.

**Recommendation 12: That the Council refreshes its allocations scheme to change references from ‘domestic violence’ to ‘domestic abuse’, and that when it is adopted as law, the definition of domestic abuse as included within the Domestic Abuse Bill be included as an ‘exceptional circumstance’ in relation to housing prioritisation.**

134. A further issue relating to the Council’s allocations scheme arises from the report referenced in Part 1 on the Whole Housing Approach. The report cites the fact that a dearth of move-on accommodation is a contributor to the halving of available places for women in refuges. Though refuges meet the basic threshold of being a place of safety, they are not an environment from which women (and children) can begin to rebuild. Thus, insufficient move-on accommodation is negative in two ways, preventing those who need a place of safety from accessing it, and trapping those who have stabilised sufficiently to move on. The Review Group considers, therefore, that whilst demand for refuges remain high, the Council should increase the priority for move-on from refuge accommodation of women (and in this case it will be only women) who have been facing domestic abuse.

**Recommendation 13: That the Council increases the priority for move-on accommodation of women who have been facing domestic abuse for as long as the availability of refuge provision remains historically further beyond supply.**

135. One issue discussed at length by the Review Group was the process of those wishing to move away from Oxford, and switch to a different area. In a direct swap scenario, where tenants from different areas simply switch houses, this presents a high risk that a perpetrator will be able to find out where their victim has moved to by exerting pressure on the new tenants. In order to obviate this risk, a chain of swaps is required whereby

person A moves into person B's house, person B into person C's, and person C into person A's. The Review Group was assured that this is routinely offered, though it can take longer to organise.

## **Domestic Abuse within Council Properties**

136. Ann Phillips, Tenancy Management Manager, briefed the Review Group on how the Council manages the housing issues arising from a report of domestic abuse. When domestic abuse is reported to the Council a DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence) assessment is likely (though not always) undertaken in order to determine the level of risk the individual faces, and to ensure that all relevant other bodies are involved in the case.
137. Reports of domestic abuse by Council tenants are passed to the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour team, who are responsible for investigating reports of domestic abuse and taking enforcement action against a perpetrator in the non-criminal sphere. Where necessary, a perpetrator can be evicted on the basis of the Council's standard tenancy agreement terms, which allows the Council to seek possession of the property on the basis of a breach, including the clause 'You must not assault, threaten or harass any person living with you or sexually harass or emotionally abuse them or cause psychological harm, such that the person can no longer live peacefully in the Property.' This however, is rare in that it requires the consent of the other party who, despite the abuse, may not be ready to make that step. The threshold for the court to grant the Council possession is also high.
138. The role of the Tenancy Management team is to assist the tenant to find alternative accommodation (if that is their wish) or emergency temporary accommodation if this is recommended by the Police. They will arrange removals and any other practical help, with furnishings or assistance with utilities that they may require.
139. The suite of options the Council can provide to someone after facing domestic abuse regarding their housing situation is dependent on whether the individual has a tenancy for the property in which they are living and, if so, whether they occupy the property as a sole tenant of a joint tenant.
140. For those living in a property with no tenancy, the Council's options are fairly limited. Refuge options will be explored, though these are not always the best option. Aside from this, the Council will look at whether family or friends are able to accommodate the individual, or whether a homelessness application should be made, in area or elsewhere.
141. The task is simplest for those who hold sole tenancies to the properties which they occupy. The Council is able to offer to facilitate a move to an alternative property (again, either in or out of area), or is otherwise able to secure the property through the Sanctuary Scheme (more details below).

142. For those victims who held a joint tenancy with the perpetrator, it is possible for the victim to remain in the property. The Council can rely on the McGrady principle<sup>25</sup> to ask the court to amend the tenancy from a joint tenancy into a sole tenancy. However, practically, it is often easier to encourage the tenant to give notice to end their tenancy, and then reallocate the same property to them under a new tenancy.
143. On the basis of this, the Review Group's primary focus in discussion was over how the decision of whether to provide a property on a sole tenancy basis or a joint tenancy basis was made. Victims of domestic abuse face greater difficulty in extricating themselves from abusive situations if they have nowhere else to go and have no way to force their abuser out of the property in which they are living, suggesting that ensuring joint tenancies were the norm would reduce risk. The reality, in fact, is not so simple. The gender breakdown of sole tenants weighs heavily towards women, largely a function of the priority given to single mothers for housing. For these women, having sole tenancies rather than joint tenancies affords an additional level of protection in that they can secure their own home with greater ease if an abusive situation arises. Whilst joint tenancies do bring greater resilience to those with none, they do also dilute the protections of those who give up their sole tenancy. The challenge, therefore, is to identify those who are vulnerable and would benefit from the increased protection of a joint tenancy rather than to pursue a general drive towards expanding joint tenancies.
144. In general, it is rare, if two people plan to live in a home together, that the Council will grant a sole tenancy to one individual or the other. The key exception is when one person, more often a female, has no recourse to public funds and is therefore not eligible to be a tenant on a publicly-funded property. It is possible to change a tenancy agreement with the agreement of the tenant to reflect new circumstances, such as the resolution of a person's immigration status. However, proactively identifying these changes in circumstance is a challenge for the Council. Tenancy update visits do occur, but the size of the Council's housing stock relative to the resource available to make such visits makes this inefficient to rely on. A further factor which makes this difficult is GDPR, and restrictions on internal information sharing. A tenant whose status has changed may well contact the Council and inform them, for example, that their immigration status (and therefore benefit status) has changed. Their assumption is that the Council is able to share this information freely internally, and that they have informed the Council.
145. Related to information sharing was a concern over how precautions over vulnerability could be communicated between departments. The example explored being the situation in which a joint tenancy in which there had been domestic abuse and the victim had moved away, whether the Council would be in danger of inadvertently sharing the victim's new address with their abuser via the rent statement. The risk of such

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<sup>25</sup> Arising from the case McGrady vs London Borough of Greenwich 1982

inadvertent sharing is magnified by the adoption the QL system, which integrates the work of more teams. At present, teams are notified by the Tenancy Management team not to share address details, but without being given the reason why. The new QL system will also allow a person to be flagged as vulnerable, without giving the exact reason why. The particular risk of inadvertent sharing of addresses through rent statements is also managed at source, by changing the address on the file to St Aldate's Chambers; rent statements are automatically generated and sent out by an external company and posting them to St Aldate's Chambers means they get into the hands of people who know how to process the information without breaching confidentiality.

146. There exists, therefore, a tension. On the one hand, in order to be able to support vulnerable people to become more secure by proactively presenting the option of joint tenancies, there needs to be a free flow of information between departments. On the other hand, greater flows of information within an automated system carry risks of inadvertent oversharing. This is a complex topic, which is beyond the Review Group's capacity to solve. However, the Review Group is pleased to hear that discussions are already taking place on how to manage this tension.

### **Other Housing Related Recommendations**

147. Below are a number of other recommendations pertinent to the housing of victims of domestic abuse which arose out of the Review Group's discussions with local providers of services, rather than the Council's officers.
148. Firstly, in light of the feedback from both Reducing the Risk and Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, who offer support to those at high and medium risk from domestic abuse, both highlighted that housing was the single biggest area of difficulty for them in supporting their clients to better outcomes. The Review Group recognises that the problem cited around move-on housing does exist, but also notes that the Council has agreed to a programme in which its housing stock will expand by 15% over the next decade but makes some recommendations in the interim. Its greater concerns are over reports of the regularity with which perpetrators remain in the property, and the apparent disconnection whereby the Council is reported not to offer domestic abuse victims alternative accommodation in the City.
149. Regarding the first of these issues, the Review Group notes that this is a common problem. As stated in the Whole Housing Approach report 'Housing providers play a key role in holding perpetrators to account. To date, our work has focused on social housing and the positive engagement and enforcement activities available to them. Research by Henderson showed that a high proportion of housing providers include perpetration of domestic abuse as a tenancy breach (72.6%)... Despite the high percentage of housing providers including perpetration of domestic abuse as a tenancy breach, just over half (53.8%) of respondents' organisations had taken any action against perpetrators of abuse, highlighting a gap between policy and action.' (p.28).

150. Having reviewed the tenancy agreements made by the Council, the Review Group is of the view that they are already sufficiently robust to allow the Council to seek possession on the grounds of domestic abuse. The issue is that the Council does not use its power regularly, rather than the powers being insufficient. The rarity of this happening may largely be not the responsibility of the Council; such an action will only be taken with the support of the victim, and this can often be withheld. Nevertheless, the fact that this is an issue recognised by the local specialist support providers indicates some degree of residual mismatch between what is wanted and what is delivered. One alternative to eviction is to seek an injunction against the perpetrator coming to the house. This has the benefit of action being brought on behalf of individuals outside the domestically abusive household (neighbours, for example). For those victims who are not ready to seek the eviction of their abuser, in all likelihood ending their relationship, an injunction makes the home a safe space but allows the relationship to continue.

151. The Review Group considers that the default position should be that any victim adjudged to be at high risk needs protection, and a safe home environment. It feels that the Council should, in these situations, use its powers to create this safe environment unless there are overriding reasons not to.

**Recommendation 14: That in the absence of other mitigating factors, the Council will pursue a policy of seeking to remove a perpetrator from the home in situations where a perpetrator is adjudged to be a high risk to the victim.**

152. This being said, the Review Group recognises that it has not had legal opinion on the robustness of the tenancy agreement for putting it to the Review Group's suggested purpose, and would therefore welcome that it be reviewed. It would recommend that any strengthened text is made available to local housing associations and letting agents, to allow free adoption of these powers by non-Council landlords.

**Recommendation 15: That the Council reviews the strength of the clause(s) regarding anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse in Council tenancies and provides a model paragraph for inclusion in tenancies let via housing associations/private landlords with the aim to make it easier to evict tenants who perpetrate domestic abuse.**

153. One means by which the Council could achieve the above (and a lot more besides) is through seeking accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, as referenced in Part 1. The Henderson report referred to in para 149 states that 'housing providers have found that they are in a better position to challenge and support perpetrators through receiving training and DAHA accreditation'.

154. The Review Group is fully supportive of the Council seeking accreditation, and indeed would do so on this ground alone. However, the feedback of the Review Group's external witnesses has been unanimous in highlighting the multiple ways in which housing can fail

to meet the needs of domestic abuse victims at best, and be actively hostile and inflict great trauma to those already vulnerable, at worst. This Review Group has had some opportunity to look into issues, but it recognises its own limitations of knowledge and resource. It would welcome a far more comprehensive look at the issue by professionals in the area, the achievement of which would put the Council as one of fewer than ten DAHA accredited Councils in the country.

**Recommendation 16: That the Council seeks DAHA accreditation for its housing services.**

155. If the Council were to proceed with DAHA accreditation the recommendations below may be rendered unnecessary. Alternatively, they may form part of the way the Council is awarded accreditation. Regardless of which obtains, the Review Group's observations and recommendations are included for completeness.
156. The other area brought up by the Review Group's local external witnesses is the regularity with which the wishes of the victims of domestic abuse are overridden by concerns over safety. As previously mentioned, the Review Group was assured that this issue was not Council policy, which the Review Group welcomes. Nevertheless, it is a problem reported by both of the main support agencies for domestic abuse locally. Having good policy counts for very little if it is not delivered on the front line.
157. The Review Group does note that during the meeting at which Reducing the Risk and Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service attended it was agreed to set up a meeting to discuss these issues. The Review Group welcomes this openness to discussion. This meeting has not, however, taken place. In actual fact, this is beneficial. The Review Group would welcome broader discussion and coordination between the Council and specialist domestic abuse agencies to improve services than to focus simply on this issue. The Council has recently appointed a Domestic Abuse Specialist worker, part of whose role is to explore and map in detail the pathways and issues experienced by those victims of domestic abuse who engage with the Council. This work would create a more thorough and comprehensive framework for closer working than addressing one specific issue. It is likely also that if the Council does seek DAHA accreditation, partnership working and coordination would be an issue which it would have to consider, which also suggests that there is benefit to taking the slower but more comprehensive approach.

**Recommendation 17: That the Council, once the work of its Domestic Abuse Specialist in mapping pathways and experiences of victims who engage with the Council's work is complete, engages closely with specialist domestic abuse support providers to improve the outcomes and experience of victims in their interaction with the Council.**

158. A further issue to flag, which is liable to be raised by DAHA accreditation, is whether the particular stresses and challenges domestic abuse puts on its victims means that the

standard processes for managing housing issues are unlikely ever to be sufficiently flexible. In that case, it may be that in the same way that the Council has a dedicated pathway for the management of people reporting as homeless, it should have a set of processes which are designed solely to manage sensitively and effectively the challenges that domestic abuse creates. Whilst further discussion with other key stakeholders as detailed above will inform that judgement, the Review Group's view is that such an approach is warranted, though as stated, it may be subsumed into the wider work necessary for DAHA accreditation.

**Recommendation 18: That the Council develops a clear domestic abuse pathway for managing housing of domestic abuse victims**

159. A final point made to the Review Group by one of its other external witnesses, AFiUK, is one upon which the Review Group wishes to see action. As mentioned previously, ethnically diverse victims of domestic abuse can end up relocating to places which have few cultural support networks. Whilst they are safe from danger, through no fault of their own many find themselves in a situation in which they need to recover from a traumatic experience without culturally-relevant support. Processing one's experience with others is, for example, much more difficult in a foreign language than in one's own. The Review Group considers that it would not be a significant amount of work to take steps to ensure that the suggested move location is one with culturally appropriate support.

**Recommendation 19: That the Council takes proactive steps to ensure appropriate cultural support is available to individuals moving out of Oxford.**

## **Sanctuary Scheme**

160. As mentioned above, the Council runs Sanctuary Scheme. Relative to Councils elsewhere it is given a higher degree of prominence in that it has a dedicated officer to manage it. This results of this investment are evident in the feedback received by the Review Group's external witnesses, with Reducing the Risk viewing it as 'gold standard' and 'the best' and ODAS concurring.

161. The scheme offers a free 'target hardening' service for anybody who has been subject to domestic abuse once the perpetrator has moved out, as well as to those who have suffered child sexual exploitation or other sexual abuse or been stalked. Target hardening identifies measures that can be undertaken to the property to ensure that they are secure, and that threatened individuals can be safe from the perpetrator in their own homes. This work can vary from simply changing locks to more significant works to install CCTV, secure doors and windows to adding anti-climb fencing or putting in fire-proof letterboxes.

162. The scheme accepts referrals from the police, social care or other domestic abuse services, as well as self-referrals. In the last year 121 referrals have been received with approximately 60% of referees holding Council tenancies, 30% living in properties owned

by other registered social landlords, 9% in private rented accommodation and 1% homeowners. The main demographic group using the service are women between the ages of 25 and 55, with 57% being white and 47% from BAME communities. This indicates that the scheme's reach into BAME communities is good; proportionally more are accessing the service than are present in the general population.

163. The work undertaken can vary based on the homeowner. The Council, for example, has an agreement with ODS to undertake the works, but private landlords may be unwilling to pay for increased safety measures. In these cases, work may be limited to those things which are low cost.
164. For this reason or other, practical, reasons the Sanctuary Scheme can run an assessment and conclude that, even with an intervention, the level of threat to the person living at the property remains too high. In that instance, instead of undertaking work to the property the scheme will work with colleagues to rehouse the threatened individual(s). The passing of the Domestic Abuse Bill will make this a more regular proposition. At the moment, those who hold a secure tenancy to a property forfeit that secure tenancy if they move into another property, or even into a refuge. This can have the effect of encouraging individuals to stay in higher risk situations because they do not wish to lose their valuable secure tenancy. In the proposed Domestic Abuse Bill, secure tenancies will become transferable when moving owing to domestic abuse, reducing the barriers to moving away from danger.
165. A real-life case study of the work undertaken by the scheme is below.
- “The Sanctuary Scheme received a referral from the National Crime Agency based on a credible death threat against a mother and her parents. The perpetrator of the threat was already in prison for attempted murder, but the Police believed a second attempt was being planned by an associate in the community. Despite lockdown, Council departments worked hard together to get the mother and child moved, along with her parents, into two properties within 48 hours. Security assessments for the new properties were undertaken over video, and ODS staff agreed to undertake works to make them secure despite the lockdown.”
166. The Review Group welcomes the work of the Sanctuary Scheme as a life-saving service provided by the Council and only has one recommendation to make. This is simply that as vital as it is, the service is currently only funded year on year. The Review Group is mindful that the window for influencing the 2021/22 budget has passed, and that an election is scheduled before the next budget. Nevertheless, it wishes to make a clear recommendation that it considers this work to be absolutely vital, and that the Council should commit to funding the scheme for the duration of the next Medium Term Financial Strategy period of four years.

**Recommendation 20: That the Council includes within its budget provision for the cost of the Sanctuary Scheme for the duration of the next Medium Term Financial Plan, rather than reconfirming its funding year on year.**

## **Part 5: Specific Issues for Ethnic Minority Victims**

167. Gaining a granular understanding of the issues faced by members of the BAME community would have taken more time than was available to the Review Group. In March 2020, however, the Thames Valley BAMER (Black, Asian, Minority-Ethnic and Refugee) Project concluded. The two-year project was funded by the Home Office and worked across nine local authorities (including Oxford City Council) as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner in the Thames Valley. The project sought to identify the barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who are subjected to abuse or violence (including domestic abuse) when needing to access support, and to identify lessons for improving service responses. In October 2020 the findings of the project were published in a report. This report, in addition to the learning provided by the Group's external expert witnesses, has been used as the basic framework for guiding the Review Group's exploration around the specific challenges faced by ethnically diverse communities regarding domestic abuse.
168. The executive summary of this report is available as Appendix 5A to this report, and the full report as Appendix 5B.

### **Thames Valley BAMER Project Report Summary**

169. An excerpted list of the issues identified in the report's executive summary is detailed below as context for the Review Group's own discussion.

#### **Universal credit**

The single payment policy of universal credit is disempowering to women whose spouses are already financially controlling and prevents any opportunity to develop the financial independence required to escape abuse.

#### **Communication**

Availability and capacity of BAMER Support Workers, and of professionals in other agencies can lead to delays and mis-timings in communication. This is especially true when women experiencing abuse through controlling behaviour often have very narrow windows of opportunity to be in contact with professionals.

#### **Emergency accommodation**

The availability and timeliness of access to emergency accommodation is limited and this presents significant barriers and risks to women who may choose to remain in an abusive situation because accommodation is not accessible. When available, accommodation may not be culturally appropriate, creating the same dilemma for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

#### **Understanding and assessing risk for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds**

BAMER Support Workers found that agencies undertaking DASH RIC assessments with women from ethnically diverse backgrounds would often miss or misunderstand information which was relevant to risk for the individual concerned due to a lack of cultural awareness. Pre-existing risks had gone unseen by agencies involved; this may be due to women not feeling safe to disclose to professionals they did not trust, or they disclosed in a way that is not interpreted in the way they intend by professionals from white Western culture. This could result in missed opportunities to intervene and provide appropriate safety planning at the earliest stage, requiring remedial work from BAMER Support Workers.

### Interpreting services

The use of non-independent (family or local community member) interpreters is common amongst some agencies and is problematic for the disclosure of abuse or discussion of any sensitive topics. When professional interpreters are used nuances of a narrative can still be missed, either due the service being accessed over the phone instead of face-to-face, or because of colloquial differences in language. Cost is often a factor in agency decisions about use of interpreters.

### Working with clients without recourse to public funds

Support services and other resources (e.g. housing) are severely limited for women with no recourse to public funds, which creates significant vulnerabilities for women experiencing violence or abuse whilst in this situation. Where resources are available, access to them is often complex and or time-consuming, each compounding the vulnerability and risk faced by women in these scenarios.

### Scarcity of services and community groups

The mapping exercise found there are few services in the Thames Valley specialising in issues experienced by women from ethnic minority communities. Those addressing violence and abuse do not have specialist BAMER Workers (except for within this project), although they do offer support around honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. There are skilled specialised organisations operating at a national level, but there remains a significant gap for women needing to access local specialist services.

The mapping of community groups proved challenging, as they often exist as informal groups with no 'formal' footprint, e.g. offices, website, public accounts etc. Some groups that were identified did not wish to engage with the project, and more are believed to exist than those identified.

### Funding issues

Funding in the VAWG sector is scarce, and for minority groups within that, even scarcer. Where funding is available, capacity and sustainability are often significant issues, and resources such as interpreter services or translated written materials are often not acknowledged/permitted in grants and commissioned services. Additionally, community groups also face funding issues with uncertain futures.

170. Whilst clearly all the topics identified are important, the combination of the Council's responsibilities, the time constraints faced and focus of feedback from external witnesses mean that the primary direction of the Review Group's work in this area has been around ESOL and those with no recourse to public funds. The Review Group does address funding issues also, but as part of its consideration of grant funding.

## **English as a Second or Other Language**

171. With its responsibility for adult learning and its role as the lead commissioner for domestic abuse services, the primary responsibility for translation and interpretation services in relation to domestic abuse victims falls with the County Council. The City Council, for its own services is well equipped, using the same company as the BBC. This being the case, the Review Group is of the view that there is little that the City Council should be doing in direct response to interpretation and translation issues, but that it can and should contribute indirectly by mitigating and reducing the barriers experienced by those who do not speak English, or do so as a second language.
172. Two key recommendation suggested by Oxford Against Cutting to the Review Group concerned the importance of running initiatives which empower potential victims and promoting access amongst BAME communities to specialist services and raising awareness of what is on offer. Both are issues which have language as a core component.
173. To an extent, the Council does already run programmes which empower potential victims through its grants programme. The Youth Ambition Programme is an example of this. Likewise, it is pursuing an action plan to increase the diversity of its workforce, which is under-represented by women at the higher grades, and ethnically diverse communities throughout. As referenced above, the funding (such as it is) for English language classes is available to the County Council, meaning that it is not the suggestion of the Review Group that further classes be run by the City Council. Where the Council is well situated to help is in publication and its links with community groups through its grant funding programme and its community centre provision. At such time as lockdown measures are eased sufficiently to allow the return to community centres, the Review Group would wish to see a mapping and communication exercise to be undertaken to present appropriately the opportunities for ESOL learning in the City at the Council's community centres, and for the same information to be sent to community groups with which the Council has direct contact.

**Recommendation 21: That the Council runs a mapping and awareness-raising exercise of the opportunities in Oxford for ESOL classes, aimed particularly at its community centres users and grant recipients.**

174. Along a similar line, the Review Group wishes to highlight the good working relationship the Council has with supporting Oxford Against Cutting to promote its information campaigns. Strong cross-working is reported, not only by those directly engaged with domestic abuse-related issues, but even extends to the post room, where the Council supports their work through providing competitive posting rates.
175. Given the importance of language as a barrier for non-native English speakers in accessing services, it is perhaps unsurprising that the BAED Worlds Group, which looks specifically at barriers for ethnic minorities in accessing domestic abuse services, is devoting a significant amount of its attention to the issue of interpretation and translation.

176. Although it is important that professional translators and interpreters be available in the appropriate situations, community translation services are still of value. The Review Group believes that the County Council previously paid to train 14 community interpreters covering 14 languages, but that this resource is not currently being used. The Review Group would like to see whether this source of translation and interpretation services, which has already been paid for, might be brought back into use.

**Recommendation 22: That the Council raises with the BAED Worlds Group, including the County Council representative, the existence of 14 previously trained community interpreters, with a view to investigating whether and how their services may be used to improve access for non-native English speakers to domestic-abuse related support.**

177. Although publicising existing language classes and maximising uptake by those who would benefit is clearly a good thing, what it does not confront is the paucity of classes that are available in the first place. In the decade from 2008 to 2018, government spending on providing ESOL courses fell by over 60%.<sup>26</sup> Whilst such classes are desirable on wider integration grounds, as the external witnesses to the Review Group shared, the inability to speak English erects huge barriers to victims in escaping their abusers. The Review Group is of the view that this is a fundamental error of policy by the government, one which costs lives. It asks, therefore, that the Leader write to the Minister for Communities, Housing and Local Government to lobby for an increase in ESOL funding.

**Recommendation 23: That the Leader writes to the minister at MCHLG to highlight the impact that the huge cuts to English languages classes have on domestic abuse victims.**

## **No Recourse to Public Funds**

178. One particular issue of concern to the Review Group was over whether victims of domestic abuse were having their data shared by the Police with immigration officials when seeking help, and the barriers that would be creating for those with insecure immigration status in seeking help.

179. One particular concern of the Review Group derived from a super-complaint lodged against the Police for sharing immigration status information captured from individuals when seeking safety from domestic abuse by Liberty and the Southall Black Sisters. The effect of this activity was creating a significant barrier to those with insecure immigration status from seeking help. In December 2020 the Police Inspectorate upheld the complaint, recognising that ‘the UK aspires to be a humane, liberal democracy where the criminal justice system does not punish people for being victims but recognises and

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/new-research-shows-refugees-suffering-from-lack-of-english-classes-despite-strong-public-support-for-action-by-government/>

protects them. Government policy is clear that victims of crime should be treated without discrimination. We agree with Liberty and Southall Black Sisters that harm is currently being caused to the public interest and that this needs to be addressed.’ A review has been recommended to bring clarity on how best to achieve this.

180. Within the super-complaint it was recognised that across different police forces approaches varied, and it was unclear where the lines were. The Review Group has contacted Thames Valley Police, and the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit in Oxford has confirmed that Thames Valley Police ‘does not routinely ask victims. It is a long-standing concern and we are not aware of any routine sharing of victim details with the Home Office’. Thames Valley Police also recognised the dissuasive effect sharing would have on those with no recourse to public funds if information-sharing on immigration status were to be routinely passed on.
181. The Review Group welcomes the fact that Thames Valley Police are not erecting immigration-related barriers to those with no recourse to public funds from seeking help when facing domestic abuse. However, it is concerned that public perception, particularly amongst those who have no recourse to public funds, is likely to have been impacted by such stories, with a possible spill-over into wider distrust of public bodies generally, including the Council. The Review Group is keen, therefore, that in a similar way to what it has done with people seeking temporary accommodation from rough sleeping during the ‘Everyone In’ policy, the Council makes an unambiguous statement that seeking support relating to domestic abuse will not mean the sharing of immigration status details with the Home Office and publicises that statement to relevant community groups locally.

**Recommendation 24: That the Council makes a public statement confirming that it will not share immigration status information with the Home Office when individuals come forward for support with domestic abuse, and that it takes steps to publicise this amongst relevant community groups locally.**

182. The two refuges in Oxfordshire do not accept people with no recourse to public funds. At present, the Council is in receipt of unclear advice from MHCLG over providing temporary accommodation to those with no recourse to public funds through the ‘Everyone In’ policy. It is doing so, but as the pandemic eases it likely that the status quo ante will resume and it will cease to be able to do so. When that happens, the Council will cease to be allowed to provide basic housing support for those with no recourse to public funds, including those made homeless owing to domestic abuse.
183. Being aware of the approaching situation in which the Council will be unable to support with housing those rough sleepers who have no recourse to public funds, the Council has been working to develop alternative solutions. Although not agreed, the Council has been working with a group of charities, faith groups and benefactors to seek to develop a system of support outside of the Council to ensure a safety-net exists for those to whom the Council is unable to provide support. The Review Group is in complete agreement with this approach but recognises that those made homeless fleeing

domestic abuse are a subset of homeless people, and have a set of particular needs that would not be met by a generic service. It seeks, therefore, that as this work around wider support for those with no recourse to public funds is developed, that the Council seek that within the broader provision, the specific needs of those fleeing from domestic abuse are incorporated.

**Recommendation 25: That the Council, in the development of networks to support homeless people with no recourse to public funds, ensures that the remit is extended to ensure the specific needs of those made homeless from fleeing domestic abuse are incorporated.**

184. One issue that was raised to the Review Group by Manchester City Council Councillor Amna Abdullatif was that, perhaps uniquely, Manchester City Council has a fund available to support those with no recourse to public funds. The terms of the fund are highly restrictive, with support only available to the destitute. Nevertheless, the fund enables support for legal advice surrounding immigration issues, which can be a stepping-stone for access to other forms of support. The Review Group is mindful of the Council's financial situation following Covid, but with the need for the support available to be very restrictive, the cost may not be high. Consequently, it seeks that the Council find out more, with a view to making a future decision on whether to follow Manchester City Council's lead when an informed decision can be made.

**Recommendation 26: That the Council contacts Manchester City Council to understand the overall cost of providing support for those with no recourse to public funds who are in destitution.**

185. Another local authority area identified as providing a fuller support service for those with no recourse to public funds is Slough, where the MP's office and the Council's work are closely integrated to provide a broader spectrum of support. The Review Group would encourage that the Council investigates this further.

**Recommendation 27: That the Council investigates how Slough Borough Council offer support to those with no recourse to public funds.**

186. Though the Review Group makes a number of recommendations on how to mitigate the particular challenges faced by those individuals with no recourse to public funds when they are facing domestic abuse, the biggest problem lies in the policy itself, a policy which is set by national government. This policy creates huge and unnecessary barriers to individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse from leaving their situation, some of whom do not survive. For individuals in this situation, changing this policy is literally a matter of life and death. The Review Group notes that the Council has already committed to being an anti-racist City through a motion passed on 22 July 2019, and that it has previously taken steps to protect the welfare of those with no recourse to public funds, such as making clear that information given during homelessness support will not be shared with immigration officers. The resounding feedback of those external witnesses

has been of the immense suffering this policy brings, and the Review Group encourages the Council to work with participants of this Review Group and any other relevant local and national agencies to lobby government for an exemption from the no recourse to public funds rules for those experiencing domestic abuse.

**Recommendation 28: That the Council works with relevant local and national organisations to lobby government for an exemption to allow those experiencing domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds to access public support.**

187. With national policy being deeply antagonistic to the needs of those with no recourse to public funds, options for supporting this group of people are limited, despite a clear need. Victims of domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds face no less severe abuse than others, yet they must do so without the safety-net of access to alternative housing, benefits, and often fears relating to immigration-related detainment or deportation and or language difficulties. The Review Group's recommendations above reflect the limited space for manoeuvre dictated by national policy. One suggestion, however, which the Review Group supports, is the concept of flexible payments, as referred to in Part 1. The Review Group does not know why such payments can legally be made to support those with no recourse to public funds whilst others cannot. However, *prima facie*, this option affords the Council a flexible means to make direct interventions to support those with no recourse to public funds. With the average payout made under such schemes being between £600 and £800, the cost need not be unduly burdensome. In light of the paucity of other forms of support for those with no recourse to public funds, the Review Group strongly recommends further investigation to understand the legality and costs surrounding such a scheme, with a strong recommendation that one be established if possible.

**Recommendation 29: That the Council investigates the legalities and cost of implementing a Flexible Funding scheme, with a view to one being established if practicable and legal.**

## **Part 6: Leveraging Council Spending on Grants and Procurement**

188. Following a decade in which local government has been subject to major funding reforms and spending power has reduced substantially, the Council is unusual in the quantity of grant provision it makes locally to the third sector. This provision, however, is dwarfed by the Council's spending procurement. With its grants and procurement spending, the Council has a degree of influence, an influence which it can use to further its priorities. On the basis of this, the Review Group explored how the Council might leverage its spending to reduce domestic abuse.

## **Grant Funding**

189. Oxford City Council Grants Officer, Lydia Ng, made a presentation to the Review Group on the contribution of the Council's grants programme towards preventing domestic abuse or supporting its survivors.
190. The City Council commits over £1.5M in community grants every year. A significant portion of this amount is committed through the commissioning streams, and the non-commissioned open-bidding programme. The activities that the Council is willing to fund through these programmes is set out in the prospectus, the most recent of which is for 2016-20 – this ties the grant funding priorities to those of the wider Council Strategy. The prospectus then forms the criteria for the different programmes.

### **Specific Funding**

191. Under the Council Strategy's Strong and Active Communities priority, the Oxford Community Safety Plan is referenced as a key area to be supported through the funding streams. This plan includes protection from "interpersonal abuse and exploitation, including sexual and domestic abuse, human trafficking, sex working and child sexual exploitation" and the prospectus dictates that the Council is willing to fund organisations that "respond to local concerns and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour through projects providing help and assistance to victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence, sex working and child sexual exploitation". Grant assessment panels, therefore, usually include a representative from the Community Safety Team and the Council's Domestic Abuse Lead, Liz Jones, will have sight of the lists of applicants.
192. In addition to funding via this stream, the Council also has a £61k pot available within the Community Safety commissioning stream. Of this, £35k – over half - is pooled with funding from other Oxfordshire District Councils, the County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for the funding of domestic abuse services across Oxfordshire. For this relatively small sum, the Council derives a lot of value. A2Dominion is the primary organisation contracted in Oxfordshire to deliver domestic abuse services. As part of this service they provide
- A countywide helpline (accessible by phone and email) for members of the public and professionals, which acts as a single point of access for all domestic abuse specialist services in Oxfordshire, including referral into MARAC where necessary;
  - Domestic abuse outreach service for the county for medium risk victims;
  - Refuges: there are 16 refuge places across two properties in the county for victims fleeing from out of Oxfordshire;
  - Places of safety: there are currently two properties offering a 'dispersed refuge' model for victims needing to flee/relocate within Oxfordshire with visiting support via dedicated outreach officers;
  - The Anchor Programme: a groupwork programme for victims and survivors of DA with complex needs;

- A BAME support worker who is furthering the awareness raising and engagement work with BAME communities and taking forward work linked to the recommendations from the BAMER project;
- The IDVA service in South & Vale, delivered via sub-contracting with Reducing the Risk who deliver the IDVA service across the rest of Oxfordshire via independent grant funding.

193. In addition to the Council's direct funding for domestic abuse prevention and mitigation services, a number of the organisations that the Council funds provide services which include some domestic abuse related support, though not necessarily the main focus of their work. A total of £34k per year is made available to Sanctuary Hosting, AFiUK, Asylum Welcome, Oxford Against Cutting, and Homestart.

194. The Council's involvement with such organisations does not simply begin and end with the provision of funding, but there is positive ongoing partnership working, with the Council's Domestic Abuse Lead being regularly involved in the work of these organisations. For example, Sanctuary Hosting were keen to share that Liz Jones helped them to establish a robust system and referral pathway for victims with no recourse to public funds, which has enabled them to offer more support in this area.

195. Overall, in the last financial year the Council has committed close to £90k (£89,607) in funding towards groups that work to address domestic abuse issues.

#### Indirect Impacts

196. The Council's influence on domestic abuse through its grants programme is not limited, however, to those organisations which confront it as an issue directly. Almost any activity which promotes individual resilience or social capital is likely to reduce susceptibility to coercive control, support individuals or communities to recognise and respond to domestic abuse more proactively and at earlier opportunities, or help victims process their trauma. Thus, for example, the Council-funded Iraqi Women Art and War programme seeks to address and process the experience of its (mainly refugee community) members, including their experience of domestic abuse. Though funded primarily for its cultural input, the group nevertheless provides a community in which issues of domestic abuse are neither hidden nor shameful, and a platform through which past experiences can be worked through.

197. In a similar vein, a lot of programmes challenge the negative societal perceptions which carry an increased risk of domestic abuse being perpetrated. For example, the Council-funded Youth Ambition programme have organised as part of their programme activities to challenge negative social norms, including around the perception of women in society, gender inequality, and traditional family roles. The Council's grant funding programme therefore has an effect on domestic abuse beyond its direct funding, even though that effect is difficult to quantify.

## Leveraging Grant Funding

198. In terms of challenging domestic abuse, one of the biggest indirect benefits that the Council's grant funding programme has is the relationship it cultivates with BAME community groups. Given the specific challenges and barriers faced by such groups, working in partnership with these communities to acknowledge, identify and challenge abusive behaviour is vital. Over the past three years the Council has funded 30 BAME community organisations, which will make the work of the Council's newly engaged independent domestic abuse specialist, Becci Seaborne, far easier. The aim of this new worker includes supporting organisations to bring in additional external funding to these groups, but also to broker relationships and support frontline workers engaged with BAME communities to build capital and capability to break down barriers and between these communities and the statutory bodies with responsibility for domestic abuse.
199. The Review Group notes that in light of the Council's financial situation, the overall quantum of grant provision is due to be reduced as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (though it does seek to provide additional support to bring out greater overall value). In this context, it is reluctant, therefore, to call for additional funding for domestic abuse services over other Council priorities, which would see reduced funding. However, the shared testimony of the Review Group's external witnesses all pointed to a situation of cutbacks and underfunding for domestic abuse services. The organisation tasked with supporting high risk victims is not commissioned, but must consistently seek funding to continue its offer, for example. The Review Group's biggest concern, however, is that in an overall environment of funding pressures, BAME-specific needs are squeezed. This leads to a situation in which high risk clients are unlikely to be able to access an interpreter when speaking to an IDVA, and access to Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services remains heavily tilted towards phone access, a medium which has been shown to be a barrier to BAME access of services. BAME access to domestic abuse services is broader than simply a community safety issue; failure to enable such access bleeds out into other Council priorities, such as those around housing and being able to retain a job that pays to live in the City. As such, the Review Group recommends that in the review of the grants pot that is due to take place next financial year, domestic abuse-related funding is increased, and particularly the area of BAME access to support.

**Recommendation 30: That the Council, as part of its upcoming grant funding review, increases the funding available to domestic abuse services, particularly around BAME access to support.**

200. Whilst the Review Group wishes to see increases resourcing for services relating to domestic abuse, to think that all such resources should come from the Council shows a lack of ambition. Securing additional external funding must also be an important component of increasing the resources available; less so for the established organisations doing specialist work on a big scale, but this is a challenge for some. This may be because bid writing is a skill. It does not necessarily follow that in a small organisation which is expert at delivering its aims there is somebody who will have that

skill. The challenge of applying for funding in potentially a foreign language is an additional barrier to some organisations.

201. As referenced above, although the overall quantum of financial support is being reduced in the forthcoming Medium Term Financial Plan, the Council is looking to provide support of equal or greater value than the reductions. The Review Group would welcome the prospect of the Council proactively identifying organisations – particularly those in the BAME community working on domestic-abuse related activities – and helping them identify and successfully apply for external grant funding.

**Recommendation 31: That the Council is proactive in providing support to those organisations which provide domestic-abuse related activities but struggle to attract external funding to identify and successfully apply for external grant funding.**

202. One issue raised to the Review Group has been that of the importance of ‘by and for’ groups in tackling domestic abuse. Unfortunately, by dint of the order in which meetings occurred, a discussion with the Grants Officer was unable to take place. The Review Group is aware that, as per the ‘Keeping the Faith’ report, the Council is supportive in its grants of ‘by and for’ organisations. When dealing with victims of domestic abuse it is particularly important that the vulnerability of the individual is recognised and understood. The key differentiator of ‘by and for’ services is that they understand the additional challenges faced by individuals in that community in providing support. However, to do so they must have the basic understanding of the need to protect the vulnerable person seeking support and the group’s specific place within the wider framework of support for that individual.

**Recommendation 32: That the Council continues to support grant funding to ‘by and for’ organisations, but that for domestic abuse-related applications it is mindful of the need to situate ‘by and for’ support within the wider overall framework for supporting domestic abuse victims.**

203. Irrespective of whether its recommendation around additional funding is agreed, the Review Group is keen to see an increase in the volume and effectiveness of indirect challenge to domestic abuse provided by the grant programme generally.
204. The Review Group’s own suggestion as to how to achieve this is light touch. It does not wish to overburden with extra responsibilities those organisations which do valuable work which does not touch on domestic abuse issues, but as shown above, it recognises that unexpected links can arise also. In the current applications for funding, applicants are asked to share how their proposed project will contribute towards environmental sustainability. The Review Group considers that asking a similar question around developing positive relationships would nudge all applicants to consider this as an issue, and encourage those who are amenable to find creative ways in which to address it.

**Recommendation 33: That the Council includes within its grant funding application forms a question along the lines of “Does this funding intend to support positive family relationships? If so, how?”**

205. Another way to make organisations be aware and mindful of domestic abuse issues is to require as part of the grant-giving process evidence that domestic abuse awareness and management is part of the grant-seekers’ delivery model. This could be, for example, through having trained staff or volunteers, a domestic abuse lead, or even a specific domestic abuse policy. Seeking this would clearly be a bureaucratic burden, and the Review Group does not wish to deny access to smaller, less resourced organisations through being overzealous in this regard. Likewise, the benefit of having such resources would differ, depending on the type of project. Nevertheless, for those do have sufficient resources to embed meaningfully the prevention of domestic abuse and support of victims into their activity the Council should not be shy in requiring them to do so. The Review Group recommends that the Council reviews its requirements for grant recipients and identifies reasonable thresholds and types of grant funded projects where evidence of domestic abuse awareness and management could be expected without impacting unduly on access to grants.

**Recommendation 34: That the Council identifies and requires levels of organisational awareness and capacity around domestic abuse prevention and support which is reasonable relative to the size of organisation, size of grant sought and the purpose of the grant.**

206. In addition to prompting organisations to consider taking steps to make their beneficiaries more resilient against the underlying causes of domestic abuse, the Review Group notes that many organisations may require support in practically how they might do so, once they have decided they are willing to. In its evidence gathering, the Review Group was signposted towards the Women’s Aid Expect Respect toolkit,<sup>27</sup> a source of age-appropriate activities for children to learn about healthy relationships. Likewise, Oxford Against Cutting have free resources available on their website.<sup>28</sup> The Review Group recognises that these are far from the only resources available, but what it does is showcase the quality of resources available. As part of the Council’s guidance for grant applicants, the Review Group would like to see signposting to these and similar resources to give them ideas on how they might meaningfully contribute towards developing positive family relationships.

**Recommendation 35: That the Council includes in its guidance for grant applicants links to appropriate resources through which organisations may support positive family relationships.**

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<sup>27</sup> Freely available for download at: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/education-and-public-awareness/expect-respect/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.oxfordagainstcutting.org/resources/>

## **Procurement**

207. Although social outcomes only feature as far smaller considerations in the Council's procurement than in its voluntary sector grant-giving programme, they are nevertheless present. As part of its procurement process the Council gives a weighting to the wider social impacts that a potential contractor will have by the way they do their business. For example, do they hire apprentices, thereby developing the supply of labour in their industry for the future whilst giving opportunities to local young people to learn? Although these outcomes are smaller, the overall size of the Council's procurement spending far outweighs its voluntary sector grants, and engages a greater number of organisations. The Review Group is keen, therefore, that the Council should seek to use its influence as a procurer to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse. Its suggestion is that supporting positive family relationships is identified as being a qualifying social value within the Council's consideration of social value in procurement.

**Recommendation 36: That the Council extends its definition of social value in procurement to include opportunities for companies to support positive family relationships.**

## **Part 7: Internal Actions: Supporting the Council's Workforce**

208. Employment (and the income it brings) is an important bulwark against coercively controlling behaviour. As such, the undermining of a victim's employment situation by an abuser is not uncommon. However, even in situations where a victim's employment is not targeted, the effect of domestic abuse can nevertheless have hugely deleterious effects on an individual's performance at work, with lateness, sickness and unauthorised absences being more prevalent. If not managed sensitively, this can lead to an already-vulnerable person facing the erosion or, ultimately, loss of one of their key sources of autonomy and self-determination.<sup>29</sup> Even those victims who do maintain their roles may suffer long-term impacts through being overlooked for promotion. With a staff numbering approximately 720, of which 59% are women, the City Council acknowledges that a number of its staff will be facing domestic abuse at any given time. Additionally, given the prevalence of domestic abuse (five in one hundred adults experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020), and that 4% of adults experience abuse from a partner, the Council also recognises that a number of its own staff will be perpetrators of domestic

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<sup>29</sup> It is estimated that 2% of women will lose a job owing to the effect of domestic abuse: *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate*, March 2004; and from Walby, S & Allen, J. also cited by the TUC in the more up to date 'Support in the Workplace for Victims of Domestic Violence' (Oct 2020).

abuse.<sup>30</sup> The way that the Council manages this situation, therefore, forms an important part of its own response to domestic abuse.

### Domestic Abuse Policy

209. Partially in light of the issues raised above, at its meeting of 30 November 2020 the Council passed a motion stating ‘This Council resolves to ask the Head of Business Improvement to submit a report to Cabinet setting out proposals to Develop a Domestic Abuse in the Workplace Policy for Oxford City Council and encourage Oxford’s workplaces to do the same... This council encourages all workplaces to prioritise domestic abuse as a workplace and community safety issue.’

210. In its consideration of the ways in which it can be a supportive employer to those facing domestic abuse, the Review Group considered a policy which has been drafted but not adopted by the Council. It covers disclosure and manager responsibilities, performance or attendance management issues, managing a perpetrator, how to manage if a victim and perpetrator are both working for the Council, and supporting appendices for the key elements. The draft policy is included as Appendix 6 to this report.

211. Having reviewed the policy, the Review Group recognises that, as a document five years old in parts, the policy is in need of updating in its details. Nevertheless, its overall structure remains valid. Although the Review Group makes a number of suggestions in relation to the policy, it considers the available draft to be a strong starting point as a means to action the Council’s decision to implement a policy.

**Recommendation 37: That the Council uses the existing draft domestic abuse policy as its template, to be updated, for its to-be-developed Domestic Abuse in the Workplace Policy.**

212. A minor issue, but the Review Group does wish to raise a point of nomenclature. Whilst the Council passed a motion to develop a ‘Domestic Abuse in the Workplace Policy’, domestic abuse will actually be taking place elsewhere. A clearer title would be ‘Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy’.

**Recommendation 38: That the Council gives its to-be-adopted policy on domestic abuse a clearer title, such as ‘Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy’**

213. The Review Group makes a number of suggested additions to the policy, which it suggests might also strengthen the future policy.

214. One particular issue highlighted is that the current draft policy contains advice and support for managers in dealing with issues of domestic abuse, but not to general

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<sup>30</sup> Stats from ONS, Domestic Abuse Prevalence and Trends, England & Wales: year ending March 2020

workers. The Review Group notes that non-manager colleagues are almost as well placed as managers to pick up unusual behaviour, reduced performance or physical signs. Further, individuals facing domestic abuse may find it easier to confide in someone who happens not to be their manager. Colleagues may also know or suspect that an individual is a perpetrator. The Review Group recommends that a process to guide staff members who know or suspect a colleague is experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse be incorporated into the policy when it is adopted. However, it notes that it is crucial that this policy is thought through and implemented sensitively; intervention carries the potential of elevated risk and the Council must be mindful of not increasing harm, even if inadvertently.

**Recommendation 39: That the Council includes a section within its domestic abuse policy to provide guidance to staff if, in the course of their job, they suspect or know that someone is a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse**

215. A further issue identified with the draft policy is that it focuses on staff and overlooks the fact that there are multiple types of contributors to the Council – staff, but also volunteers and elected members.
216. The Review Group recognises that the status of staff, volunteers and elected members is not the same and that no effort should be made to blur that distinction. However, the Review Group does consider it worthwhile asking the same questions of elected members as it does of staff, even if the responses are different. As in the point above, volunteers or elected members may also have concerns that a member of staff is experiencing domestic abuse. If so, they too need to know how the Council wishes them to treat that concern. Likewise, pre-consideration should be given to how the Council will manage a situation if domestic abuse impinges on the contribution of a volunteer of a Councillor. In particular, how would the Council interpret its rules, for example, around Councillor attendance?
217. One serious consideration arising from this is the issue of Councillor conduct. Again, here, the rules and mechanisms of enforcement relating to conduct are very different between staff and elected members, the latter being determined by the Code of Conduct. The Review Group recognises that it is practically difficult to change the Code of Conduct, as it is a document which has been agreed and is applied by all the Councils in the county. Furthermore, the focus of the Code of Conduct is primarily on how a Councillor acts in his/her role as a Councillor, not at home. Nevertheless, the Review Group considers it important that the Council be seen to uphold the same expectations of behaviour corporately - from staff to elected members - in relation to domestic abuse and would like this issue to be explored.

**Recommendation 40: That the Council at its next review of its constitution gives consideration to the practicability of including an explicit expectation that Councillors will not perpetrate domestic abuse.**

218. One issue referenced in the motion passed by Council is the desire to see other employers implement Domestic Abuse Policies in their own workplaces. The Review Group is mindful that the Council is the sole shareholder to a number of companies, including Oxford Direct Services which employs over 250 people. In addition to the benefit of having such a policy and the example it sets, the Review Group notes that with a very different demographic profile (primarily white male), undertaking this exercise may be helpful in understanding the specific challenges and foci needed in organisations very different from the Council, an important part of the Council being able to convince other workplaces of the benefits of adopting a policy around domestic abuse.

**Recommendation 41: That the Council as shareholder of its wholly-owned companies implements domestic abuse policies in those companies**

Wider Strategy and Implementation

219. The development of a Domestic Policy should not form the complete response to domestic abuse. The policy must be worked out through the Council's structures, and thought on how best to do this is necessary. Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, provided to the Review Group an introduction to the Council's broad approach to supporting its staff, the support currently available for those facing domestic abuse, and a gap analysis.
220. The announcement of the first national lockdown in March 2020 put into fast-forward the Council's existing explorations of remote working. As a consequence, all but a very slim minority of workers were set up to work from home. This situation has continued throughout the pandemic, with St Aldate's Chambers reopening for essential visits but home working being overwhelmingly the norm. Looking ahead to after the pandemic, remote working is set to remain an ongoing feature of staff working environments. The Council proposes to let out two floors of St Aldate's Chambers and offer a blended approach of home-and office-based working for most staff, which correlates to the feedback received from staff when asked their preference.
221. Amidst a radically shifted working environment, the Council's approach to supporting staff must also adapt. That new approach is set out in the Council's People Strategy. The two most relevant elements of this strategy are increased investment in the Council's digital support for its staff, to allow staff to access information themselves, and additional training for managers on how to support whilst working in a remote environment.
222. The Review Group understands the rationale for this change and is supportive of it, but it recognises that remote working does increase the risk profile for those facing domestic abuse. As such, the Review Group considers it necessary that specific attention be given to how this elevated risk can be mitigated within the Council's current

and future remote working environment.<sup>31</sup> To ensure the most effective system is put in place, the Review Group suggests that the Council work with specialists in this area, including other local authorities, domestic abuse charities and trade unions to find ways of driving this risk down as far as possible.

**Recommendation 42: That the Council, as part of its People Strategy, initiates a project to provide enhanced awareness, resources, and capability to recognise and support victims of domestic abuse, and engages with safeguarding and domestic abuse specialists to identify good practice and best resources.**

223. The recommendation above relates to the need to address domestic abuse as a specific risk to staff in the new working environment. The following are issues put forward as lacunae identified in the gap analysis presented to the Review Group and which the Review Group recommends it would be well to rectify.
224. At present, if a staff member types 'domestic abuse' into the intranet search function two results come up. One of these relates to the work of the Community Safety Team. The other is the Council's safeguarding policy. The safeguarding policy does address domestic abuse, briefly. A screenshot of the information is below:

## 6. Domestic Abuse

One in 10 lives are being affected by domestic abuse, if that includes you or someone you know, get help and support by visiting [reducingtherisk.org.uk](https://reducingtherisk.org.uk) for a list of organisations and contact that may be able to help.

### Young people

All professionals who become aware of a young person experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse within a relationship have a responsibility to follow the Pathways for Young People, It concerns children and young people up to 18, or 25 for some care leavers.

-  [Domestic Abuse Pathway for Young People \(PDF\)](#)

### More information

- Please contact  [Liz Jones](#)

<sup>31</sup> It has been reported that there have been no requests for help with situations of domestic abuse since the start of the first national lockdown in March 2020. Whilst this is ostensibly good news, a lack of reporting of domestic abuse is not the same as its absence. Nor does it mean that the increased risk will not manifest itself in the future.

225. The information available is scant. The Review Group recognises that in signposting to Liz Jones, the Council's Domestic Abuse Lead, individuals (including managers) are able to get support internally. However, this does mean speaking to someone, which is a stage that not all people experiencing domestic abuse may wish to embrace. The Review Group is concerned that the page comes across as lacking ownership by the Council of its duties to its staff at a time of difficulty.
226. The other logical place a staff member may look for resources around domestic abuse on the staff intranet is the Thriving at Work and Wellbeing section, which is the locus of resources to support staff wellbeing in all its forms. At present, it carries no information on the support available for people facing domestic abuse. The availability of this support is actually widespread – 18 domestic abuse champions, two of whom also act as safeguarding champions, and an employee assistance programme run externally to the Council which provides advice on things including domestic abuse.
227. If it is the Council's aim to provide workers with the resources to access help themselves, the Review Group does not consider the current information sufficient. Its criticism is not one of provision, but of communication and awareness-raising. In line with the Council's wider People Strategy, the Review Group seeks better publicity of its help to enable staff to access the correct support for their needs.

**Recommendation 43: That the Council improves the detail of the support it provides staff facing domestic abuse on the staff intranet.**

#### Training

228. An important recognition in the gap analysis presented to the Review Group concerned training. All staff undertake safeguarding training and others, primarily front-line staff, are also given specific training on domestic abuse. However, this offer does leave gaps in the recognition of domestic abuse and the specific issues it raises around management. The Review Group recommends that those gaps be closed as a priority, but makes its own suggestions on how the training offer might be improved.

**Recommendation 44: That the Council reviews the adequacy of the internal training it provides for all staff, line managers and elected members on domestic abuse**

229. As referenced earlier, domestic abuse can often spill over into reduced performance at work, higher sickness and unexplained absence. The management of this is, in the first instance, the responsibility of line managers. To repeat the point made earlier, understanding and sensitivity to the issues around domestic abuse must have a bearing on how the Council's performance management processes are applied, or else they become a further means by which victims of domestic abuse have their autonomy and stability undermined. Consequently, it is vital that all line managers are given such

training to aid them in recognising someone who may be suffering domestic abuse, but also in ensuring that the way the workplace consequences of that abuse are managed in a supportive way, and not which compounds a victim's existing challenges. Equally vital is that the HR processes which those managers implement are designed to be supportive in a domestic abuse situation. The Review Group is keen, for example, that return to work and performance management guidance is reviewed to ensure that sensitive questions are included to detect and manage domestic abuse. Likewise, the Council has a duty towards its staff, even if they are perpetrating domestic abuse. Pre-planning around how time off in the event of an arrest or reprimand should be managed is necessary in providing a supportive environment to encourage a change in behaviour.

230. As mentioned, the Review Group considers training of all staff specifically on domestic abuse to be the gold standard. However, this is a significant time investment and would be of variable value dependent on where in the organisation an individual worked. The Review Group suggests that as an alternative to having a set policy, manager training should include consideration of which roles within their team should have mandatory domestic abuse training (and at what level), and which need only participate in the standard safeguarding training.

**Recommendation 45: That the Council makes domestic abuse awareness and management training mandatory for all those in the Council with line-management responsibility.**

**Recommendation 46: That the Council reviews its HR processes around sickness, lateness, time off and performance management to ensure they are capable of supporting staff involved in either side of domestic abuse.**

**Recommendation 47: That the Council includes within domestic abuse awareness and management training for managers training on identifying the appropriate level of training required for the staff in their team regarding domestic abuse.**

231. One issue which relates practically to how the Council supports victims (and indeed, differently, perpetrators) of domestic abuse are the HR processes that managers implement.

232. This report raises a number of the specific vulnerabilities faced by people from minority communities. Given the diversity of Oxford, and the Council's ambition to have a workforce more representative of the city it serves, awareness of specific issues and practices which tend to be associated with particular cultures – concepts of honour and shame, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, for example - is particularly important, as they are more likely to present in Oxford than a less diverse area.

**Recommendation 48: That Council training provided to staff and elected members on domestic abuse considers, at a level relevant to type of training,**

**training which is sensitive to specific cultural contexts and working with a diverse range of communities, and culturally-specific issues which can increase vulnerability amongst specific minority community members.**

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

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233. From its outset the Review Group's primary focus has been to examine in detail the areas of domestic abuse prevention and mitigation that are most within the Council's own responsibility. In doing so it has found that there is much in this regard the Council can be proud of, in particular the work of Liz Jones, the Domestic Abuse lead, and her team who consistently go above and beyond what might be expected to raise standards for victims of abuse. It is also welcome to be recognised by external organisations as leaders in certain areas, with the Council's Sanctuary Scheme being described as 'the best'.
234. This being said, the Council's provision is not perfect. It is a good sign that Council officers have often themselves recognised the issues identified by the Review Group as being problematic, and mainly have been taking steps to improve them. This report hopefully provides a degree of background understanding on why certain issues do exist. Its recommendations are largely expected to fall within the Council's existing plans to improve the experience of those coming forward for support, and to build trust or enable access to those who are not. A good example of this being the recommendations made to support staff who are facing domestic abuse, which build both on a Council motion and on a previously-drafted policy. It is hoped that this report can act as a framework for tackling these issues with renewed coordination and vigour.
235. As evidenced in the report, the biggest contributor of the Council to the experience of victims of domestic abuse is in regards to housing. Providing a safe space for a victim is a foundational part of being able to rebuild their lives, and the degree to which the Council meets their needs in this area has huge effects on their future safety and wellbeing. Failure to do so is reported to be the greatest source of trauma by any agency for domestic abuse victims. So critical is this work that even small improvements can have an outsized effect on victims, but the Review Group hopes that the combination the recommendations around housing will go further than this and act as a roadmap for creating a new benchmark for the experience of the Council by those facing domestic abuse. It is important to stress, however, that housing is not a service offered in a vacuum, and the challenges and barriers faced by victims of domestic abuse cut across the Council's work. Consequently, real organisational energy is needed to ensure that the systems and flexibility developed in housing is not undermined by another part and that ensuring victims experience better outcomes is embedded corporately.
236. Beyond the Council's own area of primary responsibility this report confirms the challenges faced by ethnically diverse communities, particularly in regards to translation services and those with no recourse to public funds. These are, ultimately, issues for which central government is responsible, having cut funding for ESOL as well as general local authority budgets, and who set the policy around recourse to public funds that the Council must follow. This report makes a number of recommendations in these areas

where there is a clear and important need. However, in the absence of central government action it is unrealistic for the Council to substitute. The recommendations made in this regard seek to mitigate the worst of the consequences of these policies within the Council's ability, but a step change can only occur with a change in central government policy.

237. The final point to raise in this report is that although men and women, rich and poor, and people of different ethnicities experience different challenges in the journey to survivorship of domestic abuse, there is no membership of a demographic grouping that acts as a protection against domestic abuse. It can be experienced by everyone. And because it can be experienced by everyone, it is everybody's business to reduce it. The Review Group encourages the Council to take a lead in doing so.



# Silent victims: Men now make up a quarter of domestic abuse sufferers

## Charities warn that social stigma still stops victims from seeking help

**Eirian Jane Prosser**  
e.j.prosser@newsquest.co.uk

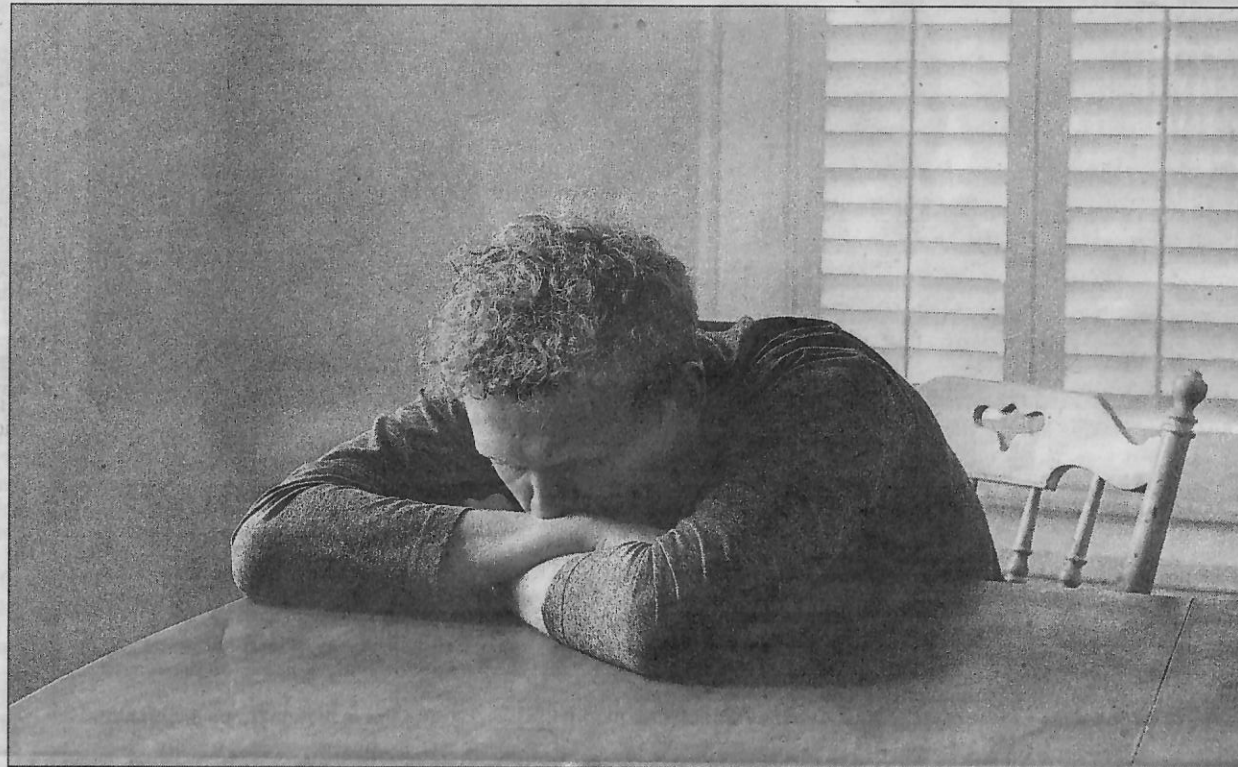
A QUARTER of all reports of domestic abuse made to police in Oxfordshire last year were about men being victims, latest figures have revealed.

A total of 2,768 calls to Thames Valley Police between January and October were either from men and boys saying that they had been abused or from worried friends and relatives.

However, the proportion of men and boys contacting local domestic abuse support services is still only four per cent.

Now, a charity which runs an abuse helpline for men has warned that the Oxfordshire figures could be just the 'tip of the iceberg' and that more needs to be done to help men speak out.

Mark Brooks, chairman of the Mankind Initiative, said: "What the figures clearly show is that there is



Men are being encouraged to share their experiences of domestic abuse. Picture: Andrew Neel

## Efforts to boost oral health for care home staff and residents

CARE home staff and residents across Oxfordshire will be able to get additional help to improve their oral health with a new on-line toolkit.

Designed by Oxfordshire County Council, in collaboration with Community Dental Services (CDS), it aims to improve oral health and offer practical advice to those who live and work in care settings.

Dr Eunan O'Neil, consultant in public health at the council said: "Good oral health is a key contributing factor in both our mental and physical wellbeing, regardless of age or situation."

He added: "This toolkit will help us to ensure that those who may need additional support with their mouth care, such as those who reside in residential care, are properly supported by our workforce."

The online oral health toolkit was developed by the council and CDS to improve skills and knowledge of care home staff around the importance of daily mouth care as well as practical advice for those people who are dependent or need assistance in oral care techniques.

It can be used and accessed at a convenient time for all staff, and designed to fit in with shifts

said: "What the figures clearly show is that there is a significant number of men who are victims of domestic abuse within the county: they make up one in four of all victims of domestic abuse."

"That is obviously a concern, however it also shows that men are coming forward to the police to report their crimes or report what is happening to them."

"The big challenge is whether this is the tip of the iceberg: how many of those men are receiving the practical help to enable them to escape from the abusive relationships they are in?"

In total, Thames Valley Police (TVP) recorded 11,304 domestic abuse-related occurrences between the start of January and the end of October last year.

Of those reports, 2,768 – or 25.48 per cent – were about men being victims, and the rest were about women as victims.

The divide is the same as the national level.

However, Mr Brooks warned that the proportion of men contacting local domestic abuse services across the country is still only four per cent.

He added: "One in 25 of people accessing local domestic abuse support services is male, hence it is important that, while we encourage more men to come forward, there still needs to be far more practical support to enable them to eventually escape."

A2Dominion is a housing agency that has thousands

**Men are being encouraged to share their experiences of domestic abuse. Picture: Andrew Neel**



**Mark Brooks**

of properties across Oxfordshire, and also runs a support service for people in the county who are victims of domestic or sexual abuse.

In Oxfordshire, it said just 82 out of the 1,485 referrals made to its service between January and October were men.

That means men account for 6.2 per cent of all referrals, which is two per cent higher than the national average.

However, that number of referrals is still 18 per cent lower than the number of alleged male victims according to the Thames Valley Police figures.

Experts have said the low number of men being referred to domestic abuse victim support services is cause for concern.

Mr Brooks said: "The lack of male victims being referred to the county's specialist domestic abuse services is a real concern given

the police figures.

"This is an issue that the police, councils and health services have to address because it suggests men are not being signposted or are not aware of the expert help that is available."

We asked Mr Brooks why fewer men come forward.

He said: "Many men worry about coming forward because they feel ashamed of being a victim at the hands of a woman and also fear not being taken seriously."

"It is why more awareness campaigns, to encourage more men to come forward, is vital."

Jo Evans, director of supported housing at A2Dominion, said: "If you're experiencing domestic abuse, what you are going through is not your fault, and you can still seek help during the current national lockdown."

"Regardless of your gender, we can help you with practical advice and support via our helpline and provide a safe place to stay if you need to leave your home."

"You can find advice online at a2dominion.co.uk, or by contacting our helpline on 0800 731 0055 from 10am - 7pm on weekdays. If you're in immediate danger, call 999."

During the first lockdown, between March 23 and July 3 last year, the total number of reports of domestic abuse to Thames Valley Police rose by more than 10 per cent compared to the same pe-

riod the previous year.

Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse, a charity based in Oxfordshire, also saw a 55 per cent increase in referrals in the first six months of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

Government guidelines for victims of domestic abuse during this third national lockdown state that if you need to escape your home due to violence or domestic abuse, the rules around coronavirus do not apply.

Thames Valley Police said it 'urged' people to raise the alarm in any way they could. Detective Superintendent Becky Mears, head of Thames Valley Police's protecting vulnerable people department, said: "We continually work hard to encourage people to report incidents to us. Domestic Abuse affects people from a wide range of age, genders, faith, and communities."

"It is important that we give people the confidence to make a report and we work closely with a number of partner agencies in order to do so."

"There is a wide range of specialist support available to anyone who makes a report. Tackling domestic abuse is a priority at all times."

Anyone trapped at home with their abuser can report domestic abuse silently and discretely by calling 999 then pressing 55: the operator will then raise the alarm.

It can be used and accessed at a convenient time for all staff, and designed to fit in with shifts.



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# Whole Housing Approach Evaluation

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## Year 1 Report

Published November 2020





A Whole Systems Approach addressing the needs of survivors across all tenure types, running across three pilot sites; Cambridgeshire, Stockton and London

Delivered in partnership with



Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse



Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance



Surviving Economic Abuse



Advance



Safer London



The Bobby Scheme



Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council



The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea



Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Partnership



Hammersmith and Fulham



City of Westminster

With Thanks to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for funding the Whole Housing Pilot Project

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## What is a Whole Housing Approach?

The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) was first conceptualised in 2018 by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) in collaboration with the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group.

This group brings together extensive knowledge and experience from national organisations across the housing and domestic abuse landscape. It offers recommendations and raises awareness of what policy and practice changes need to be made in order to enable victim/survivors experiencing domestic abuse to be supported appropriately. The group identified that a whole system approach was needed to effectively address the key issues and barriers experienced by survivors and to transform the housing sector's response to domestic abuse.

The WHA model offers a framework for the domestic abuse and housing sectors to work together to address the immediate and longer-term housing needs of survivors. The model incorporates the experiences of survivors, the expertise of system leaders and established, evidence-based practice, while also exploring new ground like in the private rented sector (PRS) and privately owned sector to identify how they can be part of an effective response.

**“The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”**

Maya Angelou

**76% of domestic homicides take place inside the home.**

## Why a Whole Housing Approach?

The WHA endeavours to raise awareness of domestic abuse within all housing sectors and improve the housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse so that they can achieve stable housing, live safely and overcome the abuse and its harmful impacts.

Safe and stable housing is a core need for people living with domestic abuse. Yet for many it is often the most dangerous place with 76% of domestic homicides taking place inside the home. At the same time, the onus for relocating to achieve safety is almost always on the survivor and comes with an increased risk of homelessness and losing security of tenure.

Refuge services are vital, lifesaving services that need to operate in every locality however not every survivor will need or be able to access a refuge space. Victim/survivors need access to a multitude of pathways to secure stable and safe housing. They also need options for remaining in their existing home and relocating to new accommodation. Consideration also needs to be given to the perpetrator's housing circumstances and how this impacts on the safety of victim/survivors. Options and initiatives are needed for engaging with and holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour.

### The Whole Housing mission is to:



**Improve access to stable housing** across all housing tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership). This also considers the need for move on options from refuges, supported accommodation and any other type of temporary accommodation



**Ensure access to a range of tailored housing options** and initiatives to give people experiencing domestic abuse the **choice** to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation. The full suite of housing options enables agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively. Effective coordination efforts consider the long-term safety of the victim/survivor, as well as managing crisis situations.

## Key Aims

**1**

Earlier identification and intervention for domestic abuse through mobilising social and private landlords and key institutions involved in private ownership;

**2**

A reduction in the number of people who are made homeless as a result of domestic abuse; and

**3**

Increased tenancy sustainment options so that people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely in their home when it is their choice to do so, or do not lose their tenancy status if they relocate.

This includes social housing landlords taking action to remove perpetrators from properties through enforcement where appropriate and safe to do so.

## The WHA approach includes 12 components



The green circles represent types of accommodation including the three main tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership) and temporary accommodation settings (refuges, supported accommodation).

The white circles are the housing options and initiatives designed specifically for domestic abuse to offer support and protection for victim/survivors and choice for remaining and relocating to new accommodation. Some of these options, like the Sanctuary Scheme are established options that local authorities and housing providers have been providing for several years. Others, like Flexible Funding and Housing First are new initiatives being introduced in the UK.

\*WHA Coordination, Mobile Advocacy, Co-located Housing Advocacy

## Project Delivery

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funded the first WHA pilot project over 18 months from October 2018 to March 2020, which was delivered in the following three sites:

- **Stockton-on-Tees**
- **Cambridgeshire & Peterborough**
- **Three West London Boroughs – Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham, Westminster**

A multi-agency project delivery team worked together to develop funded components of the WHA from concept to delivery across a range of accommodation settings and tenure types (social, private rented and privately owned).

The project delivery team included six specialist domestic abuse organisations, one civil society organisation and ten local authority areas.

The project was coordinated by three WHA project leads, one for each pilot site and responsible for the following activities:

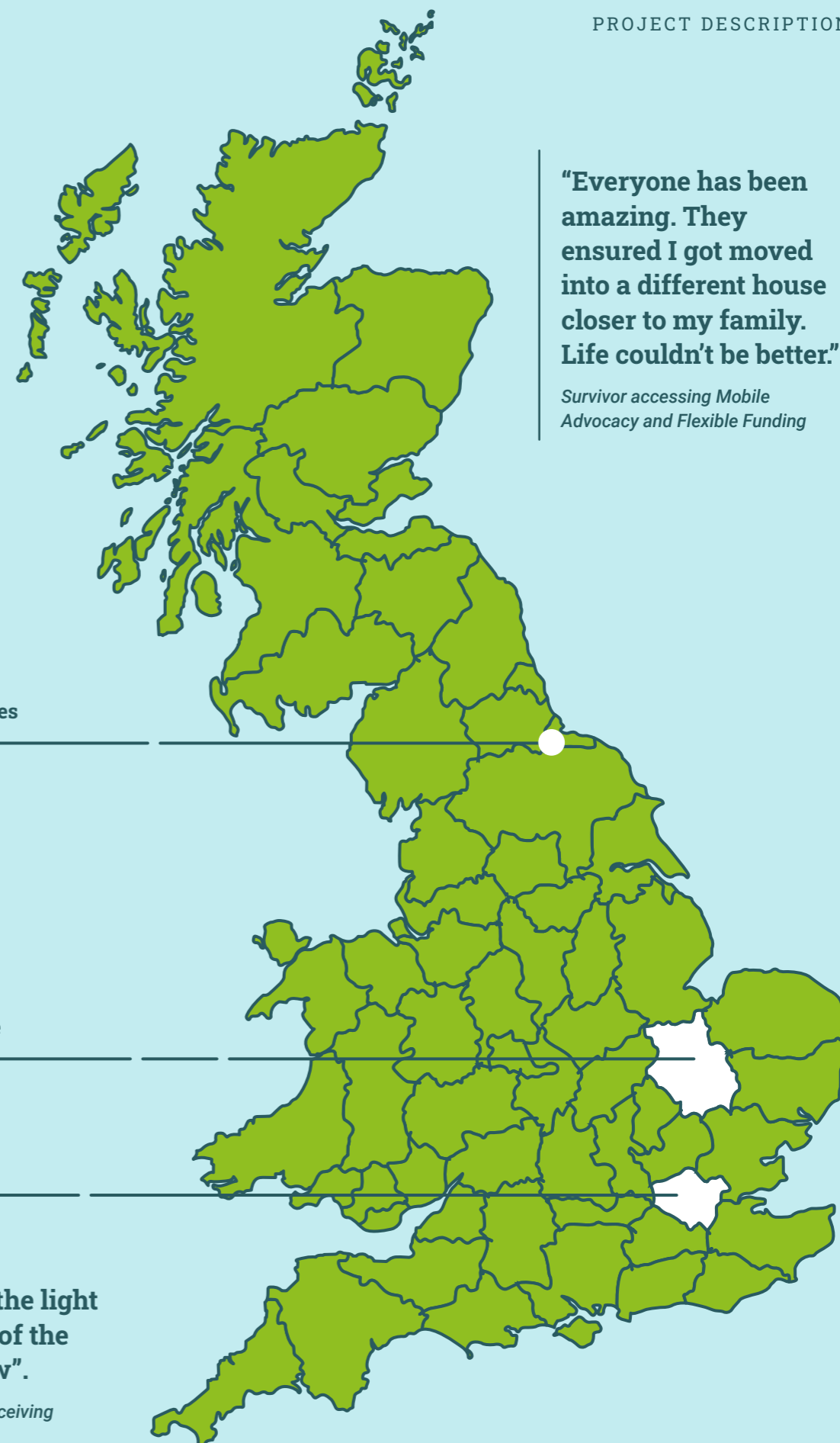
- Leading on the coordination of the Whole Housing Approach project delivery with housing professionals, organisations and professional bodies.
- Building relationships with organisations, establishing networks and developing infrastructures to improve joined up working between organisations.
- Working with individual organisations to improve their operational processes for how they identify and respond to domestic abuse.
- Collecting data and monitoring progress of housing's response to domestic abuse and evidencing the need for further actions and investment.

### Funded Components

Different components of the model were delivered across the three sites. This included direct services to survivors and second-tier services to organisations and professionals:

**Direct services** with people experiencing domestic abuse. This work is delivered by specialist domestic abuse services. Components are highlighted in purple throughout this report to reflect this level of work.

**Second tier services** focused on tenure types to capacity build front line organisations to deliver effective domestic abuse responses. This work is delivered by domestic abuse coordinators. Components are highlighted in orange throughout this report to reflect this level of work.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION  
DIRECT SERVICES TO SURVIVORS

The funding focused on delivering activities for the following 8 components:

Component	Delivery Partner	Description	Project Sites
Mobile Advocacy	Cambridgeshire Women's Aid	Direct service to victims/survivors, at location of their choosing including the woman's home and in a range of community settings where the service can expand their access. Support is offered to victim/survivors to secure stable housing, which includes exploring and pursuing options for remaining in an existing property and relocating if needed for safety reasons. They ideally also offer Flexible Funding (see below) to help with securing housing.	Cambridgeshire
	Refuge Cambridgeshire		London
	Advance		
Co-located Housing Advocacy	Advance	Direct service to victims/survivors who attend a housing service. In this case, a local authority housing department (homelessness service, housing solutions). They are co-located in the housing department and will support victims/survivors, offering advice on housing options and safety planning and risk management. They also offer case management support and deliver awareness raising training to staff based in these departments. They ideally also offer Flexible Funding (see below) to help with securing housing.	London (Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea)
Flexible Funding	Standing Together (London)	Direct service to victims/survivors. This is a pot of funding specifically to help with securing more stable accommodation. These funds are administered and dispensed by a domestic abuse service, ideally by the above two services. The pot is meant to be flexible and support victims/survivors to become financially independent. The most common requests relate to monies needed to sustain existing housing or to relocate and start over.	Cambridgeshire
	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough County Council		London
Sanctuary Scheme	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	Direct service to victims/survivors offering a multi-agency, survivor centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures (Sanctuary) and support.	Stockton
	Shrievally Trust		Cambridgeshire
	Stockton-on-Tees Council		

PROJECT DESCRIPTION  
SECOND TIER SERVICES TO SURVIVORS

Component	Delivery Partner	Description	Project Sites
Managed Reciprocal	Safer London	A combination of direct services and second tier. This intervention starts with second tier work to improve options for victims/survivors living in social housing including local authority council housing and housing associations. Safer London established the Pan-London Reciprocal Scheme (PLRS), which helps to relocate households from DA and other forms of VAWG to move to another property and to maintain their security of tenure.	All three
Privately Owned	Surviving Economic Abuse	Second tier service focused on agencies involved in <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>home ownership, purchase and sale</li><li>mortgage products</li><li>family law</li></ul>	Nationally All three
Private Rented Sector	DAHA hosted by Standing Together	Second tier service working with national and regional membership bodies and local authority PRS teams, letting agents.	Nationally All three
DAHA for social housing	DAHA hosted by Standing Together	Second tier service working with housing associations, local authorities and supported accommodation services	Nationally All three
		The perpetrator management work focuses on positive engagement and enforcement activities that housing providers in social housing can take.	

In addition to this funding, the MHCLG also awarded funding to Standing Together and Westminster City Council to develop a **Housing First project** for women with experiences of homelessness, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and multiple disadvantage. Standing Together coordinated the project, working with housing associations that provided units of accommodation and with Solace Women's Aid who delivered specialist support to the women housed. The project is one of few women's Housing First services in England, and one of the first where support is delivered by a specialist women's service provider. As Housing First is part of the WHA model, they have been included in this report.

The delivery team produced a Whole Housing Approach Toolkit for each of the model's 12 components. This offers practical guidance and resources for local areas to implement the model locally.

## The Big Picture: Direct Services

From April 2019 to March 2020, we delivered the following activities:



**1,085 survivors and  
1,056 dependent children**

were supported by **9 mobile advocates**  
and **2 co-located housing advocates**.



**349 Sanctuary Schemes**

were installed in Cambridgeshire  
and Stockton-on-Tees.



**17 referrals  
received  
4 successful  
moves**

**A Reciprocal Scheme  
was introduced in  
Cambridgeshire for the first  
time in May 2019.**

This enabled victim/survivors to move  
across the country while retaining their  
secure tenancy



**£66,935 was  
awarded to  
141 survivors and  
185 dependent  
children**

**Flexible Funding was  
introduced for the first time to  
help sustain and secure more  
stable housing.**

Most funds helping to clear rent arrears and  
debts accumulated due to financial abuse, pay  
for deposits and other move on costs and for  
household items after relocation.

## The Big Picture: Second Tier Services to Survivors

From April 2019 to March 2020, we delivered the following activities:

**The Privately Owned Housing Officer  
employed by Surviving Economic Abuse**



**facilitated  
72 meetings  
with  
stakeholders.**

**The Private Rented Sector DAHA  
Development Manager**



Awareness was also raised through media  
activities such as newsletter articles, a podcast  
and guidance produced for landlords on how they  
can offer a helpful response.

**Across the three sites, DAHA delivered:**

**15 workshops**



**9**

Support to  
**9 housing providers**  
working towards accreditation

Assessments with  
**2 housing providers**  
who were awarded DAHA  
accreditation



# DIRECT SERVICES TO SURVIVORS



## Mobile Advocacy

The mobile advocates offer direct support to victim/survivors at a location of their choosing including their home. They also deliver services at a range of community settings to offer a more accessible service, particularly for rural areas.

The support offered is broad and based on what the victim/survivors wants help with. This often includes helping victim/survivors who are facing homelessness and to secure more stable housing, which includes exploring and pursuing options for remaining in an existing property and relocating if needed for safety reasons.

**1,085 survivors and 1,056 dependent children**

were supported by 10 mobile advocates and 2 co-located housing advocates from April 2019 to March 2020

**“Everyone has been amazing. They ensured I got moved into a different house closer to my family. Life couldn’t be better.”**

Survivor supported by a mobile advocate, flexible finding and a local sanctuary scheme as part of Whole Housing

Cambridgeshire Women's Aid	Refuge Cambridgeshire	Advance in London
3 mobile advocates	4 mobile advocates	1 mobile advocate and 1 housing support worker
431 survivors and 384 children supported	502 survivors and 555 dependent children supported	46 survivors and 117 dependent children supported

## A Mobile Advocate's experience of supporting Ellie\*

**Ellie is a 46-year-old woman who first accessed our Mobile Advocacy team in 2018. At the time, she lived in a private rented property with her husband and their two children. The tenancy was in her husband's sole name. Ellie's husband was emotionally abusive towards her on a daily basis.**

Ellie wanted to apply for social housing but was unsure of how to begin. She needed financial support to start over. I offered emotional support, listened to Ellie's story, asked her what support she needed and completed periodic risk assessments to monitor the level of danger her husband posed. We used this information to co-create a safety and support plan. And talked through the harmful impacts domestic abuse had on her.

I explained Ellie's housing options to her. Ellie's child had additional needs due to a disability, and subsequently felt refuge accommodation was not appropriate. She wanted to keep her children's routine as stable as possible to prevent further distress and disruption to their lives. She wanted to remain in her local area so her children could continue attending the same schools.

I worked with Ellie to open her own bank account, set up her own email address and submit a homeless application to the local authority. Technology safety was regularly discussed and reviewed. The Housing Service told Ellie that they would only support her with a move out of the area. I explained Ellie's wish to remain in the area due to her child's additional support needs and impact of being removed from his school's support system.

Ellie had spent years putting in place the school's support for her children. She was worried about having to start over and the potential negative impact on her child's learning development. The housing service agreed to rehouse Ellie in her local area. I successfully advocated for her to be given the highest priority (Band A), making reference to the MHCLG's statutory guidance on [Improving Access to Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse in Refuges or Other Types of Temporary Accommodation](#).

Ellie quickly bid on, and was offered a property. We created a safety plan for a safe move, including packing and moving into the new property whilst her husband was at work. I also supported Ellie to access Flexible Funding to help with moving costs and the purchase of household items so she could set up her new home. Without this, Ellie said she would not have been able to afford to make the move and would have to stay with her husband.

Once Ellie was settled, I referred her to the local Bobby Scheme (Sanctuary Scheme). Extra locks were fitted to her doors, as well as window alarms and an external letter box that was fitted. A door chime was also installed to her front door, alerting her when someone enters her property. Ellie said these extra security measures made her feel safe at home. I accompanied the security installer to Ellie's property and while they fitted the security devices, I met with Ellie and we came up with a plan for how drops offs at the children's school could be done as safely as possible for her.

Ellie and I then met every fortnight to talk about her husband's continued abuse towards her. He was now seeking contact with the children through family court proceedings. Ellie has grown in confidence and expresses gratitude for the support she received from all agencies involved. She has been able to successfully move into her own property in her local area whilst remaining safe and living free of fear and rebuilding her confidence and life with her children.

\*Names have been changed to protect the identity of survivors

## Co-located Housing Advocacy

Advance has operated a co-located housing advocacy service in Hammersmith and Fulham Council's Housing Solutions service since 2007. This project introduced two co-located Housing Advocates in Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Council's Housing Solutions Service for the first time.

Co-located Housing Advocates offer direct support to survivors who present to the housing service as homeless due to domestic abuse. This includes gathering information to support their housing application, co-creating safety plans, and offering education and information about domestic abuse. They also offer advice and guidance to staff based in these departments to support their own case work and deliver training to increase awareness and upskill the department's response to domestic abuse.

From April 2019 to March 2020

## 106 survivors

were offered specialist domestic abuse support from the two co-located Housing Advocates.

## 57 survivors

were supported in Westminster

## 49 survivors

were supported in Kensington and Chelsea

Housing staff received consultancy and case management support for

## 115 cases and 157 staff

received training on domestic abuse awareness across the three London project sites.

“The Housing Advocate is supportive and flexible in her approach. She is the expert and we're glad we have her here to guide us in improving the way we respond to domestic abuse”

Housing Officer

“Having a Housing Advocate present is a helpful resource as people experiencing domestic abuse are able to receive specialist expert advice and support, whilst allowing Housing Officers to focus on the client's housing needs”

Housing Officer

## A Co-Located Housing Advocate's experience of supporting Shelly\*

**Shelly self-referred to Advance, seeking support due to experiencing emotional and financial abuse from her now ex-partner of 6 years. Shelly was living in a rented property that she shared with her ex-partner. They had a joint tenancy however her ex-partner had managed the tenancy. Shelly didn't know how to make contact with her landlord and because her ex-partner controlled all of the finances, including their joint bank account, she had no control over rent payments.**

Shelley moved in with a friend on a temporary basis. She also found a job in a nursery and worked ad-hoc in her chosen profession as a photographer. Shelly was earning and had access to her own money for the first time since leaving her ex-partner.

I supported Shelly to open a bank account in her own name that the perpetrator did not know about and could not access. I also helped her apply for Universal Credit so that she could maximise her income.

Shelly wanted to live independently with her daughter. She was a European national, so I supported her with making an application for permanent residency. I also went through her housing options and gathered information and helped prepare her homeless application for temporary accommodation and social housing.

Shelly was awarded her right to remain in the UK and now has permanent residency. The Housing Advice Service assessed that Shelly was owed a duty and was placed in temporary accommodation. Shelley is now bidding for social housing.

With Shelly's awareness and agreement, I referred her to Children's Services as she had a young daughter who had witnessed the abuse. Her daughter has autism and Shelly was her primary and only carer and wanted to find out what other support she could put in place for her daughter.

I also supported Shelly to apply for a Non-Molestation Order.

Since accessing our service, Shelley reports having more awareness and insight into what's happened to her and has a better understanding of her rights. Shelly shared that she was made to feel at ease after meeting with me as I understood her circumstances and was able to help her with what she needed, which was finding a safe home for her and her daughter.



\*Names have been changed to protect the identity of survivors

## Flexible Funding

This component of Whole Housing is inspired by the work of Professor Cris Sullivan and her colleagues at the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The group developed the Domestic Violence Housing First approach and toolkit, which focuses on getting survivors into stable housing as quickly as possible and providing support to help rebuild their lives. This includes offering Flexible Funding financial support via their Mobile Advocacy services.

Flexible Funding is a designated funding pot that specialist domestic abuse services, like Mobile Advocacy and Co-Located Housing Advocacy, can access quickly and easily to help survivors retain or establish housing stability and safety. Flexible Funding gives domestic abuse advocates a tool to help survivors alongside the advocacy services they offer including safety planning, emotional support, offering advice and information on options and practical advocacy with other services.

The impacts of economic abuse and the costs associated with leaving a perpetrator and starting over can limit a survivor's choices, potentially leaving them with no choice but to remain with the perpetrator. Maintaining existing or accessing new housing is even more challenging where a perpetrator has interfered with rental, mortgage or utility payments or has caused damaged to the property.

Flexible Funding aims to provide a more equitable and accessible solution to financial crises that may otherwise spiral into homelessness or leave a survivor trapped with their perpetrator. It is low-barrier and does not require survivors to provide evidence of abuse. Because economic abuse takes many forms, there is no set list of what will be funded. Survivors in the pilot were encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their safety in the short and long term.

Funds can be used in a variety of ways, including helping someone pay back rent or mortgage arrears, paying for new clothing required for employment searches or purchasing household items that were damaged or needed for a new home.

**“I have changed area, and consequently all the benefits stopped as well, so this money came just in time, it will help us a lot”**

**Victim/survivor**

**“It's something she's doing for herself... it's something that's going to make her feel more like her again.” Flexible funding enabled the survivor to buy a laptop to complete studies through the Open University.”**

**Mobile Advocate who helped a survivor to access Flexible Funding**

Flexible Funding was offered in Cambridgeshire and London by the local domestic abuse services to survivors who were either at risk of losing their current housing or were homeless

From April 2019 to March 2020, we delivered:

## Cambridgeshire

Total funds available: £40k



Flexible Funding was awarded to **93 survivors** and **146 dependent children**

The **average sized grant was £450** (range from £60 to £1,669)

Of the **93 grants**,  
**4%** were for educational costs,  
**29%** was for rental assistance and deposits,  
**17%** for home essentials,  
**46%** for other needs such as legal costs



Of the **survivors supported**,  
**100%** were female  
**30%** were from a black and minority ethnic group (where data provided).

“It has made an invaluable difference to our lives”

Victim/survivor

“Once she knew that she would have carpets installed in her new home, it improved her mental health”

Mobile Advocate who helped a survivor to access Flexible Funding

“My ex-partner trashed the house, urinated everywhere, I had to get rid of everything, With Flexible Funding I was able to buy furniture. They were really nice, lovely, fantastic, I thought they would be all looking down on me. They delivered it and put in the right rooms. I could start again. I wasn't allowed to decorate before. I got everything I liked that I knew he wouldn't. I got power back. Makes it feel like my own.”

Victim/Survivor

## London

Total funds available: £30k



Flexible Funding was awarded to **48 survivors** and **39 dependent children**

The **average sized grant was £565** (range from £12 to £2,123)

Of the **48 grants**,  
**4%** were for educational costs,  
**17%** was for rental assistance and deposits,  
**46%** for home essentials,  
**33%** for basic needs



Of the **survivors supported**,  
**100%** were female.  
**56%** were from a black and minority ethnic group.  
**25%** had No Recourse to Public Funds.

“Now I can see light at the end of the tunnel”

Victim/survivor

“The survivor felt like she was not dependent on the perpetrator anymore, even though he told her she could not get by without him. As she said, ‘I proved him wrong.’”

Mobile Advocate who helped a survivor to access Flexible Funding

“Flexible Funding has kept me motivated. If you know you have this to fall back on, you can better handle hard decisions better. IDVAs burn out when you get knocked back and feel like you've been told no too many times. Being able to offer this to women has been really motivating.”

Mobile Advocate who helped a survivor to access Flexible Funding

“For clients, I think knowing that someone is there to help stop them hitting the big red switch of “I'm just going to screw everything up in my life because no one cares”.”

Mobile Advocate who helped a survivor to access Flexible Funding

## Raina's\* story

Raina was recovering from a stomach operation and living in a night shelter when she applied for Flexible Funding. She was unable to work as she was in the UK on a visitor visa, which had recently expired. Her ex-partner had consistently told her that she would not survive without him. Flexible Funding enabled her to secure temporary accommodation where she was able to recover in a safe, secure environment and seek legal advice.

**With the support of her domestic abuse worker, Raina went on to secure her immigration status, gain employment and secure stable housing. She also made improvements in her health following her operation. As Raina said, she has 'proved her ex-partner wrong.'**



\*Names have been changed to protect the identity of survivors

## Sanctuary Scheme

A **Sanctuary Scheme** 'enables households at risk of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of enhanced security measures (Sanctuary) and support'.<sup>1</sup>

A **Sanctuary** is 'a property where security measures have been installed in order that households at risk of domestic violence are able to remain safely in their own accommodation if they choose to do so'.<sup>2</sup>

While there is no typical installation, a Sanctuary Scheme should include a range of security measures (not simply a lock change) that reinforces the perimeter (including all easily accessible doors and windows as a standard) and interior of the property (**Sanctuary Safe Room**.)

**“Extremely happy with the work, the guys who came were professional and I now feel so much safer it has eased my anxiety levels”**

**Victim/survivor**

A Sanctuary Safe Room is defined as 'replacing a door to a main room, often the bedroom, with a solid core door. The Sanctuary Safe Room door is reversed to open outwards; the frame is reinforced, additional locks and bolts, substantial hinges and a door viewer are fitted. This provides a safe room where household members can call and wait safely for the police'.<sup>3</sup>

A Local Sanctuary Scheme should be delivered in partnership with a specialist domestic abuse service. This enables Sanctuary measures to form part of a wider safety and support planning package. The scheme aims to increase the physical and perceived sense of safety of survivors and prevents homelessness, giving survivors choice to remain in their home when they want to and it continues to be safe to do so.

A Sanctuary Scheme service was funded in Cambridgeshire and Stockton.

### Stockton-on-Tees 'Safe at Home' scheme

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has delivered a Sanctuary Scheme entitled 'Safe at Home' since 2010. In Stockton-on-Tees, all agencies and individuals can make a referral to the Safe at Home Scheme; referrals are initially made through the local specialist domestic abuse services, police officers and the social services department are then directed to the scheme via Cleveland Police Crime Prevention Unit.

All referrals then receive an assessment visit from a Designing Out Crime Officer (DOCO) from the Police Crime Preventions unit, who books in a home visit to inspect the property and makes a recommendation of security works. The Safe at Home team within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council then arranges an appointment with the survivor to install the security measures.

The Safe at Home Scheme aims to be an early intervention response to domestic abuse. It also gives victim/survivors the option to remain in their own homes when it is their choice to do so. It can also reduce and prevent further abuse, which in the long run reduces demand on other agencies such as emergency services and domestic abuse services.

**“I feel so much safer and it has made a difference”**  
Survivor

**“Life changing”**  
Survivor

**“I feel safer knowing I’m in my home”**  
Survivor

**“I am extremely happy with the work, the installers were professional and now I feel so much safer, It has eased my anxiety levels.”**  
Survivor

**“The locks were changed so quickly, I now feel so much safer. My anxiety has reduced. I’m the only one with the keys.”**  
Survivor

### Cambridgeshire Bobby Scheme

The Bobby Scheme was established in 2001 by the Cambridgeshire Police Shrievally Trust, which is a registered charity formed in 1999 to improve community safety in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Bobby Scheme’s initial aim was to reduce crime and fear of crime in older, vulnerable and disabled people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In October 2011, the Bobby Scheme extended to include securing the homes of domestic abuse survivors, helping them to feel safe and allowing them and their children to remain in their own homes rather than go into a refuge service.

The Bobby Scheme receives referrals from housing providers, domestic abuse and sexual violence services, local authority departments and other charities, as well as from the police across the entire region. They employ a dedicated coordinator, who is trained in domestic abuse awareness and has responsibility for processing all referrals into the service. The Trust also employs two surveyors who are former police officers and whose role it is to assess the property and install the Sanctuary works.

#### In 2019/20



We installed **38 Safe at Home Sanctuary Schemes** including



**44 school children** living in the households



It took an average of **2 working days** from referral to installation



At an average cost of **£125 per Sanctuary**

#### In 2019/20



We installed **311 Safe at Home Sanctuary Schemes** including



**449 school children** living in the households



It took an average of **3 working days** from referral to installation



At an average cost of **£200 per Sanctuary**

The following quote is from a Mobile Advocate in Cambridgeshire

“Our local Bobby had finished for the day and at the last minute the phone rang, the call was from a Mobile Advocate who explained to the Bobby that she had a client who required an urgent visit. Both the victim/survivor and mobile advocate had been notified that the offender/perpetrator was being released from prison the next day, leaving the victim/survivor in a state of distress and extremely vulnerable. The Bobby lived close to the area therefore he could be at the victim/survivor’s property within half an hour. The Bobby met the mobile advocate within two hours of the appointment being made. The property was assessed and security measures installed, securing the home on the same day. This included securing the perimeter of the property, changing all of the locks and fitting window and door alarms. While the property was being assessed and security measures installed, the mobile advocate remained with the victim/survivor to offer safety planning and emotional support.

**The victim/survivor reported feeling considerably safer to remain at home. The next day the perpetrator was released from prison and went straight to the address but was unable to gain entry due to additional security measures being installed on the front door”**

## Lily’s\* story

‘I experienced bad domestic violence in a property before this one. I was nearly left for dead. I had to leave there and move to this one. He saw the new property, but I didn’t want to move again. The police told me what I could have, the domestic violence police. They told me about a panic alarm. I wanted [sanctuary scheme] so I would be able to sleep at night. I was worried about the front door, the main door to the building, it would have been easy to kick off, so I went to the council. They said that it is a communal door so nothing can be done. So, I went to the police instead (Bobby Scheme). The main door is better than it was now. My flat door has more locks and a spy hole. I didn’t have to move out as they came the next day to do the work. The person who came, they gave me a panic alarm. The person who did the work was really helpful. He put locks on the back window.

I had to call the police to tell them I thought he found out where I was. I had to call twice this time, once then and once when he attacked me before. I had to call the police a few times several years ago for the same man. I haven’t had to call the police at all since.’



\*Names have been changed to protect the identity of survivors

# SECOND TIER SERVICES TO SURVIVORS

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## Managed Reciprocals Moves

The Pan London Reciprocal is a voluntary collaboration between local authorities and registered housing providers to move people from one social housing tenancy to another. Its purpose is to prevent homelessness for victim/survivors fleeing all forms of violence against women including domestic abuse.

Safer London established the reciprocal scheme in London in 2016 and as part of this project, continued its success by replicating the Managed Reciprocal moves model by establishing a reciprocal scheme in the Cambridgeshire Whole Housing Pilot. This comprised of 16 housing providers, including 10 housing associations and the 6 district counties that make up Cambridgeshire and Peterborough forming the Cambridge Managed Reciprocal. Safer London provided coordination support one day a week, bringing together local housing providers to sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding. They helped to establish pathways and local protocols, and embed local procedures in order to facilitate moves and monitor the project.

The Cambridgeshire Managed Reciprocal introduced an innovative component by opening the option of relocating perpetrators if it is deemed safe and in the best interest of the survivor to do so. This allows survivors to remain in their home and is a quicker process as it is often easier to identify a property for a single person than a family.

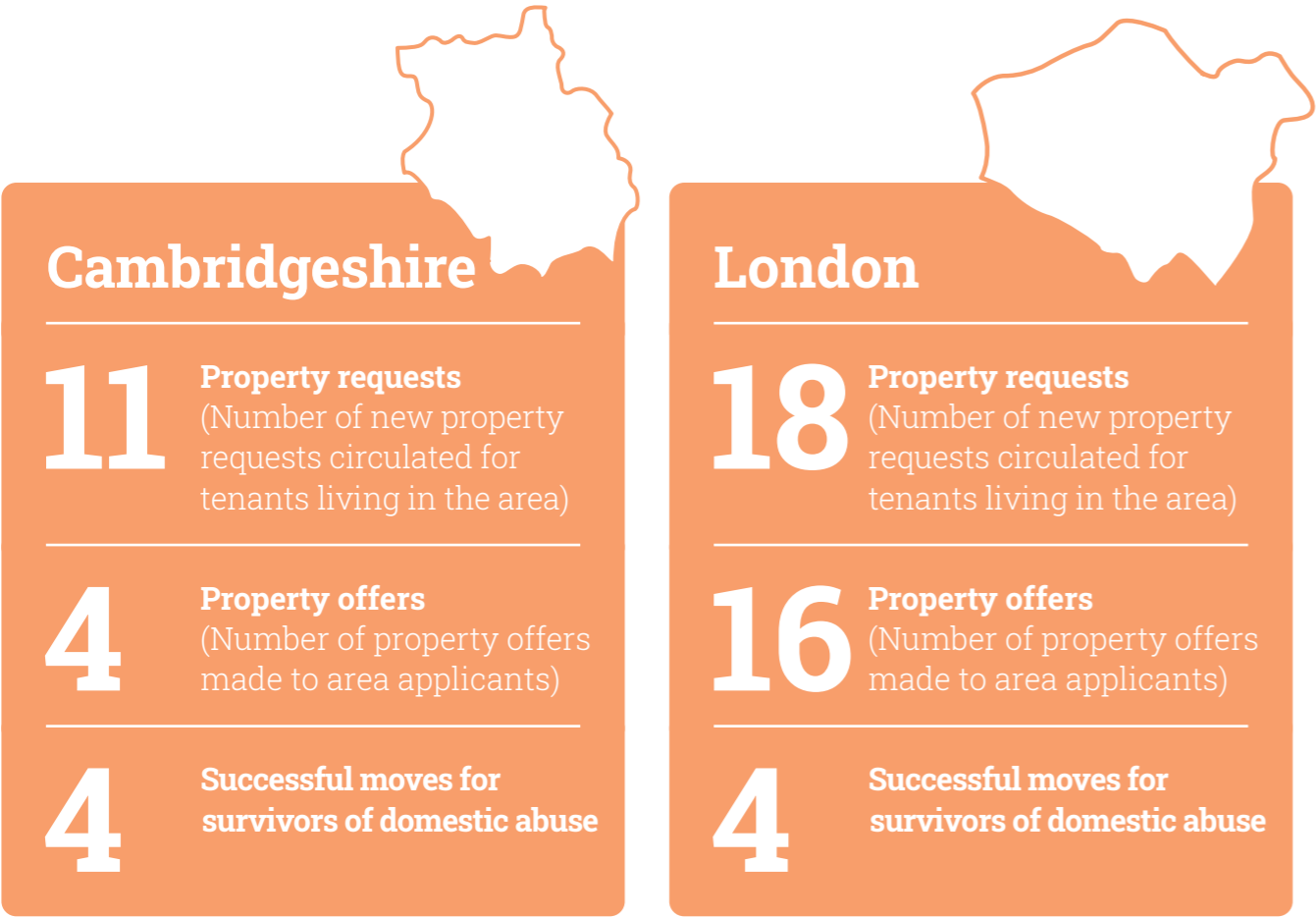
Focused work also took place in Stockton which resulted in recommendations being made to enhance an existing and performing Choice-Based Lettings scheme to better meet the specific needs of survivors. This included flagging moves relating to domestic abuse and embedding procedures for offering survivors the option of a referral to their local domestic abuse service and checking if they needed a Sanctuary Scheme in their new home.

Focused work in the three London boroughs saw an increase in the number of properties offered by each borough and an increase in the number of moves compared to the previous year. In London, the coordination of managed reciprocals was also supported with funding from MOPAC.

**“I do feel safer because I can now walk out and take my dog for a walk and not worry who is around. I’m not getting death threats anymore and feel more relaxed in the new home and area.”**

**Cambridgeshire Applicant**

From April 2019 to March 2020, we delivered:



“Before the house move I was getting daily calls from my client in distress and to report incidents and off load worries and stresses, however now we are able to plan interventions, signpost to other support networks and client has become much more independent.”

Mobile Advocate in Cambridgeshire

“The housing reciprocal allowed my client to continue with her daily routines in a safe space with the potential of [the perpetrator] turning up at her property or running into her in the local area much reduced. This gave her a reinforced sense of safety and reduced her anxieties around unexpected encounters.”

Mobile Advocate in Cambridgeshire

London:

“The project gave us the opportunity to pro-actively engage with housing providers and local authorities in these boroughs via meetings and a workshop in Q4 for housing leads and local VAWG services. This was really beneficial to support the overall functioning of the scheme, both for social tenants from these boroughs and for external tenants who would be safe to relocate in any of these three boroughs. Pro-active engagement with landlords and local authorities is something that the PLHR team does not have capacity to do in all London boroughs.

Support from the Three-boroughs VAWG Coordinator and Local Authority WHA representatives was instrumental in identifying new contacts in the housing departments to improve engagement.

Working with the local VAWG provider Advance and providing training to their staff was also useful to initiate referrals for clients they support in these boroughs.”

Domestic Abuse and Housing Policy Manager

Privately Owned Homes

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it. Building upon existing work with banks and building societies, SEA delivered the programme of work with the privately owned sector through a dedicated Privately Owned Housing (POH) Advocate who developed and delivered the first project of this kind.

The focus of this project included scoping the homeowner landscape. Desktop research and consultations with survivors during the planning stages was undertaken to better understand the issues faced. This led to identifying the three key systems through which abuse takes place:

- 1. Home purchase and sale
- 2. Mortgage lending
- 3. Family law response

Awareness raising and capacity building work was undertaken, on both a national level and in the three pilot sites. Mapping and relationship building with stakeholders commenced, focusing on the above priority areas.

“As a MARAC chair I’m thinking about economic abuse, coercive control and the findings from DHRs. I think all MARAC chairs need to know about this and practitioners need to know to inform referrals made on their professional judgement”

Feedback from professional attending the training

“As a frontline domestic abuse support worker in Middlesbrough I found this training highly informative and relevant to my role. It has built upon my current knowledge of economic abuse particularly relating to coercive control. The trainer was very knowledgeable and helped me to reflect on this form of abuse in different ways. I will circulate to my colleagues to raise awareness of this training and the organisations we can access for support around economic abuse. Many thanks”

Feedback from professional attending the training

“There is so much that housing can do to help survivors, particularly with regard to arrears. I will go back to my housing team and share the information to the teams”

Feedback from professional attending the training

From April 2019 to March 2020, the following activities were delivered:



The Specialist POH worker engaged multiple platforms to promote the work of WHA and improve responses to domestic abuse and housing. This included:

- Weekly reviews of survivor emails with the SEA advocacy team to inform direction of the project and keep abreast of the issues survivors' experienced, offering support and signposting where possible.
- Ongoing contact with SEA's Expert by Experience Group members within the mortgages subgroup to inform the project.
- Private housing working group meetings held with DAHA Private Rented Sector Development Manager to join up work where priorities overlapped.

- Several national media pieces focusing on economic abuse and mortgages: Sunday Times, Refinery29, Reform, The Guardian and The Independent.
- Worked with local domestic abuse services in the pilot to raise awareness of economic abuse and homeowner rights. The domestic abuse advocates reached within this project began proactively advocating with the financial and debt sectors, contacting SEA for guidance where needed. This showed an increased confidence to engage with these vital stakeholders, knowing that this is within their 'remit' and capabilities, and bridged a gap of support for survivors.

**Example of POH Advocacy work with a survivor**

A domestic abuse advocate working in one of the pilot sites contacted SEA, as they were supporting a survivor who was facing criminal charges in relation to economic abuse. The survivor had been advised by her solicitor to plead guilty, it was highly likely that she would have gone to prison, lost her home and her child. SEA's POH Advocate shared guidance and provided a supporting letter to the survivor's specialist domestic abuse worker. As a result, the Crown Prosecution Service decided to drop the charges following advocacy.

**Private Rented Sector**

Building on the work of a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Private Rented Sector (PRS) project launched in 2017, a PRS DAHA Development Manager, continued to deliver pioneering work with the main landlord professional bodies in the UK including the RLA (who have now merged with the NLA to become the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA)) and the Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA). Collaborative efforts to raise awareness with private landlords, letting agents and the property management sector occurred through a variety of media including social media, training and presentations delivered to professional bodies. Resources were developed to cater to different stakeholder audiences.

The focus of this project enabled further mapping of the PRS in England and engagement with the national membership bodies. It introduced for the first time work at a local level with the three local authorities which are operating the WHA pilot sites: Stockton-on-Tees, Cambridgeshire and three London Boroughs (Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and Hammersmith and Fulham).

**As a result of the training**

**91% trained**  
have better understanding  
of domestic abuse

**97% trained**  
feel equipped to take safe action  
to respond to domestic abuse

**The following quotes are from participants attending the training:**

**“Very Informative Course, Materials and content were presented excellently”**

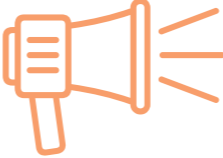
**“Great input I learnt a lot”**

**“Excellent course. Very well presented”**

**“Very useful training & opportunity to work jointly to raise awareness of this important topic in the private rented sector”**

**“The training was really informative and part of it really hit home. More needs to be done to tackle DA.”**

From April 2019 to March 2020, the following activities were delivered:



## Media work:

- 3 newsletters**  
reaching ~1,000 landlords in Cambridgeshire
- 1 article**  
for Eastern Landlords Magazine reaching ~1,000 landlords
- 1 Podcast**  
for the National Landlords Association (now the National Residential Landlords Association), the second most played podcast on the NLA's SoundCloud



## Resource production:

- Domestic Abuse Guidance for Landlords in the Private Sector**  
circulated in the pilot sites to ~1,500 private landlords
- PRS factsheet for domestic abuse services**  
draft circulated to DA services in Cambridgeshire to support their advocacy efforts
- An e-book for letting agents**  
was co-created with Fixflo, a repairs and maintenance management service provider who created property software designed to enable tenants to report repairs to a letting agent

“The training helped us as repair operatives have a greater understanding of domestic abuse and be vigilant in looking for signs. Now, if we think someone is suffering abuse, we report it to our line manager so that this can be sent to the right team in the council”

Operative from the Building and Heating, Ventilation and Electrical Services at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation support (DAHA)

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance’s (DAHA) is a partnership between three agencies who are leaders in innovation to address domestic abuse within housing: Standing Together, Peabody and Gentoo.

Founded in 2014 in recognition of the important role that housing providers play in the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to domestic abuse. DAHA’s mission is to improve the housing sector’s response to domestic abuse and one of the ways it does this is through an accreditation scheme, which offers housing providers a framework and benchmark for how they can respond effectively to domestic abuse. The standards consist of eight priority areas (policies and procedures, case management, risk management, inclusivity and accessibility, perpetrator management, partnership working, staff training, and publicity and awareness) and when embedded, reflect that housing services and providers are on their way to delivering an effective and safe response to domestic abuse.

A home in which someone feels safe is vital and the housing sector is ideally placed to identify, recognise and prevent domestic abuse in their properties.

A DAHA Development Manager was employed for Cambridgeshire to work with local authority housing services and housing associations.

From April 2019 to March 2020

- 5 housing providers initiated the process of implementing DAHA accreditation standards
- 2 providers achieved accreditation, including CHS and Cambridge City Council
- 12 workshops were delivered and attended by over 200 housing providers. These workshops offer guidance on how to implement the 8 priority areas
- 3 local domestic abuse and housing operational group meetings were held to promote a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) and connect providers to work together to implement DAHA’s standards.

Benefits of DAHA in the words of an accredited local authority housing service:

‘...all of the accreditation work has created a stronger platform to enable our officers to believe survivors and I think this is the critical point; the measures we have put in place take us ‘beyond belief’. I do not think the desire to believe was ever in question. Advisors pointed to the importance of extending appointments to 1 hour and 45 minutes so that they can invest time in assessing customers who have experienced domestic abuse and that the assessment is not just concerning homelessness but is a safety and safeguarding assessment too. As a result, the number of homeless applications taken has risen significantly since advisors have been completing domestic abuse risk assessments (DASHs); from 44 in 2018 to 76 in 2019.’

‘We have made huge strides in working with our partners at the Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors (IDVA) service and Cambridge Women’s Aid in particular. I am under no illusions that we will continue to disagree on occasions but our partnerships in this sphere seem much more collaborative now and we are receiving customer feedback assistance from both partners.’

‘All our housing advisors and officers now aim to complete a risk assessment for every applicant (we have completed 46 in the last 12 months) or tenant we believe to be experiencing domestic abuse. On occasions, this has enabled officers to assure our customer that what they are experiencing is abuse, when previously they had not considered it as such. A positive by-product of completing a risk assessment is that asking applicants to evidence abuse via crime reference numbers, for example, no longer seems so important.’

## Housing First

Housing First is a housing and support approach which:

- Provides a stable home for people who have experienced homelessness and chronic health and social care needs so they can rebuild their lives,
- Provides intensive, person-centred, holistic support that is open-ended,
- Places no conditions on individuals; however, they should desire to have a tenancy.

The Housing First approach was first developed in New York and has now been widely adopted in the USA, Canada, Denmark, Finland and France. Since 2010, a growing number of local areas in England have established Housing First services to try and meet the needs of their homeless population. It is an evidence-based intervention that is proven to successfully support people with repeat histories of homelessness who experience multiple disadvantages, helping them into independent and stable accommodation. In the UK the majority of Housing First projects use scattered accommodation, meaning that clients live independently in private rented sector (PRS) or social housing in the community rather than in congregate, self-contained accommodation. The scaling up of Housing First has been widely recommended as part of a housing-led system that can help to end homelessness and the government has funded three demonstration pilots across England to expand and test the approach.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of Housing First services across England are mixed gender, which is reflective of homelessness provision more widely. Homelessness data shows higher numbers of homeless men than women nationally, which has resulted in provision largely designed around men's needs. However, recent research has highlighted the methodological limitations in how data on homelessness is gathered, and that women are likely to be among the uncaptured 'hidden' homeless population.<sup>5</sup> This is problematic as it means that most homelessness provision does not recognise women's gender specific needs, and results in them going largely unsupported.

Crucially, research has highlighted how the Housing First model lends itself well to being adapted for certain groups, e.g. women by adopting gender-informed practices.<sup>6</sup> Including specialist domestic abuse services in these partnerships is crucial to this process.

## The Westminster VAWG Housing First Project

In 2017 Standing Together and Westminster City Council were awarded MHCLG funding for a Housing First and Homelessness Coordinator role. The Coordinator spent a year laying the groundwork for establishing a Housing First project for women who have experienced homelessness, any form of VAWG, and multiple disadvantage.

Further funding was secured for a partnership project between Westminster City Council, Solace Women's Aid and housing associations including Women's Pioneer Housing, L&Q, Peabody and Southern Housing. The partnership, known as the Westminster VAWG Housing First project, started taking referrals in Spring 2019 and was one of the first Housing First services in England to be delivered by a specialist domestic abuse support provider in the women's sector ([Solace Women's Aid](#)).

Support is delivered by two Housing First workers from Solace Women's Aid who support up to ten women at any one time. They work to engage and build relationships with the women, support them to access a permanent, independent tenancy, and then provide intensive support to help them maintain that tenancy, and address other aspects such as their physical, and mental wellbeing. As research has shown that violence and abuse is a universal experience for women accessing Housing First projects, this project particularly benefits from the involvement of specialist women's sector provider Solace Women's Aid, who have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide specialist support around domestic abuse and VAWG.

Housing was initially provided by Peabody, London and Quadrant and Southern Housing Group who partner with the project on a service level agreement basis. Subsequently Women's Pioneer Housing Association also signed up to provide housing for the project.

Standing Together provide project support as well as coordinating and growing partnerships with registered social landlords (RSLs).

### Key outcomes achieved from August 2019 to March 2020

In total 10 women were supported by the project. All the women supported by the project had been rough sleeping for a considerable length of time, and the majority had had children removed from their care. This type of negative past experience often results in women's trust in services and support to be quite low.

- **On engagement** – 90% are engaging with the project. 70% of women were supported to make reports to the police over historical and current domestic abuse, with one perpetrator being recalled to prison.
- **On tenancy sustainment** – 9 women nominated, of those 60% were offered housing and 50% have moved into an independent tenancy with a 100% sustainment rate.
- **On health and wellbeing** - 90% of the women were supported to register with a GP. 50% of the women had shown improvements in terms of mental health, reasons given include being inside after a long period of street homelessness, and engagement with a psychologist. 60% of the women were supported to access drug and alcohol services, with 3 women starting a methadone prescription and maintaining it, some for the first time in many months.

Key project stakeholders are the four registered social landlords who provide the units which house the women. These are Peabody, London and Quadrant, Southern Housing and Women's Pioneer Housing respectively.

### Feedback from registered social landlords picked up on three clear themes:

1. RSLs have a good understanding of the Housing First model and their role in the partnership

“I receive nominations to identify suitable properties within Peabody stock to offer as potential units and manage the lettings team who conduct the viewing and sign ups of the properties. Also liaising with internal departments to agree extra works in units.”

2. Good communication is valued

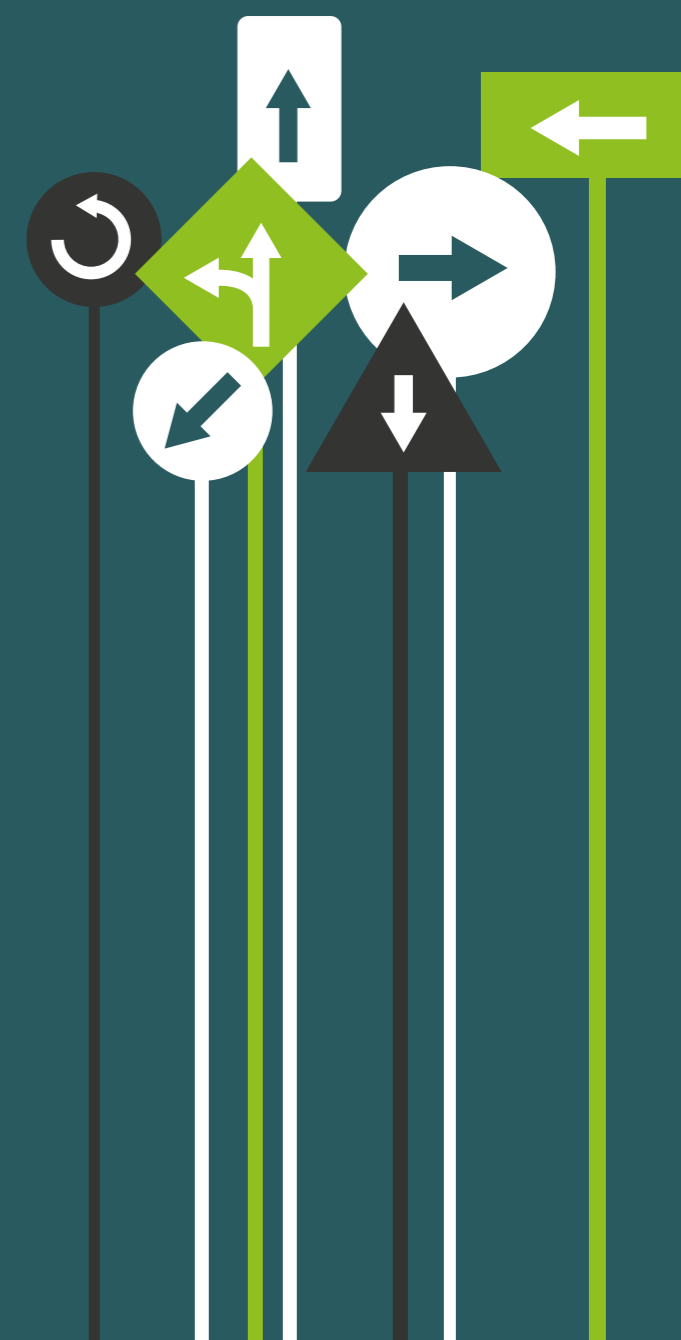
“Partnership working and having regular meetings and briefings on the project. It is good to see everyone is on board and recognises the value in what is trying to be achieved.”

3. Identifying suitable properties/property availability is a challenge

“Having to deal with other competing demands (for units)”

“Our biggest challenge is being able to identify suitable homes – with lockdown, what has come up in the suitable boroughs has been limited.”

# CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS



# Learning So Far

Each component of the WHA can be implemented as a standalone initiative that creates impactful results for survivors. Often survivors will need multiple components to achieve safety and independence. Positive outcomes were achieved when a combination of WHA components were delivered as part of the one intervention.

The following three case studies best exemplify this. All three case studies are based on survivors supported through the pilot, which included the provision of domestic abuse advocacy support and flexible funding.

A **cost-benefit analysis** has been applied to each case study, the results of which are persuasive in showing that harmful outcomes were likely prevented for each case with a potential total savings of **£68,545.8** to the public purse. A certainty level of 70% was added to account for risk and uncertainty, which is in line with a certainty level applied by local authorities in the WHA pilot sites for other projects. This is an allowance for outcomes of “what would have happened anyway” without the WHA intervention. This meant applying a 30% reduction from the total savings identified.

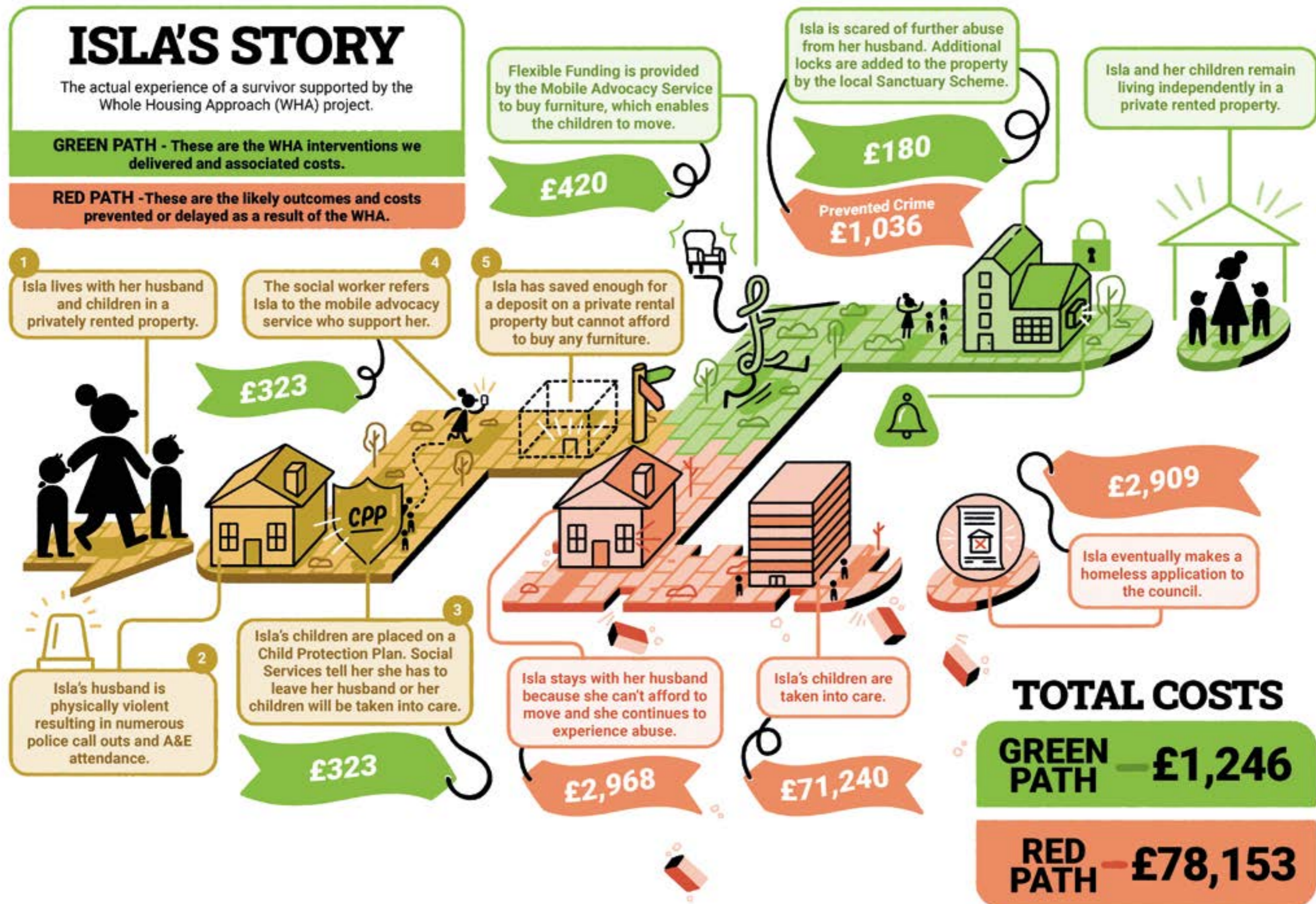
When survivors’ needs are identified and then they are connected to the right resources and support, they feel safer and are in a better position to rebuild their lives. In this instance, a small financial investment made a significant difference in being able to access safety and independence from the perpetrator.

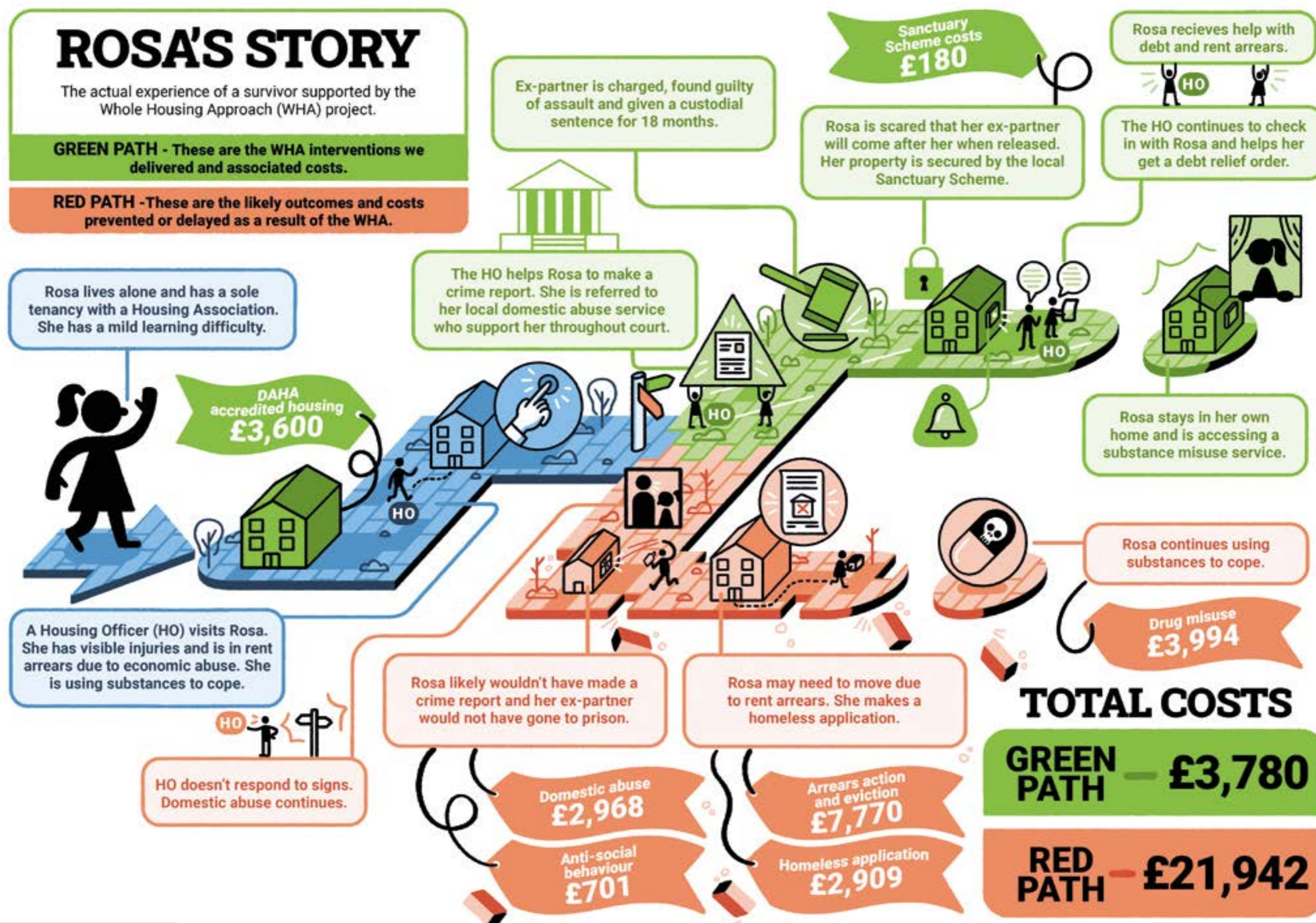


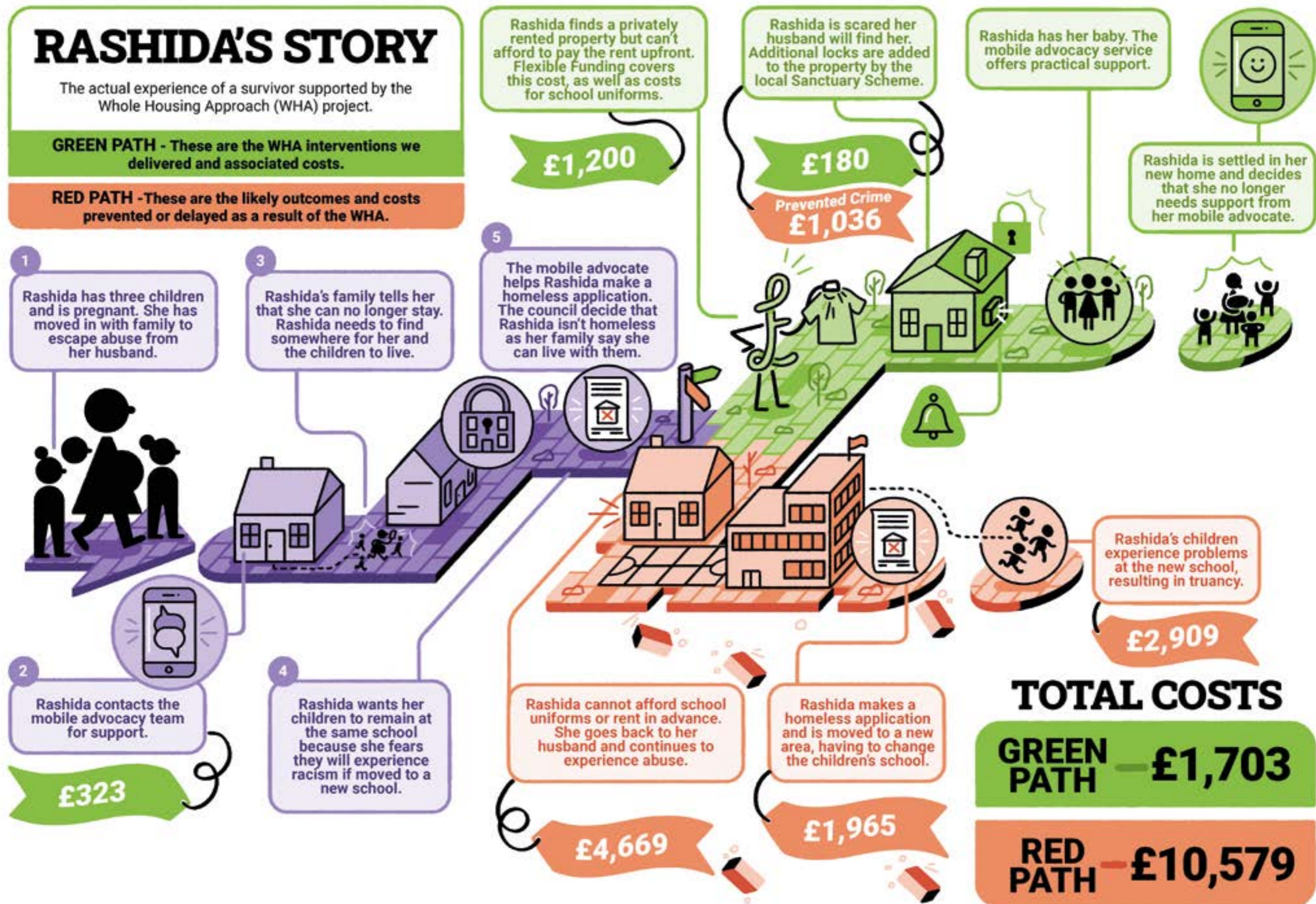
For every £1 invested...

The cost benefit ratio ranged from **£3.39 to £59.27...**

Meaning a **potential total savings of £68,545.80** to the public purse.







What next?

This report shows demonstrable differences made for both victim/survivors, their children and with the professionals and housing providers and services that they interact with. There was an awareness at the commencement of the project that the WHA model would be an adaptive solution and continue to evolve and grow as we piloted the different components. The model is flexible and adaptable in meeting local need and variations in the availability of social housing stock and the number of residents living in rural areas.

The following recommendations for central and local government are based on learning from this first WHA project.



Central and local governments commit to embedding the WHA model.

The model offers a multitude of pathways that victim/survivors need to access or maintain stable housing and offers choice for remaining in one's home and relocating to new accommodation. Specialist domestic abuse provision is key to an effective delivery of the WHA and this includes coordination and frontline provision. The model recognises that refuge services are vital, lifesaving services that need to operate in every locality however not every survivor will need this or be able to access a refuge space. Specialist community-based provision, such as co-located and mobile advocacy are as important to producing positive outcomes for survivors' safety and their housing situation and should be included as part of a package of support when offering any housing initiative.

The WHA model also helps local areas to think about how they can deliver better perpetrator management initiatives, which in some cases may require rehousing perpetrators so that victim/survivors are free and safe to remain in an existing home. This will also help prevent an overemphasis on refuge services as the main housing option and prevent adult and children survivors from having to relocate to a new area because of a lack of alternative choices.

The Domestic Abuse Bill includes a new duty on local authorities in England to provide support for victim/survivors and their children within safe accommodation. Subject to the successful passage of the Bill, the new duty is expected to be in place by April 2021. Tier One authorities will be responsible for this new duty and will need to convene a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. These boards will assess need for support within safe accommodation, develop and publish local strategies, decide what support services are required and commission these accordingly and report progress back to MHCLG. Tier One Boards are encouraged to consider adopting a WHA within requirements of their new duty and in local needs assessments, strategies and commissioning processes.

Adopting this approach nationally will ensure consistency in service delivery and avoid a postcode lottery of the support available.

The [National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group consultation responses](#) includes further recommendations and should be read in conjunction with this report.



Local needs assessments, strategies and commissioning processes are linked to national Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), rough sleeper and homelessness strategies to meet the housing and support needs of victim/survivors with multiple disadvantage.

Supported housing and schemes like housing first provide an option for survivors who experience multiple disadvantage and have care and support needs in addition to their experiences of domestic abuse, and who may feel unable to live safely and independently in housing of other tenure types. Supported housing offers a safe environment, with staff on hand to meet care and support needs and mitigate risk from domestic abuse.

Women-only supported housing is a valuable but all too scarce option for women with care and support needs who have experienced domestic abuse alongside other forms of disadvantage, and who face the risk of being further victimised or re-traumatised in mixed services. Tier one boards, commissioners and service providers should therefore consider whether female survivors have access to women only services



Flexible Funding is a core component of WHA and must be included in any local response to address the economic and housing needs of survivors.

The use of Flexible Funding highlighted how the economic status of survivors can determine their likelihood of accessing safety, freedom, and housing.<sup>7</sup> In the last year, COVID-19 drastically changed the socio-economic conditions in our society. Lockdown has meant that some survivors were trapped at home with their perpetrator. This public health crisis is now also developing into an economic crisis, with women being identified as a group that will be hit hardest. As stated previously in this report, survivors of domestic abuse are already likely to face economic disadvantages. The impact of these intersecting issues will cause further inequalities and economic hardship, creating additional barriers for survivors to break free from perpetrators and hinder their ability to overcome both the impacts of abuse and their weakened economic status exacerbated by COVID-19.

The specialist domestic abuse services part of this project highlights additional barriers their services face when supporting women with uncertain immigration status. Many of these women do end up being entitled to public funds.

Yet, the complexities involved for working this out is time consuming and causes delays in accessing safety, like refuge services. They identify an urgent need for bridge funding to be able to offer these women a safe place to stay while they wait for the outcome, which Flexible Funding could remedy.

4

#### Ensure adequate affordable move-on options are available.

A key aim of the WHA is to encourage agencies and organisations to work in tandem with each other, ensuring that they look at the long-term security of the survivor as well as short term crisis management. In too many domestic abuse cases, agencies feel their only role is to move a survivor into some form of accommodation without considering the long-term picture. One survivor could be passed through multiple types of accommodation over a short period of time before being able to acquire a more secure tenure. There is little consideration of the psychological, physical and economic impact this can have on them and their families.

There is an urgent need to increase supply of genuinely affordable accommodation and consider move on options from refuge services and other types of unsafe accommodation. Move-on was a significant challenge for refuge services before COVID 19 and has become an increasing problem during the pandemic. Women's Aid England report that refuge services in England are posting fewer vacancies since the start of the pandemic, with the average number of available bed spaces falling by half in comparison to the same time last year.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this a call for action was made by DAHA, Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), National Housing Federation and Women's Aid England asking housing providers to prioritise move on from refuge as we came out of lockdown. There is further work to be done here including the opportunity of asking and legislating housing providers to allocate a proportion of any new builds and their existing stock to respond to domestic abuse whether this is rehousing the family or perpetrator.

The Government's Move On Fund provides part of the solution to this with a portion of this fund ring fenced for domestic abuse. It includes capital grant funding to restore or build new homes and revenue funding for tenancy and domestic abuse support costs. The fund in London is managed and delivered by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and in the rest of England by Homes England. Both authorities are partners of the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group.

Currently only a handful of move on projects are being developed and delivered across the country. The WHA project team is seeking additional investment to support new areas of work to scope what an effective move on model looks like for survivors, specialist domestic abuse services and housing providers involved. Consideration will be given to how this intersects with other components of the WHA including mobile advocacy, sanctuary schemes, flexible funding and housing providers that hold DAHA accreditation. The intention is to include Move On as a new component of the WHA model.

5

#### Continued investment to grow and expand the work in the PRS and POH sectors.

The pioneering work being delivered at the second tier in the PRS and private ownership sector is in its infancy. It has already had a vast reach and there is huge potential to prevent homelessness and economic hardship within these tenure types. Having already made impactful actions as part of this project there is a need to continue and expand this work to effectively tackle systems and policy changes needed. Several key priority areas of work that require further development and have been identified through consultations with survivors include:

- A significant number of industries and agencies are involved in the PRS and POH response, making it complex to navigate, coupled with attitudes that domestic abuse is not considered to be relevant and therefore doesn't need to be addressed.
- Complex legalities and barriers to accessing legal advice meaning that survivors are frequently unaware of their rights and how to seek redress. Legislation can also be a barrier to organisations who want to take action to support a survivor but are bound by regulations, for example mortgage lenders. Hence, a focus on policy work is needed for the work to be truly impactful.
- Considering these tenure types have historically not been part of a domestic abuse response, there is a need to build an understanding of PRS and POH within the domestic abuse sector to increase a professional's capacity for advocacy.

- Developing local responses with relevant industries and agencies and embedding them within local Coordinated Community Responses to domestic abuse.
- Further work and investment in exploring the lack of housing rights and legal options for survivors and their children. In particular where this relates to joint tenancies as this is currently a huge barrier to leaving.

6

#### Introduce the sector's call to action for a domestic abuse perpetrator strategy, which includes a coordinated response from services - including housing - to encourage better management of perpetrators.

Housing providers play a key role in holding perpetrators to account. To date, our work has focused on social housing and the positive engagement and enforcement activities available to them. Research by Henderson showed that a high proportion of housing providers include perpetration of domestic abuse as a tenancy breach (72.6%). However, a small number (13.2%) of respondents stated their organisation did not treat domestic abuse as a tenancy breach.<sup>9</sup> Despite the high percentage of housing providers including perpetration of domestic abuse as a tenancy breach, just over half (53.8%) of respondents' organisations had taken any action against perpetrators of abuse, highlighting a gap between policy and action. According to this same research, housing providers have found that they are in a better position to challenge and support perpetrators through receiving training and DAHA accreditation, which is part of the WHA.



- 1 Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) The effectiveness of schemes to enable households at risk of domestic violence to remain in their homes. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1697788/6364.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1697788/6364.pdf)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 DCLG (2010) Sanctuary Schemes for households at risk of domestic violence: Practice guide for agencies developing and delivering sanctuary schemes. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sanctuary-schemes-for-households-at-risk-of-domestic-violence-guide-for-agencies>
- 4 Blood I, Copeman, C, Goldup, M, Poleace, N, Bretherton, J & Dulson S (2017) *Housing First Feasibility Study for the Liverpool City Region*. Retrieved from [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237545/housing\\_first\\_feasibility\\_study\\_for\\_the\\_liverpool\\_city\\_region\\_2017.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237545/housing_first_feasibility_study_for_the_liverpool_city_region_2017.pdf)
- 5 St. Mungo's (2018) *Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology*. Retrieved from <https://www.mungos.org/publication/women-and-rough-sleeping-a-critical-review/>
- 6 Ibid., 21
- 7 Crisis Collide: Women and Covid19-. Examining gender and other equality issues during the coronavirus outbreak, April 2020.
- 8 Women's Aid took a series of weekly snapshots from Routes to Support to show the number of refuge vacancies available in England. For the ten week period from 25th March to 27th May 2020 there were an average of 92 vacancies available at any one time. This compares to an average of 182 over the same time period in 2020.
- 9 Kelly Henderson (2017). Coordinated Community Response: Housing Providers and Domestic Abuse (Doctoral dissertation).

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# Flexible Funding Toolkit

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**Standing Together** is a domestic abuse charity based in London and implemented the first Flexible Funding scheme in 2019 as part of the Whole Housing Approach pilot in the London site.

## Purpose of the toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide guidance and materials to help organisations set up flexible funding in their area. It is intended for commissioners and service providers, including domestic abuse services, housing providers, and local authorities.

Flexible funding was piloted as part of the initial WHA project in the Cambridgeshire and London sites. This toolkit incorporates learning from this initial pilot.

## Definition

**Flexible funding is a designated funding pot that domestic abuse support workers can access quickly and easily for victim/survivors.**

Flexible funding supports victim/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and does not require victim/survivors to provide evidence of abuse. Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded and victim/survivors are encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives.

Flexible funding mainly includes payments to suppliers and third parties or payments to the referring organisation. It can also include small payments made directly to a victim/survivor. Due to tax and benefit implications, the preference is to not give cash to victim/survivors but to pay suppliers directly.

## Background

The economic abuse toolkit provides context on economic abuse, which is often at the root of requests for flexible funding.

Even if victim/survivors have not experienced economic abuse, they can still find themselves in financial difficulties, particularly when leaving their perpetrator. Victim/survivors who leave relationships at a moment of crisis often have to find large amounts of money - frequently thousands of pounds - to cover transport, rental deposits and associated costs, and other emergency expenditure at short notice.

Limited financial support is available for victim/survivors, if it is available at all. This may include:

- Specialist domestic abuse services, in the form of food vouchers or travel passes,
- Charitable organisations that can supply furniture or other essentials,
- Local authorities.

The financial support available varies from authority to authority, meaning there is a lack of consistency and clarity to the offers and qualifying conditions. Funding is often accessed through highly localised services, with conditions or limitations that prevent all victim/survivors from accessing financial support. Scoping carried out prior to the launch of flexible funding identified rent arrears, utility or council tax arrears, rent deposits, moving costs, and transport costs as needs that are often not able to be met through current funding provision in London and Cambridgeshire.

Flexible funding aims to provide a more equitable and accessible solution to financial crises that may otherwise spiral into homelessness. Early and rapid intervention can improve housing stability – a longitudinal evaluation of flexible funding in Washington DC found that 94% of victim/survivors who accessed this fund were housed six months after receiving funding.<sup>i</sup> To read more about this scheme and the origins of flexible funding, please see appendix A.

Flexible funding is easy to access and requires no evidence of abuse, which reduces the stress that victim/survivors experience and helps ensure that support is available when it is needed. Additionally, unlike loans from family, friends or companies, flexible funding enables victim/survivors to be in a more financially stable position than prior to accessing funding.

## Principles of flexible funding

The principles of flexible funding are that:

### It is easy and quick to access

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Referral pathways for flexible funding are **clear and straightforward**.

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Victim/survivors should **receive funds as quickly as possible** after the application has been submitted

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Victim/survivors **do not have to provide evidence** of abuse or their financial situation

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It is accessed via local specialist domestic abuse services but should not always be dependent on engagement with other parts of the service

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Victim/survivors who have **no recourse to public funds** can access flexible funding

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### It helps victim/survivors access safety and stable accommodation

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It **meets the self-defined housing-related needs** of victim/survivors across all tenure types (social housing, privately rented, and private ownership)

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It **covers indirect, as well as direct, costs related to housing stability**, such as car repair or replacing lost documents

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Referrers and the staff involved in administering the scheme **think creatively** about what costs flexible funding can cover

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### It is flexible and variable

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**Requests for all types of goods and services**, and amounts of funding that help to access or maintain stable accommodation, will be considered

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The **quickest route to safety and stable housing is considered** when making decisions on requests

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Funds can be issued to help victim/survivors **achieve economic independence** as this will ideally help them secure housing independently in the future

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### It is cost effective

The person authorising funds **considers the long-term costs saved** by providing victim/survivors with flexible funding

The fund should **cover costs that are not covered by other sources of funding or where applications to other sources have been turned down**. Flexible funding is ideally accompanied by domestic abuse advocacy support to mobilise other services to cover costs and clear debts due to domestic abuse (i.e. rent arrears caused as a result of economic abuse)

Over time, the Coordinator / domestic abuse service will **establish relationships with local businesses and providers of goods and services**, which can better help meet the needs of victim/survivors

The Coordinator **balances the needs of individual applicants with the need to ensure that the fund reaches as many victim/survivors as possible**. This should include consideration of what will help the victim/survivor achieve the quickest and most sustainable route to safe and stable housing

## Key components

### Flexible funding should include:

- **An organisation that has the capacity to hold the funding and administer the fund.** The fund takes a substantial amount of work to administrate and must be held by an organisation that also has the capacity to process referrals, make payments in a timely manner, and monitor overall activity and expenditure.
- **A dedicated Coordinator who has specialist domestic abuse knowledge.** It is recommended that the Coordinator holds responsibility for the activities listed in the point above and authorises requests. They will need to have specialist domestic abuse and housing knowledge, and ideally be based within a specialist domestic abuse service, as the nature of flexible funding means that applications may be for funding that doesn't appear to be directly related to housing need. See Jasmine's story in the case studies section of this toolkit for an example that illustrates the value of thinking creatively about what constitutes housing-related need.
- **Links to other, smaller domestic abuse services led by and for BME, LGBT+, disabled communities so that they can also apply to the fund on behalf of survivors.** Local domestic abuse services need to be able to apply to the fund on behalf of survivors. Additionally, local domestic abuse organisations are likely to have knowledge of other funding that is available in the area, which must be accessed prior to flexible funding.

- **Access to specialist domestic abuse support.** Specialist domestic abuse support is a necessary complement to flexible funding to ensure housing stability. It is the main reason why it is recommended that this pot sits with these services. The support that is offered will vary between victim/survivors but should include safety planning at a minimum and be responsive to victim/survivors' changing circumstances, needs, and level of risk. The support available should be victim/survivor-focused: victim/survivors know what they need to feel safe and maintain or access secure and stable housing, even if the link between the cost and housing may not be obvious to the referrer. The support should also be trauma-informed and should be able to link victim/survivors to a range of advocacy and other services. Depending on the local context, the specialist domestic abuse support may take the form of mobile advocacy, and any funding applications for flexible funding should ideally include a mobile advocacy component. Please see the mobile advocacy toolkit for more information about implementing mobile advocacy.

**Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence illustrated the importance of victim/survivor-led advocacy with the example of a victim/survivor who asked her advocate for a washing machine. The washing machine allowed the victim/survivor to maintain her employment and, as a result, her housing.**

The implementation of flexible funding in the pilot sites has demonstrated the need for this fund to be accompanied by high quality specialist domestic abuse support. In London in particular, victim/survivors often present with complex housing situations that are complicated by them having no recourse to public funds (NRPF) or experiencing multiple disadvantage. Referrals in these cases were not intended to resolve a developing crisis and ensure housing stability thereafter, but rather offered temporary solutions to enable further advocacy work – for example, by enabling victim/survivors to access suitable emergency accommodation to prevent street homelessness while a Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) application was completed and other NRPF service providers contacted.

## Planning and Preparation

### Scoping

The planning process for a new flexible funding scheme should start with a mapping exercise of existing funds in the area that the scheme will be operating in. This will allow the identification of any gaps in provision and enable the scheme to be tailored to the local funding context.

The mapping exercise can also provide a useful resource to share with domestic abuse workers who are referring into the scheme, to ensure that they are aware of all available funding opportunities and that they take advantage of these prior to making a referral to flexible funding.

### Stakeholders

Stakeholders will vary from area to area, but may include:

- Local authorities, who may be best placed to hold and/or administer the fund,
- Local domestic abuse partnerships,
- Local domestic abuse services, including mobile advocates and IDVAs,
- Organisations that deal with domestic abuse, but do not have access to their own funding – for instance, community organisations.

The agencies that can make referrals for funding should be decided during the planning process. It is important to ensure that victim/survivors from all backgrounds have access to flexible funding as the most marginalised victim/survivors are likely to be the most in need of financial assistance, so local domestic abuse services that cater for specific communities or groups of survivors should be able to refer into the scheme.

### Funding / fundraising

Flexible funding can operate with a relatively small pot of funding, but other costs – including the cost of a Coordinator – must be factored into any bids for funding. Additionally, it is recommended that flexible funding is commissioned alongside a specialist domestic abuse advocacy service that has adequately skilled and experienced workers to support women with housing and other related needs.

Scoping should be carried out prior to the submission of any applications for funding to determine the required amount, which should be proportionate to local need. When determining local need, consideration should be given to the fact that although flexible funding payments can range from a few pounds for a train ticket to thousands of pounds for rental arrears or a deposit, the average payment in both pilot areas was between £500 and £600. The fund should be large enough to ensure that referrals for very large amounts do not place significant pressure on the remaining funds, and to also ensure that victim/survivors who have significant financial needs can be supported by the fund.

### **Promotion and publicity**

Flexible funding should be promoted and publicised to organisations that will make referrals to the fund. Ways to do this include presenting at team meetings and creating and circulating information sheets for frontline staff so that staff clearly understand the purpose of the fund and can offer this option to victim/survivors.

When the fund is launched, local domestic abuse services need to be informed of the referral criteria and the procedure for making referrals. Please see the referral guidance in Resources for an example of the referral criteria and procedure used for the London fund.

### **Recruiting staff to deliver the scheme (Quality Management)**

It is unlikely that delivering flexible funding will require a full-time Coordinator, given the limited scope of even the largest funds. However, the Coordinator should have the time to ensure that flexible funding referrals are promptly acknowledged and processed. As such, it may be necessary to have a shared inbox for flexible funding referrals to ensure that referrals can be processed even when the primary Coordinator is out of the office or not working.

In order to be able to process referrals that may not appear to be related to housing need, those administering the scheme should have specialist domestic abuse and housing training. While referrals should contain an explanation of what the funding is for and how that reduces housing need, it is important for the Coordinator to be able to have a holistic understanding of domestic abuse so they can respond appropriately. Additionally, the Coordinator needs to be able to identify any safety concerns that may arise during the administration of the funding and discuss these with the domestic abuse workers – for example, an item may only be able to be collected from within the victim/survivor's danger zone so delivery may be the safer option.

The Coordinator may also be responsible for coordinating other domestic abuse initiatives such as the local Sanctuary Scheme or Reciprocal Scheme in order to make this a full-time role (see other sections of this toolkit), or they may also deliver direct support to victim/survivors.

If the role does not involve offering direct support to victim/survivors, Coordinators may find it difficult to be contacted by victim/survivors who are seeking extra funding or who are experiencing complex circumstances, so must be comfortable explaining the limits of the fund and redirecting victim/survivors to their support workers. Coordinators must also be able to liaise with frontline workers to develop solutions to victim/survivors' complex situations while still operating within the scope of the fund.

The responsibilities of the Coordinator are to:

- Oversee the referral process and assess referrals using a trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centred approach,
- Liaise with referrers to determine how victim/survivors can be best supported by the fund in conjunction with other interventions and support available,
- Process referrals quickly and communicate decisions about funding clearly,
- Check that no other sources of funding are available to pay for goods and services within the requested timeframe,
- Ensure that payment is made quickly and using the most suitable method,
- Monitor expenditure and effectiveness of the scheme (including carrying out surveys with victim/survivors),
- Promote the scheme and ensure that victim/survivors from marginalised communities have access to the fund,
- Deal with any issues relating to the purchase of goods and services.

### Engaging people with lived experience

Flexible funding needs to be monitored to ensure that it is being implemented in a way that aligns with the aims of the model and ensures positive outcomes for victim/survivors. Getting feedback from victim/survivors who've accessed the scheme is a crucial way to do this, as it provides data on whether the funding is truly easy to access, available when required, and helps victim/survivors achieve and/or maintain stable housing.

Consent should be sought to contact victim/survivors for a follow-up survey or interview when the application is made for flexible funding. If a victim/survivor does not consent to be contacted, then this should not be used as a reason to refuse an application for funding. Please see Resources at the end of this toolkit for a template consent form.

Follow-up surveys or interviews should be conducted by the administering agency within the time period specified on the consent form, usually 3 or 6 months. This ensures that there is time for victim/survivors to be able to assess whether flexible funding has affected their housing situation. See the Resources section of this toolkit for a sample feedback survey and script.

However, the passage of time may mean that it is no longer safe to contact victim/survivors due to their situation changing. The Coordinator of the fund may choose to mitigate this risk by asking referring agencies to distribute the survey or conduct the feedback interview. Alternatively, the Coordinator can put strategies in place to reduce the risks associated with

contacting victim/survivors – for example, the Coordinator may call from a withheld number and/or have a cover story ready in case the abuser answers the telephone.

The Coordinator may wish to gather outcome data from the referring agencies, in order for the impact of flexible funding on individuals to be gathered from the perspective of the support worker. This can be a good way of ensuring that outcomes and feedback are captured for victim/survivors who may be unable to engage with people who they don't have an established relationship with, or whose housing situations may still be unstable.

### **Storing personal and sensitive data**

Processing flexible funding referrals requires the collection of personal and sensitive data, including full names and addresses. Data collection should be proportionate to the funding request: for example, it is not necessary to collect victim/survivors' addresses if home delivery of items is not being arranged.

Data should be stored securely, and the number of people who have access to the data should be restricted by password protecting documents and limiting folder access to the staff involved in administering flexible funding.

## **Discussion and considerations**

### **Should payments be made directly to a victim/survivor?**

Making payments directly to victim/survivors is controversial and not all flexible funding schemes will be able to support this. There may be issues with obtaining receipts and incorporating direct payments into accounts. Additionally, there will be tax and/or benefit implications when payments are made directly into victim/survivors' accounts. Care must be taken to ensure that victim/survivors are not put in a position where their access to benefits is compromised.

However, making payments directly to victim/survivors can actively support their recovery and self-esteem. Entrusting victim/survivors with funding shows belief in their experiences and their understanding of what will help them to maintain or achieve stable housing. Making payments directly to victim/survivors also means that they get to choose whether or not to reveal their experiences of domestic abuse to the person or organisation they are paying. Indeed, if a domestic abuse organisation makes the payment on their behalf, then their status as a victim/survivor is automatically revealed.

A good compromise, where available, can be to provide victim/survivors with gift cards to enable them to purchase items, while avoiding any negative effects on benefits entitlement.

### **When is it appropriate to use flexible funding to pay off rental arrears or debts?**

Clearing rental arrears or debts – particularly debts arising from utility bills or council tax – is a common cause of flexible funding referrals. Rental arrears or debts can stem from a range of sources, but economic abuse is often involved in cases that are referred to flexible funding.

Being in rental arrears can be highly problematic for victim/survivors, as it can restrict their access to management transfers if in socially rented housing and can lead to eviction and homelessness. If rental arrears have been caused by the perpetrator, the presence of rental arrears can enable the perpetrator to exert control over the victim/survivor, even if the perpetrator and victim/survivor no longer have contact. Resolving rental arrears therefore often improves the stability of housing for victim/survivors, as well as helping to prevent ongoing abuse.

Before arrears or debts are cleared by flexible funding, however, it is important to ensure that other avenues have been explored and that advocacy with relevant agencies has been undertaken by the victim/survivor's domestic abuse support worker. Flexible funding should not be used to relieve other agencies of their duties towards victim/survivors. Steps should have been taken by the support worker and the housing provider to support the victim/survivor to pay off the arrears in line with relevant internal policies. If some of the arrears can be cancelled under these policies then this should be done prior to a flexible funding payment being made.

Where the amount requested is significant, the referrer should ideally find out what minimum payment is required in order to prevent or stop eviction proceedings and how much the victim/survivor can afford to pay off with a repayment plan. This is also helpful for stretching the flexible funding pot so that it reaches as many victim/survivors as possible.

Additionally, it can be helpful to co-create an action plan with the victim/survivor and landlord to help prevent arrears accruing again. The victim/survivor should be offered access to support – such as debt management – to ensure that they are able to continue to pay their rent. It is the responsibility of the referrer to arrange this, but the Coordinator should be aware of these issues and should discuss this with the referrer.

### **Direct contact with victim/survivors**

If flexible funding is not delivered by a frontline service, there may be issues with victim/survivors contacting the Coordinator directly. It should be made clear to potential referrers that only professionals can refer into the scheme and that victim/survivors should not be given the contact details for the Coordinator in order to avoid multiple lines of communication developing. Victim/survivors can be provided with an information sheet that explains the purpose of the fund and what victim/survivors should do if they have any questions or concerns. A template for this document can be found in the Resources section of this toolkit.

In instances where victim/survivors contact the Coordinator, the role of the fund should be explained and any requests for support should be directed towards the referring organisation. Coordinators should be able to employ a trauma-informed perspective to be able to deal with these contacts sensitively. The Coordinator should not take on the role of support worker or advocate, although it may be necessary to liaise with the referring organisations to ensure that the victim/survivor is receiving adequate support.

If disputes arise regarding the support the victim/survivor is receiving, victim/survivors should be directed to raise these issues directly with the service they are being supported by.

### **Complaints about goods and services**

It is inevitable that not all purchases will go smoothly. Issues can arise with the quality of a service and as the purchaser of goods and services, the Coordinator may need to respond to these issues, acting as a liaison between the victim/survivor, domestic abuse service and supplier.

A complaints policy and procedure should be developed as part of the planning process.

Additionally, the way in which funds are delivered should be considered to ensure that services are delivered as smoothly as possible. Where possible, the victim/survivor or the referrer should identify relevant services and the role of the Coordinator should be limited to dispensing payment. For example, if a referral is made for carpet to be fitted in a victim/survivor's property, the victim/survivor or referrer could obtain a quote and reference number, and the Coordinator could then make payment directly from the fund. Similarly, supplying victim/survivors with gift cards ensures that victim/survivors are able to purchase exactly the goods they need and can settle any disputes directly with the supplier.

### **Procedures: London Pilot Site**

In London, flexible funding is administrated by Standing Together, a second-tier organisation that works to improve organisational responses to domestic abuse. Standing Together holds £30,000 of funding. The fund is open to organisations involved in the Angelou Partnership: a cohort of 10 specialist organisations that support women and girls experiencing domestic or sexual violence in Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster, and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Applications are made by frontline workers from these organisations. The referral form (see the Resources section of this toolkit) is sent to the Coordinator at Standing Together, along with a consent form if the victim/survivor would like to be contacted as part of the project evaluation. The Coordinator reviews the application and responds to the referrer within a day, often within the hour. This is either to approve the referral or to ask for more information.

The approval criteria are as follows:

- The request meets a housing related need, and increases the stability of the victim/survivor's housing situation;
- The victim/survivor either lives in or has fled Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, or Hammersmith & Fulham;
- All other appropriate funds have been approached or deemed unsuitable;
- The victim/survivor has recently experienced, or is currently experiencing, domestic abuse.

More information may be requested for a variety of reasons. For instance:

- To find out more about a victim/survivor's situation and how the flexible funding request will support them;
- To discuss how a request can be delivered;
- To clarify how the request meets housing need.

Once the Coordinator has all the necessary information, then a decision can be made. If an application is rejected this is usually because the referral is not judged to be for goods or services that will increase the victim/survivor's housing stability, or because it falls within the scope of another fund.

When a request is approved the Coordinator sends the details of the request to the Office Manager at Standing Together, who is authorised to make purchases. The Office Manager is only provided with the information that is essential to making the purchase. Once the purchase has been made, any confirmations are sent to the Coordinator by the Office Manager. The Coordinator will then send confirmation and any details of the goods or service to the referrer.

If there are any issues with the delivery of the goods or service, these are communicated by the referrer to the Coordinator, who liaises with the Office Manager to ensure the timely resolution of any issues.

## Case studies

### Jasmine's story.

As there is no set list of what can be purchased through flexible funding, the Coordinator bases their decision about the suitability of the referral on the link that the referrer makes between the referral request and the victim/survivor's housing situation. In Jasmine's case, her support worker made it clear that providing Jasmine with funding would help her consider her housing options and that there were significant risks associated with not providing her with funding. This case study illustrates the value of Coordinators believing that what victim/survivors say will help them improve their housing situation will do so.

A return train ticket was purchased for Jasmine so that she could go and stay with a friend outside London. Jasmine has PTSD, depression and anxiety and was feeling overwhelmed by appointments and services. Additionally, the perpetrator had just been released from prison and Jasmine was very upset and concerned for her safety.

Jasmine's support worker had tried to explore safety and housing options with Jasmine but, due to her fear of the perpetrator, she was unable to think about her options. The support worker was concerned that without respite, engagement with the service was unlikely to be maintained and Jasmine was likely to become homeless as she did not have adequate protection to feel safe at home and often could not stay there.

When Jasmine returned to London, she was able to engage with her support worker, her Housing Officer, and attend her housing appointments. Jasmine had previously turned down both a Sanctuary Scheme referral and a fire brigade referral but now accepted these, enabling her to feel safe in her home and engage with local services.

**Jane's story.**

Jane came to the UK from a Commonwealth country with her husband, who exercised his EU treaty rights under the Surinder Singh judgement. Jane could live and work in England for six months before needing to obtain her residence card, but Jane and her young son fled from her abusive husband five months into the six-month period.

Jane went to stay with a family friend. She had no money to support herself as she did not have access to her savings or recourse to public funds due to her immigration status. Jane had several ongoing legal cases to enable her to leave the UK with her son and return to her country of origin, and was advised by her solicitors that making an application to the Home Office for a residence card on the grounds of relationship breakdown due to domestic abuse would jeopardise her court case and her application for leave and removal. As such, Jane could not work and her only source of income was less than £40 a week which she received from her husband to go towards her son's cost of living. Jane had to travel a significant distance to get this money and to allow her son to have supervised contact with her husband, at a cost of £60 per trip.

Jane's domestic abuse support worker applied for £500 to meet Jane and her son's basic needs, which was awarded. The funding was used to repay debt she had with the friends who'd supported her and her son, to purchase clothing and toiletries, and pay for travel. Jane and her son moved into emergency accommodation and Jane bought essential items for the accommodation, including bedding, a kettle, cutlery, crockery, and baking tins. These items were "desperately needed" and Jane stated that "had the money not been granted I'm not sure I would have been able to afford such".

Beyond the practical impact of the funding, in an email to the domestic abuse service that supported her Jane expressed the value of "grant[ing] the money in the first place, when so many others had turned us down for not meeting the criteria. It has made an invaluable difference to our lives, and I am grateful to those who provided it as well as those who assisted me in applying and obtaining it."

### **Supporting victim/survivors with no NRPF: Emergency accommodation**

Victim/survivors with NRPF should have access to flexible funding, but care should be taken to ensure that other agencies are not relieved of their duties towards victim/survivors.

In Jane's case, she was deemed in priority need and provided with emergency accommodation by the local authority, so using flexible funding for accommodation would have been inappropriate. In other cases that arose during the pilot, flexible funding was offered to victim/survivors with NRPF who were not deemed in priority need to secure hotel accommodation to prevent them becoming street homeless that night. Accommodation was only provided as a last resort, on a short-term basis (not longer than a week), and where other agencies were unable to provide emergency accommodation.

When providing emergency accommodation through flexible funding, whether to victim/survivors with NRPF or victim/survivors who had access only to emergency accommodation that was unsuitable (as in the case of a woman who was offered mixed-sex hostel accommodation for a week while applying to refuge services and instead provided with a secure private hotel room through flexible funding), care should be taken to ensure that the accommodation allows adequate privacy, does not require ID if the victim/survivor has no ID, is in an area where the victim/survivor feels safe and can continue to access support services, and that the referring agency has a clear plan to attain more suitable accommodation within the period of time the hotel is funded for.

### **Impact on referrers**

Flexible funding is a vital resource for referrers, who may find it difficult to source appropriate funding for victim/survivors. Scoping for the flexible funding pilot identified gaps in the funding that was available in Cambridgeshire and London, particularly for paying off rent, utility or council tax arrears.

Additionally, the complexity of many victim/survivors' circumstances may mean that support workers struggle to improve their housing situation and may face difficulties when engaging with other services and systems. This quote illustrates the difference flexible funding can make to support workers:

**Flexible funding has kept me motivated. If you know you have this to fall back on, you can handle hard decisions better. IDVAs burn out when you get knocked back and feel like you get told no too much. It's been really motivating.**

**IDVA, London**

### **Recommendations**

- Flexible funding should be funded in conjunction with mobile advocacy. Specialist domestic abuse support is necessary to ensure that victim/survivors can stabilise their housing situations.

### **Resources**

WSCADV flexible funding toolkit

Flexible funding information sheet for victim/survivors

Referral documents:

Form

Guidance

Available funds

Payment procedures

Monitoring tools:

Flexible Funding Tracker

Feedback survey

Feedback script

## Appendix A: Background to Flexible Funding

Flexible funding was developed in the USA by the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence's Economic Stability Working Group in 2001. The state established the Expanded Transition to Independent Living programme, which provided flexible funding to survivors of domestic abuse to support them to live independently.<sup>i</sup>

Flexible funding was further developed as part of the American Domestic Violence Housing First model. Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) prioritises securing safe housing for survivors, which is accompanied by in-depth support following rehousing. Flexible funding is one of key components of DVHF, along with mobile advocacy and community engagement.

Evaluation of the flexible funding component of DVHF demonstrated that flexible funding supports housing stability. 51% of victim/survivors were able to stay in their own home as a result of receiving flexible funding, while other victim/survivors moved from homeless to housed (12%), from temporary accommodation to housed (9%), or moved homes (8%). The remaining victim/survivors received funding to prepare them for housing (for example, transportation assistance) (17%) and the remaining 3% received funds that supported overall family well-being.

DVHF has been implemented in several different locations and contexts in the USA, including in Seattle, Washington State, and in Napa Valley, California. In the Napa Valley project, which was run by a domestic violence organisation called NEWS, \$425,000 was dedicated to flexible funding over 21 months. NEWS was able to provide victim/survivors with long-term financial support (for 12 months or longer), as well as one-off payments.<sup>iii</sup>

This was a very different project to those implemented as part of the Whole Housing pilot, which had a total of £75,000 to disburse across two sites over less than 18 months. These differences are due in part to the differing availability of funding in the USA compared to the UK, as well as the limited nature of the welfare system in the USA.

## References

<sup>i</sup> Sullivan, C., Bomsta, H. and Hacskaylo, M. (2016) Flexible Funding as a Promising Strategy to Prevent Homelessness for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(14), 3017-3033. doi: 10.1177/0886260516664318.

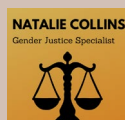
<sup>ii</sup> Sullivan, C., Bomsta, H. and Hacskaylo, M. (2016) Flexible Funding as a Promising Strategy to Prevent Homelessness for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(14), 3017-3033. doi: 10.1177/0886260516664318.

<sup>iii</sup> Lopez-Zeron, G., and Sullivan, C (2019) *NEWS: An exemplar of the DV Housing First model*. Retrieved from [https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DVHF-CA\\_NEWS\\_02212019final-.pdf](https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DVHF-CA_NEWS_02212019final-.pdf)

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# Keeping The Faith

What Survivors From Faith  
Communities Want Us To Know



## Acknowledgements

This report was written by Huda Jawad and Zainab Moallin. We wish to thank the following women for their contribution to the briefing and for their time and labour on the front line during a time of tumultuous anxiety and global insecurity: Ashiedu Joel, Bekah Legg (Restored), Bridget Symonds (Respect), Esther Sweetman (Restored), Fran Richards (Standing Together), Gisela Valle (Latin American Women's Rights Service), Hanan Bibikir (Al Aman Project), Maaria Mahmood (Muslim Youth Helpline), Marwa Belghazi, Mary Otuko (Forward UK), Naomi Dickson (Jewish Women's Aid), Natalie Collins, Nikki Dhillon-Keane, Sandra Madej (Standing Together), Sara Hyde and Veronica Simpson (Back in Control Consultancy).

### Glossary of terms

**BiCC** – Back in Control Consultancy

**CCR** - Coordinated Community Response

**Faith and VAWG Coalition** – Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition

**LAWRS** – Latin American Women's Rights Services

**NRPF** – No Recourse to Public Funds

**Standing Together** – Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse

**VAWG** – Violence Against Women and Girls

### Terminology

**'By and For' organisations** - This report refers to specialist led 'by and for' organisations. A specialist led 'by and for' organisation is one that is led by the same communities that it seeks to serve. e.g. A service for Black and minoritised women affected by domestic violence which is staffed by a board, Director and frontline staff who are themselves representative of Black and minoritised groups.

**Faith Leaders** – The Coalition uses the term faith leaders in its most inclusive sense. Recognising leaders in faith communities to be formally trained or communally recognised as having credibility and influence. This therefore includes women and young people.

**Minoritised** – this report uses the term minoritised communities instead of minority communities as we believe these communities have been politically minoritised through the dominant white supremacist framework.

**Specialist Services** - A specialist service is one whose primary organisational purpose is to address, prevent and tackle domestic violence and abuse, and support the women who have been subjected to abuse as the primary purpose of the service, and is independent from statutory services.

## About the Faith and VAWG Coalition



The Faith & VAWG Coalition is a partnership of organisations led by the Faith and Communities Programme at Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse. It seeks to build bridges between members of faith Communities or faith-centric organisations and domestic abuse prevention specialists and organisations within the violence against women and girls' sector.

### Co-founding members of the Faith and VAWG Coalition

Forward UK

Jewish Women's Aid

Muslim Youth Helpline

Latin American Women's Rights Service

Respect

Restored

Marwa Belghazi

Nikki Dhillon-Keane

Natalie Collins

Sara Hyde

Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse

SAFE Communities Project

### The Faith and VAWG Coalition values

→ We adopt an intersectional feminist perspective that understands violence against women as largely perpetrated by men and rooted in systemic, though not exclusive gender, racial and economic inequality.

→ We are grounded in our expertise and experience as both professionals in the domestic abuse sector and in our lived experience.

→ We believe that faith can contribute to the elimination of VAWG.

→ We believe there is no hierarchy of faith, belief or non-belief. All are equal.

→ We are a safe space created by a diverse range of women with an objective to work against all forms and systems of oppression.

→ We are a non-oppressive coalition that supports and fosters inclusion of all identities and differences.



# Executive summary

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ending violence against women and girls sector has been proactively responding to the escalating abuse and the resulting rapidly changing needs of women. Where some strategic gains have been had in highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on women and children being abused by men, the voices and needs of women from faith backgrounds have been conspicuously absent. Many survivors from faith backgrounds have reported that secular specialist services and society, in general, are unable to understand their experiences of abuse, and the barriers to accessing support. Often the unique role religion and spirituality play in their lives and how these manifests in their communities, experiences of abuse and healing is little if understood at all.

## Findings

### What women of faith want their faith and community leaders to know?

- Faith communities play a unique and vital role in the response to and elimination of domestic abuse and men’s violence towards women and girls.
- Faith leaders should be aware that men’s abuse is escalating during this pandemic, as factors such as the inability of women to get out of the home and seek support, job loss or furloughing, confinement and home schooling have facilitated an escalation of men’s abuse and violence.

### What women of faith want the government and Specialist Services to know about how they can be supported and empowered?

- Faith and religion can be sources of comfort for survivors of faith.
- Specialist Services, policy makers, commissioners and funders urgently need to understand the varying manifestation and use of how each or a mix of culture, religious tradition and holy scripture can be used as tools of abuse by perpetrators.
- One of the most important obstacles facing survivors of faith is finding a safe space. Policymakers must support domestic abuse and ending VAWG services that understand the needs of survivors from faith backgrounds.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has made visible the multiple intersections of inequality and discrimination that migrant women face.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a concerning increase in stalking.

## Recommendations

1. Local and central government should evidence the value with which they hold ‘by and for’ organisations and their work by adequately resourcing them and removing barriers to funding.
2. Faith communities including leaders should be seen as allies in the fight against VAWG and domestic abuse.
3. Create and support spaces like the Faith and VAWG Coalition that understand and appreciate the complexity of the relationship between faith and domestic abuse.

# Keeping The Faith: What Survivors From Faith Communities Want Us To Know

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of women and girls is increasingly talked about and yet not fully understood. Research has demonstrated that during major health pandemics such as COVID-19, men's violence towards women and girls (VAWG) becomes more severe as men's perpetration escalates and women's insecurities and their vulnerabilities increase (Fraser, 2020).

There are a number of ways that COVID-19, and the measures to manage it, have escalated perpetration. Each abuser's intention (either consciously or subconsciously) is to control and dominate his partner and any children. He will use whatever tools are available to him. COVID-19 has vastly expanded his "abuse toolbox". His tactics to isolate are aided by lockdowns and fears around contracting the virus. This is particularly concerning for disabled women, who are more vulnerable to the virus and are also 40% more likely to be abused by a partner (Brownridge, 2006). COVID-19 does not cause abuse but creates a highly conducive context that will be taken advantage of by abusers. COVID-19 has increased the opportunity men have to abuse in the home (given how much more people are required to stay at home) and has an emboldening effect, in that abusers are not having to modify their behaviour for the workplace, family gatherings or other places.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, the women's sector has been proactively responding to this escalating abuse and the resulting rapidly changing needs of women. However, where some strategic gains have been had in highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on women and children, the voices and needs of women from faith backgrounds have been conspicuously absent.

## The context and challenges facing women from faith communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

While no one is immune to COVID-19, structural inequality reproduces disproportionately across diverse communities and exacerbates existing racialised inequalities (Imkaan, 2020). Studies have shown that Black and minoritised women are most likely to suffer disproportionately from the economic fallout, the emotional labour of working from home, home-schooling, domestic tasks, caring responsibilities for children and older relatives. This also includes homelessness, state and intimate partner violence whether it be being on the receiving end of punitive treatment from police enforcing the quite unclear lockdown regulations or from a lack of safety and refuge from perpetrators in their families and communities (Imkaan, 2020).

Research also reveals how Black and minoritised women are particularly impacted in terms of susceptibility to death from the disease or the impact on general health due to administrative delays in the health system and structural barriers to accessing support. A report by the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (ICNARC) found that one-third of critically ill people in the UK were from Black and minoritised communities with 13.8% recorded as Asian, 13.6% as Black and 6.6% as other ethnic groups (Khan, 2020). This is also highlighted by CharitySoWhite (2020) who found Black and minoritised groups are over-represented as communities at risk (due to barriers in access to health) and that Black and minoritised women are disproportionately impacted by these health inequalities (Imkaan, 2020).

Whilst state and wider sector support to women and children from Black and minoritised backgrounds pre-pandemic was inadequate save for the dedicated and heroic effort of specialist by and for organisations, women from faith communities have been invisible to the state and society at large. Before COVID-19, the specialist Black and minoritised refuge sector was subjected to decommissioning at disproportionate levels. Just before the outbreak of COVID-19, Women's Aid, reported that 41% of women supported by the 'No Woman Turned Away' project belonged to Black or minoritised groups highlighting that minoritised women faced additional barriers in accessing safe

accommodation (Women's Aid, 2019). This is in line with one-third of specialist refuges for Black and minoritised women being decommissioned since austerity resulting in a reduction of 50% bed space capacity.

The pandemic has further revealed the extent to which women from faith communities and their needs are totally absent from policy responses whether at a governmental level, or the practical responses of the police, NHS, and women-led services. It is for this reason and in recognition of the barriers that operate in society and faith communities that the Faith and VAWG Coalition is outlining the unique way in which life under COVID-19 has impacted some women of faith.

The Coalition recognises that the experiences and needs of women from faith backgrounds are diverse and intersect significantly with race, ethnicity, class, ability, language, immigration status and even denominational belonging. For instance, a White Anglican woman's experiences will be very different to a Black Christian Pentecostal woman. In addition, women's religious modes of worship and religious needs will be varied depending on a number of factors including their denominational traditions, the racial and ethnic profile of their community, the privileges enjoyed and barriers faced by their faith and or racial communities. The contributions to this briefing draw largely on the experiences of women from Black, migrant and minoritised communities. This means that for some women of faith some of the barriers and issues outlined are not fully representative of their lived realities under COVID-19.

The Faith & VAWG Coalition would also like to highlight the vital role played by faith and religious communities throughout the pandemic in responding to the fall out of the unfolding humanitarian crisis. From providing emergency food parcels, organising food and medicine collections, welfare checks, spiritual and pastoral support to the sick, traumatised and isolated, digital forms of communal worship to the counselling and overseeing of funerals and burials, faith communities have provided a safety net and a holding space for those in most need and for those who feel able to make a difference.

## What is the Faith & VAWG Coalition?

The Faith & VAWG Coalition is a partnership of organisations led by the Faith and Communities Programme at Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse. It seeks to build bridges between members of faith Communities or faith-centric organisations and domestic abuse prevention specialists and organisations within the violence against women and girls' sector.

The Faith and VAWG Coalition was created following a conference organised by Standing Together in November 2018, which discussed the role of faith communities in responding to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. There was a need for a professional and strategic space where VAWG specialists and professionals working with faith and cultural contexts can come together. Although the work to end violence against women and girls at a grassroots level is already rich and diverse, this Coalition will allow a more strategic, regular, and structural approach to tackling the issue at hand.

Many women with a faith have found that secular specialist services and society, in general, are unable to understand their experiences of abuse, and the barriers faced in accessing support due to their religious identity, their faith community and the perpetrator's spiritual abuse of them.

## Methodology

To uncover the unique challenges and experiences related to COVID-19 for women from faith communities who have been subjected to abuse, this briefing used a mix-methods approach and combined a desk review with a series of interviews and questionnaires of specialists working within by and for organisations.

The following women have been instrumental in contributing to the briefing: Ashiedu Joel, Marwa Belghazi, Natalie Collins, Nikki Dhilion-Keane, Hanan Bibikir, Veronica Simpson (Back in Control Consultancy), Esther Sweetman (Restored), Bekah Legg (Restored) and Gisela Valle (Latin American Women's Rights Service).

## Findings

### What women of faith want their faith and community leaders to know?

#### 1. The important and unique role played by faith and community leaders

As stated earlier, faith communities have played a vital role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, they have and some already play a significant role in the elimination of domestic abuse and men's violence towards women and girls. These communities carry the responsibility to protect and nurture the spiritual wellbeing of individuals and the community as a whole. During times of crisis women who are subjected to abuse often turn to faith leaders (whether formally trained or communally recognised) for spiritual guidance and support. This is done, often before or instead of seeking support from secular specialist services. The unique understanding of the role of faith in an individual's life and its power to provide support and resilience explain some of the reasons why women subjected to abuse choose to disclose to leaders and members of their faith community. Similarly, perpetrators may also turn to faith leaders, perhaps either as a means of legitimising their abuse or to seek guidance and support in understanding and changing their behaviour. Faith leaders may be asked, then, to provide spiritual guidance and counselling to both the survivor and the perpetrator. To be done comprehensively and safely this requires faith leaders and community members to not only acknowledge and understand abuse but also to educate themselves and have an awareness of statutory and specialist services that survivors and perpetrators can be referred to. It is therefore important that responses to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls cannot exist without careful attention to the safety of the survivor as well as some form of accountability for the abusive partner which statutory and specialist services have a role in ensuring (VAWnet, 2020).

COVID-19 related restrictions resulted in the shutting of the doors to churches, synagogues, mosques, and places of worship worldwide. Many religious communities swiftly adapted and took faith online (some had already been building online faith communities for many years). For those whose traditional modes of worship

rely on segregation of the sexes, this created new, or growing, space for women to participate in religious congregations. In some Black and minoritised religious communities, women would be excluded from religious congregations either because there was no space for women or there was no childcare provision. However, with the new digital religious spaces created by the pandemic, women from these communities felt more included as there was more ease for women to join online. It also allowed for more flexibility as women could turn off their cameras; do other things while listening in; mute themselves when children made noise. Notably, one important issue raised by our respondents was the added responsibility this placed on the online religious meeting moderators. Given the sensitive nature of issues such as violence against women and girls and domestic abuse, there is a large responsibility placed on faith leaders in charge of the online meetings in ensuring the anonymity of women when they seek advice on sensitive issues.

It is important to note that whilst for many the term religious leader connotes a man in religious garb, the Faith and VAWG Coalition recognises that women have and continue to occupy formal and informal spiritual and religious leadership positions within their communities. This can manifest differently across faith, racial and ethnic communities. Even though these women exist in a patriarchal system, nonetheless one should be careful not to reinforce the patriarchal binary that religious legitimacy and influence can only be held by men.

## 2. Faith and community leaders must become more literate with regards to domestic abuse and its varied manifestations.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, one of our contributors, Back in Control Consultancy (BiCC), a specialists in Safeguarding and Domestic Violence training has received more domestic abuse-related enquiries, and referrals for specialised support from places of worship than in previous years. Restored, a Faith & VAWG Coalition co-founder, saw a doubling of visitors to their website and their Survivor's Network grew from 150 in March to nearly 250. Notably it took 4 years to grow the network to 150 members and within 6 months of the pandemic demand for membership increased to 250.

Faith leaders need to understand that men's abuse is escalating during COVID-19, with factors such as the inability of women to get out of the home and seek support, job loss or furloughing, confinement and home schooling have facilitated an escalation of men's abuse and violence (Imkaan, 2020).

136 “Men’s perpetration of violence and abuse towards women and children is rooted in their beliefs of ownership and entitlement, this stems from patriarchal ideas of hegemonic masculinity”

Natalie Collins

is threatened (e.g. through job loss, loss of access to male-only social, sports or cultural spaces, being confined within the home that he perceives as a “woman’s place” etc), this can lead to his escalation of abusive and dominant behaviour. While alcohol or drug use does not cause abuse, they can lower an abuser's inhibitions leading to more sustained violence and abuse towards his family. Therefore, the only way to address perpetration is to deal with the root issues of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities.

It is important to engage faith leaders and ask what their understanding of domestic abuse and violence against women are. Leaders need to have conversations about what is often a taboo subject within faith communities that examine the cultural and religious traditions and assumptions that excuse or enable abuse. Religious leaders should be willing to acknowledge that abuse will be perpetrated by men within their community (even by men they know and like) and they need to know the resources available in their community and seek training to use a trauma-informed approach (Ramsey, 2020). Everyone can become more knowledgeable about domestic abuse and trauma-informed care. Religious and community leaders who want to support women and children should take the time to learn about domestic abuse and to ensure their institutions are welcoming and safe places for survivors to report abuse. They can become advocates for ending domestic abuse by creating systems where there are none and partnering with existing specialist organisations that work to end VAWG and domestic abuse (Ramsey, 2020). They must also use their position to challenge notions of male ownership and entitlement over women and children, and advocate for religious understanding which condemns abuse, holds perpetrators to account and believes women and children.

“To leaders in the Christian faith (of which I belong), I say “Be the Christ they see”

Ashiedu Joel

One of the key tactics of an abuser is to isolate their partner. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced this isolation. As a result, families with an abuser have become more insular and hidden away in plain sight of communities, friends, and family. It can be very difficult for anyone to know what an abuser is doing to his family, and COVID-19 measures mean he can

control all communications outside the home, making accountability easier to escape. Most of the time faith and community leaders will not know if someone in their community is being abused, and so significant vigilance is needed, particularly if a woman has disengaged from the community.

If a faith leader is aware that a woman within their community has been subjected to abuse previously, it is crucial that they persevere in maintaining regular contact and seek advice from specialist services. Faith leaders should encourage and support women through the use of religious and cultural texts, traditions, practice, and ritual to ease their trauma and signpost them to specialist support needed for recovery. Men's fatal violence towards women has doubled during COVID-19, and faith communities can be a key resource to helping women and children reach safety before the abuser seriously injures or kills them (The Guardian, 2020).

For women (and their children) who have escaped an abuser, COVID-19 measures may exacerbate previous trauma. This may also be the case for those with other forms of historical trauma, including sexual assault, living in a war zone or being a refugee. For those who have previously been strangled, choked, or otherwise had their airway restricted, mask wearing can be extremely traumatic. For those who have experienced the horror of war or authoritarian regimes, necessary government enforced COVID-19 restrictions can trigger trauma responses. If an abuser has previously made their partner or children paranoid by accusing them of being dirty or filled with germs, the virus may trigger terrible trauma responses. For those who have previously been forced to stay in their home due to an abuser, or as a result of racist or religiously motivated attacks, lockdown restrictions can feel suffocating and triggering. For those who have been emotionally abused, told they were ugly and disgusting, seeing themselves on a screen during Zoom meetings can be deeply painful and difficult.

Faith leaders must take account of these and many other factors for those who are no longer living in situations of threat or trauma. The physiological nature of trauma is not rational and so becoming literate in the science of trauma is crucial, not least because this pandemic

is a collective trauma that the world is currently living with, including religious leaders. Their ability to take care of themselves and others will be hugely enhanced by greater understanding of trauma and recovery. Rebuilding the trust of those who have been abused is crucial and faith leaders should not encourage attempts or facilitate opportunities for the abuser to further victimise or re-traumatise women and children. Faith leaders can talk about domestic abuse and violence against women and girls in their sermons, making clear their desire to help and support; letting everyone know about their efforts to create safe spaces and open non-judgemental access to support.

What seems to be the most important message to faith

“The sanctity of life overrides the sanctity of marriage.”

Nikki Dhilion-Keane

leaders is to have a believing attitude to disclosures of abuse. The best way to support women and children is to first and foremost make them feel heard and to be knowledgeable of existing resources in your community. If necessary, support her to leave or tell the husband to leave the house. It may also be possible for faith communities to provide a safe place for women and children to go, indeed properties and premises at the disposal of faith communities have often been used to provide safety and sanctuary. Domestic abuse services and women's centres are trained in a trauma-informed counselling approach, which is the most effective way to support survivors of violence and abuse. Austerity and the impact of COVID-19 has limited the capacity of specialist services to offer support, however faith communities could support these services by asking them how they can enable the crucial work they are doing.

“Faith leaders need to understand that domestic abuse is a safeguarding issue and needs to be dealt with competently.”

Esther Sweetman

justifications in sexual coercion or abuse, or preventing a woman practicing her faith or religious obligations. Faith leaders must always operate from a safety-first approach, while specialist services need to be aware of, and vigilant about the impact of spiritual abuse on women. Importantly, religious leaders should be leading on these types of issues within faith communities since scriptures are often misused to justify the abuse. As abusers often employ faith to manipulate their partners, faith leaders may struggle in gaining trust of those reporting abuse and needing help. Religious and community leaders can counter these harmful practices within their communities by using scripture, faith, and spiritual beliefs to speak out against violence and by supporting survivors when they report abuse. It is also important that wherever possible, women can speak with another woman about pastoral matters. As mentioned earlier, in some faith communities’ women leaders are more visible than others, despite this, faith leaders should make it clear to their congregations and co-religionists that woman-centred support is available.

Domestic abuse is not something to ignore and hope it goes away, whilst there have been initiatives to support safety, faith communities and institutions need robust and comprehensive safeguarding policies, for protecting both children and adults. Learning about spiritual abuse is also important, this may include using religious texts to legitimise abusive behaviour, using a woman’s faith to further abuse her, using theological

## What women of faith want the government and Specialist Services to know about how they can be supported and empowered?

### 1. Faith and religion are a source of comfort for survivors of faith

A woman’s faith can be one of the most precious resources and experiences of belonging in their lives. This becomes even more so in times of crises. Specialist services communicating their understanding of this could transform women’s perceptions of the service, and of feeling emotionally safe and supported. A study conducted in Egypt exploring the psychological effects of the pressures that have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic found that many women reported experiencing depression, sleep disturbances, headaches, high blood pressure or general fatigue.

Crucially women cited the sources of support to be found in their faith and faith communities. Muslim women reported turning to prayer, reading the Quran and supplication, their Christian counterparts mentioned reading the Bible or listening to religious programs to cope with the impact of the pandemic (Centre for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance, 2020). One need only consider how strongly an abuser wants to stop a woman from authentically practicing her faith to realise what a powerful resource faith is for women.

### 2. Faith and religion can also be used as tools of abuse – the importance of spiritual abuse literacy

Specialist Services, policy makers, commissioners and funders urgently need to understand the varying manifestation and use of how each or a mix of culture, religious tradition and holy scripture can be used as tools of abuse by perpetrators. This means greater literacy on what spiritual abuse is and how it operates is needed. Training and significant research as exemplified by the nested study in Justice, Inequality & Gender Based Violence by Professor Marianne Hester et al are needed to understand the dynamics and impact of spiritual abuse.

In addition, greater investment in building trusting relationships between Specialist Services and faith communities would lead to a more holistic and coordinated response to supporting survivors and holding perpetrators to account. Understanding that for some survivors, separation or leaving a perpetrator(s) is complicated by communities and gatekeepers within them that can at times judge, isolate, and ostracise women who leave an abuser. This can potentially lead to

a change in practice and support that is better tailored to navigate such obstacles. It must also be considered that asking women to separate from the abuser has consequences for separation from the only community or resource of support they have. Their children will also be impacted by the social stigma of coming from a ‘broken’ home where they may be ostracised and isolated from the community immediately and in the future.

For many survivors, particularly for those whose faith institutions are an integral part of their lives, their relationship with the Divine and God is mediated through religious leaders and community elected representatives. Some women have grown up in a culture where the faith leader has ultimate authority. Breaking links with religious leadership or community, for many will feel like they are breaking up with God. For some, it may feel like as a sin and a loss, akin to a grieving process. Specialist Services would provide better support if they are able to understand that nuance.



### 3. Support domestic abuse services that understand the needs of survivors of faith

One of the most important obstacles facing survivors of faith is finding a safe space. With the outbreak of COVID-19, Imkaan stated in its report “The Impact of the Two Pandemics” that their members noticed weekly increases in need for refuge space among Black and minoritised women as the COVID-19 crisis continues (Imkaan, 2020). This is because many service providers have stopped working with newly referred women because of lack of capacity, they are therefore only able to work with pre-COVID survivors. The ways COVID-19 threatens hegemonic masculinity may lead some men to escalating control in the home, with their partner only just recognising or experiencing his behaviour as abuse. This means there is a lack of support for these women as new victims who have emerged since the pandemic. Government, local commissioners, and funders must support existing organisations that have assisted survivors from faith and minoritised communities.

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“For years domestic violence specialists have failed to provide tailored support for survivors from faith groups.”

Veronica Simpson

In response to our briefing, a contributor noted that in the scoping, design and delivery of most (if not all) funded domestic abuse and non by and for violence against women and girls services, there is a significant knowledge gap, expertise and skill in relation to the impact of culture/cultural background, lived experience and faith on the response of the Black (African, Caribbean) Asian and minoritised communities. Furthermore, it was also said that for independent practitioners within the Black African community, there is no designated agency or resource available to survivors of domestic abuse with the competency, experience and understanding of the intricacies and sometimes complex relationships that must be navigated so as to get the support needed to enable the woman to leave safely. Where a knowledge gap is identified, non by and for or white secular led specialist organisations are unwilling to engage professionally with independent practitioners for various reasons such as cost, reputation, trust, etc.

Related to the lack of faith and culturally sensitive service provision and support is a commissioning and tendering process that heavily relies on targets and focuses on “successful” cases. The impact of this on women is multiple but for any woman and child from minoritised communities who may not immediately respond to support that does not take account of language, cultural, caring, and economic needs. Their engagement is classed as ‘failed’ or are blamed for “not willing to engage”. These women, children (and men) are already severely disadvantaged and marginalised by structural barriers in wider society and have been failed by a system that continues to reinforce discrimination, finding that specialist services replicate this kind of violence really leaves many isolated and vulnerable. Similarly, support that centres the religious and spiritual needs of White Christian women subjected to abuse is rare, meaning that for such a woman a holistic environment is still lacking.

### 4. The pandemic has made visible the multiple intersections of inequality and discrimination that migrant women face

In response to our briefing, a contributor noted that for those working with migrant women, COVID-19 has not revealed anything they did not already know. In their recent paper, Imkaan members reported that women eligible for government support were turned away from refuges without an assessment of their situation including a specific case in the North of England where a woman was turned down by four refuges as she had no recourse to public funds. In another recent case, a woman with no recourse to public funds was turned away by housing even though the abuser was designated high risk on the DASH risk assessment. Whilst another Imkaan member reported that in 70% of cases women had been mistakenly refused access to services as having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) (Imkaan, 2020).

Organisations such as the Latin American Women’s Rights Service (LAWRS) have been raising awareness of the precarious working conditions and barriers to services faced by migrant women for decades. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the response from the government with regards to the issues affecting migrant women has been non-existent. Instead, local, and national authorities have adopted a fragmented approach to COVID, with issues around health, employment, housing, benefits, and No Recourse to Public Funds being treated separately and in silos. For many migrant communities, these issues are all interlinked. For example, statistics such as Black and minoritised communities having higher infection rates and worse clinical outcomes are not surprising if one considers the overcrowded accommodations in which many within these communities’ dwell. In such settings, one person becoming ill can lead to all in the crowded household becoming infected illustrating the inextricable link between health and housing. What COVID-19 has done is make visible the intersectional hardships migrant women endure which includes domestic abuse, poor access to healthcare, housing issues, precarious working and living conditions.

“It is not about finding anything new because we already knew that the hostile environment means that the focus of any statutory service will go through immigration agencies first. What COVID 19 has simply done is bring all this to the forefront”

Gisela Valle

Many people have and continue to suffer the impact of the pandemic. Migrant communities being one of the most marginalised have been left by government and statutory services to fend for themselves. Little to no, policy and resources has focused on addressing the needs of migrants during this pandemic. This has meant that the burden of support has been placed on already stretched charities such as LAWRS. For example, local authorities in London stopped providing any translation services as the pandemic took hold. LAWRS staff had to work additional hours translating materials related to health, employment, and domestic abuse services. At the same time LAWRS was engaging with the government highlighting the gaps in its reach and messaging to communities.

Employment rights violations rose dramatically during the pandemic and have uniquely affected migrants and in particular migrant women. As the government was in crisis itself, some employers took matters into their own hands. Whilst the government funded furlough scheme was seen to provide much needed short-term security, policymakers did not consider the impact of the furlough scheme on migrant communities with precarious working conditions. In effect the furlough scheme allowed the government to abdicate responsibility for women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). LAWRS found that given the nature of the work they do, many migrant women in cleaning and hospitality industries are subject to exploitation and the furlough scheme did not prevent this. Lack of government literacy on the impact for those with NRPF status was evidenced when Prime Minister Boris Johnson was questioned about this by a parliamentary committee in May 2020. When asked by an MP how his local constituents with no recourse to public funding could survive without work or tax credit support, Johnson seemed completely unaware that having no recourse to public funds means no access to welfare systems (The Independent, 2020).

As industries heavily reliant on outsourcing, many migrant women are employed by at least two agencies at once, however many migrant women were only furloughed on a single contract which for many would mean as little as two hours a week on the minimum wage. As

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5. The pandemic has led to a concerning increase in stalking

“A lot of women have raised concerns over cyber stalking which needs to be taken more seriously”

Hanan Bibikir

The pandemic has created a paradox when considering safety in the home, but it is important to recognise the dangers this presents to many victims of stalking. Whilst lockdown measures might appear to have made victims less accessible to stalking, early evidence from one study suggests that their vulnerability has increased. Technology has helped to facilitate stalking behaviours

such, not working during this pandemic was not an option for many migrant women. Crucially, 6 months into the pandemic, LAWRS began receiving serious cases of labour exploitation for domestic workers such as being underpaid, being refused pay or unlawful termination of contracts. These women were often living with their employers with nowhere else to go and did not receive their final payment. Awareness of the plight of migrant women in employment and domestic labour has been poor. More needs to be done to shine a light on the suffering and injustice they face.

In addition, as many migrant women who are subjected to domestic abuse or other forms of gender-based violence do not have recourse to public funds, this forces them to decide between their safety on one hand or destitution and homelessness on the other. In many cases due to their precarious living and working conditions, migrant women who have been subjected to abuse have no other option but to return to their perpetrators. And in some cases, after years of having escaped to safety as they cannot support themselves and their children in any other way.

by providing new approaches to control, humiliate, threaten, and isolate their victims. Some lockdown restrictions have provided increased opportunities for stalkers to monitor their victims and the professional uncertainty and recognition around stalking has continued, coupled with delays in the criminal justice system, resulting in increased vulnerability and heightened risk for women targeted by stalkers. The COVID-19 crisis has reversed gains made by stalking victims and has kept some in their homes making their whereabouts easier to monitor. Additionally, the pandemic has impacted the form and frequency of stalking behaviours. Factors such as the loss of employment, working from home or being furloughed increases perpetrators’ time and capacity to modify and/or escalate their stalking behaviour. Effective practice, policy and legal responses are required for both the victims and perpetrators of stalking during the pandemic and afterwards (Bracewell et al, 2020)



# Conclusions – Coronavirus: Chaos and Contradictions

Since the start of lockdown restrictions in England and Wales in March 2020 there have been numerous major religious events in the calendar of the major religious communities in the UK including Easter, Ramadan, Eid Al-Adha, Purim, Passover and Diwali. In all these occasions women play a central role in ensuring the spiritual preparations for the festivities but also the practical necessities needed for the rituals to be performed. Paradoxically this positions women as powerful and significant agents in the heart of the faith community but also increases their vulnerability to being pressured and coerced by men. Many abusers will deliberately seek to ruin special occasions, to show their partner and children that they are in control and can destroy whatever is precious to the woman. After significant effort and preparation, and while treading on eggshells to try and keep the abuser happy, he will then destroy those special times to further hurt and abuse her. Pre-COVID-19, women would be able to join in with others and in community for significant religious events, thereby ensuring they had some respite, and precious safe space. During COVID-19 stay at home restrictions however, abusers can destroy these dearly held practices and rituals, further hurting their partner and children, and isolating them from their communal support networks.

The experiences of survivors of faith have seldom been present in the wider response to COVID-19 and this is concerning as the impact of this pandemic has been gendered and intersectional. To fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on survivors from faith backgrounds, there is a need for disaggregated data to inform policy. The lack of such data fails to identify the scope and scale of the problem, hiding the racial, gendered, and intersectional impact of the pandemic. Where this invisibilisation continues, Black and minoritised women will fail to be recognised in responses by the government to address the crisis deepening the sense of systemic discrimination and exclusion that occurs (Imkaan, 2020).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had multiple and varied consequences on survivors from faith communities especially those from migrant, Black and minoritised groups. In most cases the pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities as the inability to leave the home and seek support has emboldened men and increased opportunities to abuse. Where they can, men have escalated their abuse and violence towards women and children.

The Coronavirus COVID-19 2020 Act calls for increased policing to address the challenges imposed by the coronavirus such as reinforcing restrictive measures. This has had a disproportionate impact on Black, migrant and minoritised communities. This is due to emergency policing measures continuing to target specific communities and deploy pre-existing racialised dynamics which are normalised by new emergency legislation. The hostile environment and barriers in accessing services meant some women in need of housing support fell off the radar and were exposed to unintended consequences such as sexual violence, coerced into prostitution, exploitation, and being trafficked (Imkaan, 2020)

Nonetheless, COVID-19 was a space of contradictions as it also created opportunities for marginalised women. The pandemic revised the taken for granted status quo as some of the previous patriarchal rules that excluded women were turned upside down. This was illustrated best by the opportunities presented by the online presence of religious congregations because of the lockdown. In many religious congregations where segregation between the sexes is practiced, women were not only able to attend communal worship for the first time, and for some they were in the same virtual 'rooms' and spaces to the men. They were also at times visible to their male counterparts. This enabled some women of faith to 'transgress' taboo subjects and become more visible in spaces where they were previously excluded. In doing so, the pandemic allowed for the disruption

of social norms and created the possibility for change as previously accepted norms such as the exclusion of women from religious spaces can be overcome. This will undoubtedly have important ramifications for future dynamics of power and privilege in religious spaces.

The pandemic also created an important space which has centred religious leadership. As the President of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly H.E. Tijjani Muhammad Bande noted, faith-based organisations and religious leaders play a crucial role in times of crisis. They are frequently in positions to advocate for social and legal change. They use their moral authority to advocate for the empowerment of women, access to education and health facilities. Therefore, it is crucial that religious leaders (particularly men) understand the important role that they play in both upholding of the exclusionary and patriarchal order and the progressing of many positive changes during the pandemic that has led to increased women's participation, space for action and their influential role in their communities. This will undoubtedly have consequences for the ways in which religious leaders deal with and combat men's violence towards women and girls in their communities.

# Recommendations

The Faith and VAWG Coalition with the contribution of expert practitioners working at the intersections of feminism, VAWG, race and religion, have identified a number of trends, gaps and areas of support that will enable greater safety and ‘space for action’ for survivors. These are:

1.

## **The government must support and fund ‘by and for’ organisations.**

The engagement of national and local government with specialist services and women’s groups to formulate an appropriate response to the COVID-19 pandemic has provided another opportunity to highlight and raise awareness of the vital role organisations led, created by and for minoritised and faith communities make to the lives of women, children and communities. It is important for local and central government to evidence the value with which they hold ‘by and for’ organisations and their work by adequately resourcing them and removing barriers to funding. Only then will vulnerable people within faith communities stop feeling overlooked and start feeling supported.

2.

## **Faith leaders can be seen as allies in the fight against VAWG and domestic abuse**

Faith communities provide an incredible network to reach vulnerable women and children. Engaging and resourcing faith leaders in the fight against men’s violence towards women and girls should not be limited to one-off campaigns or projects. Instead it can be part of a wider long term holistic preventative strategy to support survivors and end men’s violence. This requires the formation of trusting and lasting relationships with communities including but not limited to faith leaders who can be trained to respond appropriately and hold perpetrators to account. They can duly reciprocate learning on spiritual abuse, its manifestations, and strategies to effectively intervene and support women subjected to abuse and harm. When faith leaders and communities are better equipped to practice perpetrator accountability, in addition to those of survivor safety and empowerment, they are better able to create a response that meets the needs of women and their communities as well as contribute to attitudinal change that does not see abuse and misogyny as inevitable or something practised by few outside the fold of the community.

3.

## **Create and support spaces like the Faith and VAWG Coalition that understand and appreciate the complexity of the relationship between faith and violence against women and girls.**

Spaces such as the Faith and VAWG Coalition will allow for the strengthening of the work already being done, sharing best practice, strengths, and weaknesses, and spreading more awareness within the sector, society and communities about the specialist services available. This also enables independent practitioners working at specialist intersections of faith, feminism, ending male violence towards women, race, and ethnicity to have a network and conduit to share findings and emerging trends. This will also enable them to contribute to the calls for change in both governmental and sector approach to domestic abuse. The Coalition would offer a two-way contributory learning and partnership opportunity allowing faith communities to become more literate in the fight against violence against women and girls and the government and specialist services to become faith literate, more proficient at understanding the needs of survivors from faith communities and adapting their interventions to support the process of healing and empowerment.

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# **Thames Valley BAMER Project**

## **Final Report – Executive Summary**

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October 2020

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By Agya Poudyal  
Foreword by Liz Jones and Wendy Walker  
Edited by Becci Seaborne



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# Foreword

There is a wealth of research and knowledge around the needs of women who have suffered abuse at the hands of partners, families, and strangers. The Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Coordinators were receiving increasing anecdotal evidence of women from Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) communities not feeling confident to disclose abuse and being reluctant to approach services, both statutory and voluntary, which were viewed white British, and therefore unable to meet their needs. In addition, Thames Valley has seen an expansion in diversity, particularly in larger towns and cities over the last 10 years, which one could assume means more women were not having their support needs met. Together with the Domestic Abuse Coordinators, and third sector charities, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner successfully applied to the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Transformation Fund to run a two year project to determine what the needs of local women from BAMER communities were and take the learning to improve responses and support.

At the time of the application for the funding the acronym BAMER was in everyday use and became the title of the project, and you will see it used throughout this report. We are very much aware now, after speaking to women from diverse communities, the use of the acronyms BAMER, BAME, and BME are not acceptable and there is a preference from some for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse (BAED) or minority ethnics, and this is further changing still. If the term BAMER makes you uncomfortable, please accept our apologies and be assured that outside of this report we have stopped using it. We also recognise when we talk of BAMER communities they are not a homogenous group, a fact which has been highlighted through our work.

This report will not be the end of our work. We, the Domestic Abuse Coordinators, OPCC, third sector charities and the seven wonderful women who were employed to speak to and support women across the Thames Valley, are all very passionate about equality, improving lives, tackling abuse in all its forms and making things safer. As such, we have formed a BAED Partnership Group to take forward the recommendations in this report.

We would like to acknowledge the courageous, amazing, insightful, eloquent women who engaged with this project, the community group members, and community facilitators. We are incredibly grateful to all of them for sharing their lives and experiences and we in turn will do our best to ensure those who come forward in the future receive support which meets their needs.

## **Liz Jones**

Domestic Abuse Lead for Oxford City Council, and  
Founding Member of the Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Coordinators Network

## **Wendy Walker**

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

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# 1. Overview of the project

## 1.1. Context

The Thames Valley BAMER Project was funded by the Home Office VAWG Transformation Fund for two years from April 2018 to March 2020 and was supported by the nine Local Authorities in Thames Valley and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The project set out to identify the barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who are subjected to abuse or violence when needing to access support, and to identify lessons for improving service responses. This would be achieved by the aims and objectives set out in the bid to the Home Office, outlined below.

## 1.2. Aims and objectives

### Aims:

- Assess, improve, and better coordinate the multi-agency response to violence against women and girls in BAMER communities across the region
- Generate and map localised knowledge and networks to facilitate systemic change, and to provide a robust evidence base to inform future commissioning and support third sector grant applications
- Improve awareness of issues relating to violence against women and girls in Thames Valley's BAMER communities; engage and empower these communities to identify and challenge these abuses, and to ensure they know where and how to access timely and appropriate support
- Ensure that women from BAMER communities in Thames Valley who have abuse and violence perpetrated against them have their needs met through improved and better-informed service provision and pathways

### Objectives

- Recruitment of three strategic roles across Thames Valley (one per county) with a remit of working with communities and professionals to pull together localised key issues and learning for working with the BAMER communities across the region. They will also assess current service provision, identifying gaps and leading practice, drawing on national examples of excellence and lessons learned.
- Production of a 'by and for' BAMER public information campaign to increase awareness of issues relating to violence against women and girls.
- Training of community champions to encourage and enable early intervention for those from BAMER communities at risk of or currently experiencing violence or abuse.
- Training for frontline professionals to respond appropriately to incidents of abuse or violence perpetrated against women from BAMER communities.
- Recruitment of six multi-lingual specialist community outreach workers (BAMER Support Workers) across Thames Valley (two per county) to both add onto and enable access to mainstream services.

The funding achieved was less than applied for which accounts for the reduced capacity and resources in relation to the scope of the project, as described below.

### 1.3. Structure

The project was delivered via a network of six BAMER Support workers employed by four domestic abuse service providers across the authority areas, and coordinated by a Strategic Officer, hosted by Oxford City Council. The project was overseen by the BAMER Project Board, to whom the Strategic Officer reported, chaired by the OPCC, and consisted of representatives from six of the nine authorities, each of the provider organisations and supporting organisations, as outlined below.

Area	Organisation Represented	Role in Project
<b>Thames Valley</b>	Office of Police and Crime Commissioner	Bid author, fund-holder; Chair of the Board
<b>Berkshire (East)</b>	Bracknell Forest Council	Bid signatory
	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council	Bid signatory
	Slough Borough Council	Bid signatory
	Hestia	Provider organisation, host to one BAMER Support Worker (Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Council areas)
	DASH Charity	Collaborator, key stakeholder
<b>Berkshire (West)</b>	Reading Borough Council	Bid signatory
	West Berkshire Council	Bid signatory
	Wokingham Borough Council	Bid signatory
	Berkshire Women's Aid	Provider organisation, host to one BAMER Support Worker (West Berkshire, Reading, and Wokingham Council areas)
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	Buckinghamshire County Council	Bid signatory
	Milton Keynes Council	Bid signatory
	MK-ACT	Provider organisation, host to two BAMER Support Workers (Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council areas)
	Wycombe Women's Aid	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Aylesbury Women's Aid	Provider Organisation, host to one BAMER Support Worker

<b>Oxfordshire</b>	Oxford City Council	Bid signatory; host to Strategic Officer
	Oxfordshire County Council	Bid signatory
	A2Dominion Domestic Abuse Services (Delivering Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, ODAS)	Provider organisation, host to one BAMER Support Workers (Oxfordshire County Council area)
	Oxford Against Cutting	Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator
	Reducing the Risk	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre	Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator
<b>Thames Valley Services</b>	SAFE!	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Victim's First	Collaborator, key stakeholder
	Refuge ISVA Service	Collaborator, key stakeholder

## 2. Methodology

The Thames Valley BAMER Project worked in relation to the following strands of abuse and violence across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire:

- Honour-based abuse (HBA)
- Forced marriage (FM)
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Stalking and harassment
- Domestic abuse (DA)
- Sexual violence

Safety, confidentiality and language were key considerations throughout the project.

### 2.1. Scoping

#### 2.1.1. Primary data collection

The project set out to establish the current picture in terms of primary data which was gathered through engagement with women to understand:

- Internal barriers BAMER women faced in approaching and accessing VAWG services,
- External barriers BAMER women faced in approaching and accessing VAWG services, and

- 
- Perceptions of BAMER women regarding different statutory and voluntary services in relation to VAWG issues.

### **2.1.2. Secondary data collection**

Secondary data was collected from nationally published sources, and from provider agencies and public bodies in Thames Valley to understand:

- Demographics within Thames Valley
- Prevalence of all the forms of violence and abuse against women and girls in Thames Valley

### **2.1.3. Data interpretation and dissemination**

All data collected was analysed and disseminated to:

- Deliver interim reports
- Inform ongoing work and engagement
- Develop recommendations

## **2.2. Community activities**

Simultaneously the project undertook a number of community activities to find and hear the voices of ethnic minority women in respect of abuse and violence against women and girls.

### **2.2.1. Community mapping**

The Strategic Officer and the BAMER Support Workers investigated online resources and professional contacts to establish a picture of the existing services available for ethnic minority women in Thames Valley, including VAWG services.

### **2.2.2. Community engagement**

A range of approaches were taken as different organisations and areas responded to their specific environments:

- Engaging with community groups
- Focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews

Such work was undertaken to raise awareness of issues relating to violence and abuse; to map ethnic communities and community groups; to identify needs and issues asserted by women from these communities; to identify and understand barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who have needed to access support services in relation to violence or abuse.

### **2.2.3. Outreach**

Three of the four providers offered outreach across all but three of the nine local authority areas in Thames Valley. Apart from group work programmes, outreach support was always in the form of one-to-one casework, although the format for this varied and was provided in the following ways:

- Two areas offered BAMER-specific group work programmes.
- Three areas offered a traditional ongoing outreach service through client appointments.
- Two areas provided drop-in surgeries where women could attend between defined times, either as a one-off or for a series of sessions.
- Two areas facilitated peer support opportunities.

Referral routes into outreach could be directly from community groups to BAMER Support Workers, or through the established pathways of the workers wider organisation and support services (often an established helpline and referral service).

#### **2.2.4. Trainings and presentations**

At varying stages different training events, programmes and presentations were developed and delivered, both to community group members and to groups of relevant professionals. Such events included:

- Training helpline staff in VAWG services on engaging with BAMER clients,
- Supporting agencies to addressing the barriers faced by women from ethnic minority communities when accessing services,
- Developing training for front-line workers who engage with BAMER clients.
- Developing culturally sensitive group work programmes for victims and survivors.
- Presenting findings and updates to local domestic abuse strategy groups.
- Presenting an introduction of the project to the Crown Prosecution Service.

#### **2.2.4. Peer review audits**

A peer review was designed, and an audit undertaken to gain understanding of how ethnic minority women were considered in service design and delivery in the current set up of relevant organisations delivering services.

### **2.3. Measuring outcomes and impact**

#### **2.3.1. Performance framework**

The performance of the project was reviewed by developing and completing a performance framework to understand the achievements of the project. This also helps describe the project and illustrates the project cycle.

#### **2.3.2. Theory of change**

The project group developed a theory of change model, based on that of the Department for International Development, to provide an aspirational goal for outputs and outcomes for the project, since two years is a relatively short time in which to achieve high impact in such a complex area.

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## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Findings on population demographics in Thames Valley

The scoping and review of secondary data found that Thames Valley is a diverse area, with particularly high proportions of minority ethnic groups within the urban areas of High Wycombe, Oxford, Reading and Slough. Those groups most highly represented were Pakistani, Indian, African, and Polish, and over 134,000 non-native-English speakers spoke more than 20 languages. Thames Valley is made up of a number of religious communities, the most prevalent being Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, but with a significant proportion of people who are non-religious.

### 3.2. Findings on statistics on abuse and violence against women

A review was undertaken of the available Thames Valley data for:

- Female genital mutilation,
- Domestic Abuse
- Forced marriage
- Honour-based abuse
- Sexual abuse and violence
- Stalking

The review concluded that all forms of abuse and violence against women and girls are prevalent across the entire Thames Valley, including those areas with significant ethnic minority populations. It also concluded, however, that official figures are unreliable due to under-reporting, and inconsistencies in recording between areas and/or organisations make meaningful analysis difficult. Furthermore, official data from statutory bodies often did not break down the figures based on ethnicity, although some provider agencies did. This compounds the challenges in building an accurate picture on which to base an understanding of the issues or plan responses.

### 3.3. Findings from focus group discussions

The project completed 20 focus group discussions across the Thames Valley which incorporated participants who were members of community groups representing a range of African, Asian, European and Latin American heritages: Eritrean, Somali, Sudanese, Tanzanian, Zimbabwean, Mixed African, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Nepali, Pakistani, Syrian, Turkish, Mixed (Kurdish), Portuguese, Spanish, Brazilian.

The focus group questions were structured around experiences of accessing services and views on what is needed to make agencies and services more approachable.

#### 3.3.1. Internal barriers to accessing services

Women in the discussions identified a number of cultural factors which hinder them from seeking help:

- 
- Honour and shame are highly important concepts in many cultures, and the consequences of dishonouring family or community by disclosing abuse are significant (often disownment and destitution, and sometimes death).
  - Fear and intimidation based in other, wider cultural expectations and the consequences of breaking these norms (often disownment and destitution).
  - Control by abusive partners preventing social interactions, reaching out for help from agencies, or accessing other resources.
  - Failure to recognise abuse due to cultural normalising or minimisation of abusive behaviours.
  - Language is a significant barrier, creating a fear of not being understood.

### **3.3.2. External barriers to accessing services**

Other barriers the women identified are rooted in social/structural factors:

- Insecure immigration status means women have no legal status without their perpetrator spouse; destitution and child separation being the only alternative.
- Racism (overt and subtle, structural racism) and unconscious bias create history of experiences which undermine women's confidence in being taken seriously and receiving support which meets their needs.
- Accessibility presented challenges in a number of ways:
  - Travel to services is costly and time-consuming,
  - Culture affects knowledge and understanding of social systems, and
  - Referral pathways are complex, and especially so for those with less cultural awareness of the systems involved.
  - Information about services is not made available in languages and formats that are accessible and are not targeted at women who are being prevented from engaging in society.

“

*I feel more comfortable when being examined by someone from my own background. I want to ask you a question, how many BAMER policemen are there actually? We do not feel represented in the police.*

...

*[A participant reported a doctor saying]*

*You Asian women don't take your medication.*

*You fast and ruin your health.*

...

*We want social workers and services who listens to us and investigates appropriately and sign posts to appropriate services.*

*...Where I come from women working in a restaurant, bar and pubs is seen as us being unfaithful.*

”

### 3.3.3. Perception of services

Women in the discussion groups made a number of observations about services they had or might come into contact with:

- **Community groups** were viewed positively, with women often more likely to disclose issues to a member of their own community as being more likely to be understood
- Women reported adequate support from **police**, but noted delays in responses, and often not being provided with interpreters, which they asserted is essential
- **Employment** is a protective factor, yet women are often culturally prevented from working or taking certain types of jobs. Where they are able to work they are often over qualified but unable to gain work at their skill level. Desire for work was strong; culture and language being the biggest barriers. Women identified language as affected almost every part of their lives; speaking English is important for life in the UK.
- The complexities, inconsistencies and conflicting experiences with **criminal and civil courts** undermines trust in these systems and creates fear, especially regarding the removal of children.
- **Health** professionals were recognised as a potentially crucial access point to more specialist services, highlighting the need for pro-active screening and questioning. Some women asserted a desire for more diverse ethnic representation amongst health staff, whilst others stated reservations about disclosing issues to members of their own community.
- Similar views were expressed around staffing in **mental health** services, whilst women also noted that mental health issues are still highly taboo in many cultures.
- Knowledge of the nature and role of **domestic violence refuges** seemed to be limited, but women felt that refuge would often not be able to meet specific cultural needs. They also noted that existing social isolation created through language and cultural barriers would be further compounded by moving to a refuge away from family and support networks.
- There was a high degree of fear and mistrust towards **social services** within the focus groups, with concerns focusing on a perceived high likelihood of Social Workers removing children from women's care. The women noted that abusers use this to manipulate women, and that raising awareness about the true picture would be beneficial. Rapid changing of staff was observed, creating

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difficulties in building a rapport and reducing the likelihood of women raising issues of abuse.

- Women reported difficulties obtaining help and support from **local authorities**, especially the **housing departments**, where there are stringent requirements. Women can often struggle to understand or prove they meet these criteria in order to access safe accommodation.
- Some women looked to the **local authority** (council) to provide funding for community groups. Others had experience with council **housing departments** and felt there was a lack of support in finding safe alternative accommodation; providing evidence of abuse for this is often challenging for women and causes to them remain in abusive situations.
- Women often had conflicting views about **religious institutions**, asserting that no religion condones abuse although they often take a non-interventionist approach, or play a role in reconciling relationships where abuse may be a feature. It was noted that (non-Christian) religious leaders are male and may lack understanding from a female perspective. This may be compounded as some women would only seek guidance for such issues within their religious community.

## 4. Outcomes

### 4.1. Community Mapping

The mapping exercise found that amongst services offered for ethnically diverse women, whilst numbers of specialist services focusing on refugee, asylum and English language support were rising, there remain gaps in support on forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour-based abuse. In general there are few ethnically sensitive/focused services, and those that exist are found in the areas of greater ethnic diversity: Milton Keynes, Oxford, Reading, and Slough.

### 4.2. Community Engagement Activities

The community engagement work took place for two years across the Thames Valley region. BAMER Support Workers engaged with 33 community groups representing women with heritage from at least eight African countries, six Asian countries, three European countries, three Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities, and 16 from mixed heritages. Engagement incorporated a variety of community-based activities such as cooking or craft sessions, religious and cultural events, trainings, presentations, and one-to-one support.

Engagement work **raised awareness** of abuse so that women were able to identify abusive behaviours and recognise the signs of abuse. It also raised awareness of how to respond when issues of abuse are raised, the support services available and how to access them.

BAMER Support Workers observed **improvements in service delivery** where more women from ethnically diverse backgrounds were accessing services. It is unclear if this is due to greater awareness of services through the project's work or through better cultural sensitivity from services as a result of the work; it could be both. An increase in ethnically diverse men accessing services was also noted anecdotally.

The project saw **increased participation** by ethnically diverse women, particularly where there was engagement with previously overlooked communities. This was accompanied by heightened engagement, where women expressed a desire for this to continue.

Although beyond the scope of the current project, it was also observed that there is a complex relationship between abuse/violence and other **issues within the community** such as suicide and mental health.

### 4.3. Client Casework through Outreach

Five of the six BAMER Support Workers provided outreach to 68 clients across Berkshire West, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. 37 different ethnic identities were recorded from across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and mixed heritages. An intensive and holistic approach was taken to offer psychosocial support alongside practical advocacy in various forms:

- Group work
- One-to-one community-based support
- Drop-in surgeries
- Peer support

The service offered **empowerment** by providing information, especially regarding women's rights, and by breaking down language barriers through enhanced cultural sensitivity and appropriate use of interpreters. Empowerment was also achieved by raising awareness of abuse, giving 'permission' for women to define abusive behaviours as not acceptable, prompting disclosures.

The outreach service demonstrated how crucial the role of **advocacy** is for ethnically diverse women, and how significantly this improves their experiences of services (especially statutory agencies) by bridging the gaps between women and agency professionals, often building new found

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*I thought violence would only be physical. I didn't know it could be going to bed with him even when I didn't want to. I also thought that, because I was married to him, I had to sleep with him, as and when he demanded. I thought this is normal if you are married.*

...

*I will live with the abuse rather than get divorced. Divorce in my culture means my life is over.*

...

*Women will always be blamed and asked 'why do you wind him up?' 'That is just how men are.' Their family will also hold similar views and ask them to put up with the situation.*

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trust and confidence. This often extended to aiding clients in navigating the complex pathways in and between services.

Significant outcomes were achieved in **securing the safety** of women accessing the service by offering a more nuanced and informed approach to assessing risk. This allowed for more prompt and relevant interventions, including those related to mental health issues. This often went hand-in-hand with tenacious advocacy to secure safe and stable accommodation, especially in cases where clients had no recourse to public funds.

Women participating in outreach support gained considerable support on **immigration** issues, including signposting and brokerage with specialist agencies and legal advice. In one area three mothers were reunited with their children who had been residing overseas and where such residency was being used as a tool for abuse and manipulation.

BAMER Support Workers identified, acknowledged and learned how to respond to forms of abuse which are only recently coming to recognition in white Western cultures. These included transboundary abandonment, breast ironing, and black magic.

Provider agencies in the BAMER Project observed an increase in ethnically diverse men accessing services and noted the need to develop services and responses for male survivors.

#### 4.4. Partnership Working

Close partnership working created an environment for **intensive and holistic** support with significantly improved relationships, and at times creating new and simpler pathways to services. Partnership working enabled BAMER Support Workers to raise the status and profile of ethnic minority women, educating professionals through positive engagement and advocacy.

The relationships arising from this work provided wider platforms to learn from other professionals and share learning with them to enhance the approaches taken by professionals from a range of agencies. It also presented opportunities to offer trainings and presentations to further enhance awareness and develop appropriate responses within partner agencies.

On occasion, partnership links were used to leverage funding and other resources, where provider agencies collaborated with other organisations to identify gaps in provision and pool resources or apply for funding to address local issues, such as funding child care or travel costs to enhance accessibility to services.

### 5. Peer Review Audit

The audit was structured as a questionnaire around six themes designed to draw out an understanding of how organisations plan and respond to victims and survivors from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Seventeen agencies offering support around abuse and violence against women were approached, and five responded:

- DASH Charity

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- MK-ACT
  - Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service
  - Thames Valley ISVA Service
  - Wycombe Women's Aid

## 5.1. Mission and goals

All five organisations considered issues of ethnic diversity at strategic and operational levels in a planned way. This was not always pro-active at Board level, and Board memberships tended to be white British. All organisations recognised diversity and nuance within and across all ethnic identities.

## 5.2. Administration and staffing

All organisations proactively addressed ethnic diversity through recruitment and staff induction and development, ensuring representation and awareness. They all provided training on all aspects of violence against women and girls and on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion; where these were not mandated individually, all topics were covered across the team as a whole. Gaps were noted in respect of deeper specialisations (issues around multiple perpetrators, breast ironing, acid attacks).

## 5.3. Service development

All organisations were confident the ability of their staff to recognise and respond with cultural sensitivity to all forms of abuse and violence, and were able to offer support to clients from ethnically diverse team members. Respondents noted the need for specialist knowledge of the complex and interconnected pathways for clients and reported this was present in their teams. Provision of ethnically specific/sensitive programmes of support was mixed, some organisations providing none, others offering up to one or two options. Accessible support (i.e. face-to-face, as asserted by ethnically diverse women) was available with workers from ethnically diverse backgrounds in all organisations. All organisations used interpreters, however publicity and service information tended to only be available in English, with only one exception. Information was centred on sexual violence or domestic abuse, and the absence of information relating to ethnically specific issues of abuse could create an accessibility barrier. All organisations sought client feedback to inform practice, and also worked in partnership with other agencies, thereby raising awareness of relevant issues through advocacy, particularly at multi-agency forums.

## 5.4. Site and facilities

The responding organisations tended to have main offices in central and accessible locations, whilst all offered appointments for clients in convenient community-based locations. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on accessibility for ethnically diverse women as face-to-face meetings are now not taking place; online contact from within the home is often not possible for women experiencing high levels of control. The impact for non-English speakers is even greater as most technology-based alternatives are not feasible for them.

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## 5.5. Working environment

There were clear referral pathways into organisations, who also share relevant information and anonymised data with other agencies in line with regulations, to deliver and plan service provision. All provide ongoing training and staff development in regards to unconscious bias and underpin practice with policies on equality, diversity and inclusion, GDPR, and confidentiality.

## 5.6. Assessment and evaluation

All organisations stated that they seek and include ethnically diverse female voices in their assessment. Only one organisation supported this with evidence, and two organisations misunderstood the question and referenced their use of individual needs/risk assessments with clients. Responding organisations noted gaps in data collection and recording which would help with assessment and evaluation of services, although two did record and analyse outcomes for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

# 6. Challenges

## 6.1. Universal credit

The single payment policy of universal credit is disempowering to women whose spouses are already financially controlling and prevents any opportunity to develop the financial independence required to escape abuse.

## 6.2. Communication

Availability and capacity of BAMER Support Workers, and of professionals in other agencies can lead to delays and mis-timings in communication. This is especially true when women experiencing abuse through controlling behaviour often have very narrow windows of opportunity to be in contact with professionals.

## 6.3. Attachment to BAMER Support Workers

The skill and cultural sensitivity of the BAMER Support Workers created a relationship of trust in which women formed strong attachments, creating reluctance to engage with other professionals where the same trust had not been developed. This could create conflicts in time management for workers who had limited capacity, and at times extended to a desire by women to maintain contact with BAMER Support Workers once their cases were closed.

## 6.4. Emergency accommodation

The availability and timeliness of access to emergency accommodation is limited and this presents significant barriers and risks to women who may choose to remain in an abusive situation because accommodation is not accessible. When available, accommodation may not be culturally appropriate, creating the same dilemma for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

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## 6.5. Recording data

There are significant inconsistencies between agencies (statutory and non-statutory) in collecting and recording ethnicity data. In many cases ethnicity data is not recorded at all, and some agencies are openly reluctant to do so. This makes it impossible to create a holistic picture, to infer accurate patterns, or to perform meaningful comparisons on which to understand what is happening or to plan how to respond. It should be noted that for many agencies there are resource implications for recording, processing, and reporting such information.

## 6.6. Understanding and assessing risk for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds

BAMER Support Workers found that agencies undertaking DASH RIC assessments with women from ethnically diverse backgrounds would often miss or misunderstand information which was relevant to risk for the individual concerned due to a lack of cultural awareness. Pre-existing risks had gone unseen by agencies involved; this may be due to women not feel safe to disclose to professionals they did not trust, or they disclosed in a way that is not interpreted in the way they intend by professionals from white Western culture. This could result in missed opportunities to intervene and provide appropriate safety planning at the earliest stage, requiring remedial work from BAMER Support Workers.

## 6.7. Cafcass

Women engaging with the project asserted that Cafcass tended to demonstrate little understanding of the dynamics, risks or impacts of domestic abuse. They also reported a lack of a holistic approach.

## 6.8. Interpreting services

The use of non-independent (family or local community member) interpreters is common amongst some agencies and is problematic for the disclosure of abuse or discussion of any sensitive topics. When professional interpreters are used nuances of a narrative can still be missed, either due the service being accessed over the phone instead of face-to-face, or because of colloquial differences in language. Cost is often a factor in agency decisions about use of interpreters.

## 6.9. Working with clients without recourse to public funds

Support services and other resources (e.g. housing) are severely limited for women with no recourse to public funds, which creates significant vulnerabilities for women experiencing violence or abuse whilst in this situation. Where resources are available, access to them is often complex and or time consuming, each compounding the vulnerability and risk faced by women in these scenarios.

## 6.10. Partnership working

There are inevitable tensions and competing priorities when working with multiple agencies, and developing a shared understanding of a new and complex project amongst a diverse group of agencies takes time. Effective collaboration requires a shared understanding of and appreciation

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for the remit, role, values, ethos restrictions and funding arrangements of each agency. In any event the diversity in these matters creates limitations around scope and activity alongside potentially time-consuming processes (e.g. decision-making).

### 6.11. Scarcity of services and community groups

The mapping exercise found there are few services in Thames Valley specialising in issues experienced by women from ethnic minority communities. Those addressing violence and abuse do not have specialist BAMER Workers (except for within this project), although they do offer support around honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. There are skilled specialised organisations operating at a national level, but there remains a significant gap for women needing to access local specialist services.

The mapping of community groups proved challenging as they often exist as informal groups with no 'formal' footprint, e.g. offices, website, public accounts etc. Some groups that were identified did not wish to engage with the project, and more are believed to exist than those identified.

### 6.12. Diversity of the client and engagement groups

Many of the community groups had mixed ethnicity membership. At times this presented challenges linked to the disparity in experiences and empowerment when attempting to engage with each participant on an equal footing on issues around power in relationships.

### 6.13. Scope of the BAMER Project and its work

The potential scope of the project was vast, and workloads required dynamic management. BAMER Support Workers reported that professionals such as Social Workers and Police Officers recognised the value of their roles, evidenced by direct contact requesting advice and assistance with complex cases.

### 6.14. Distrust and disengagement

Women often did not want to participate in a project funded by the Home Office due to suspicions linked to immigration issues. It required hard work from the BAMER Support Workers to overcome this barrier and gain engagement.

### 6.15. Supporting male victims

There tends to be little understanding or awareness of male victimhood within ethnic minority communities, which leads to a dearth in support. This project supported a number of male victims, and noted that training is needed, especially to address the scepticism of some professionals around the authenticity of ethnic minority males who disclose abuse.

### 6.16. Funding issues

Funding in the VAWG sector is scarce, and for minority groups within that, even scarcer. Where funding is available, capacity and sustainability are often significant issues, and resources such as interpreter services or translated written materials are often not acknowledged/permitted in

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grants and commissioned services. Additionally, community groups also face funding issues with uncertain futures.

## 6.17. Data collection

Lack of data has been a significant hindrance in understanding and interpreting the full context for this project. This has been due, at times, to considerations of confidentiality and safety of those concerned, whilst at other times there were simply non-responses. On other occasions it was found that different agencies record information in different ways and categories, making meaningful comparisons difficult.

# 7. Lessons identified

## 7.1. Identities

There are numerous variations and distinctions within the 'categories' of ethnic identity which have been arbitrarily created for data processing purposes. For example, there are vast differences across the range of Asian, and African identities; in particular Black African and Black Caribbean cultures differ greatly, but are often grouped together in white Western 'measures' of ethnicity.

## 7.2. Scope of the BAMER Project work

The scope of the project was vast and naturally required refining as the project progressed; a focus on meaningful and intensive engagement with women from ethnic minority communities was felt to be most appropriate and impactful.

## 7.3. Solution-focused approach

Honesty and transparency about 'agenda' and the nature of work was key to building trust; women engaged when they perceived a focus on finding solutions to their expressed concerns and issues.

## 7.4. Acceptance of domestic abuse as a community issue

Resistance to accepting issues of abuse and violence within communities was common, but meaningful conversations arose when these issues were considered in through the lens of positive relationships.

## 7.5. Dependence and empowerment

The skill and knowledge of BAMER Support Workers enabled them to foster trusted relationships, and it was noted that women formed strong attachments based on this. Issues of dependence versus empowerment arise here, alongside a need to recognise that the journey to empowerment may be more complex and take longer when the nature and degree of oppression is more intense to begin with.

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## 7.6. Language, interpretation, and translation

Language gives the ability to understand, and express oneself, and is crucial particularly in sensitive and stressful situations. Provision of independent interpreters is crucial; availability of information and materials a range of languages is needed to increase awareness and access to services. Access to learning English as a second language is a basic tool of empowerment for women.

## 7.7. Domestic abuse refuge

There is misinformation about what refuge is, and what is involved in moving to refuge which acts as a barrier to this option for many women from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some misgivings, however, are founded in truth, and much refuge provision does not fully cater to the nuanced and various needs of the range of non-Western cultures.

## 7.8. Helpline

Traditional helpline services, especially where these are the 'point of access' to other specialist services, do not meet the needs of many women from minority communities; telephone and email contact are significant barriers for those with little or no English, who may not know or trust that a safe and confidential interpreter service can be made available.

## 7.9. Financial pressure

Strong cultural expectations for males to financially support their family puts pressure on men who do not feel able to talk about the issue, and compounds the isolation experienced by many women.

## 7.10. Perpetrator programmes

Current provision of perpetrator programmes does not take account of the significant concepts of shame/honour, not the community dynamic which often produces multiple perpetrators within one scenario. They also fail to acknowledge the role of female family members as perpetrators in some (mainly honour-based) cases.

## 7.11. Risk level

Risk for women from ethnic minority backgrounds needs to be seen through a complex intersectional lens. Currently the DASH RIC assessments being undertaken by statutory agencies often do not reflect the cultural and community dynamics which influence the risk faced by women from such communities. This means risks can remain unidentified, leading to crisis scenarios of 'sudden escalation' when previously unseen risks come to bear.

## 7.12. Women from the European Economic Area (EEA)

Women from the EEA are often not seen as coming from minority communities and can be overlooked in this respect. Their immigration status can be insecure due to changes in spousal relationship and other technical/legal requirements, creating vulnerabilities which impact their options and choices in response to abuse and violence.

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### 7.13. Childcare facilities

For many ethnic minority communities, women have sole responsibility for childcare, creating a barrier to engagement and access to services.

### 7.14. Criminal justice system and civil courts

UK legal systems are complex and many women, especially first-generation immigrants, have little or no understanding of they work. This is disempowering and is compounded by the costs associated with court proceedings.

### 7.15. Mental health issues

Mental health issues remain a highly taboo subject in many minority communities, and as such a culturally sensitive approach is required; the project noted an expressed desire for more ethnically diverse representation in mental health services.

### 7.16. Health

Those who require spousal or family support with language for health appointments are denied the opportunity to discuss private issues relating to abuse or other sensitive topics with their health professional. This is potentially a crucial access point to specialist services and as such a missed opportunity. It may be further compounded by a lack of awareness amongst some professionals regarding the more culturally specific signs of abuse.

### 7.17. Housing

There is a long-standing lack of affordable housing across the Thames Valley region, and this creates a significant barrier for women needing to flee from abuse and violence. Where refuge, supported accommodation or local authority housing might be available, processes can be time consuming with negative impacts for women and their children. Often the need to produce evidence of abuse to gain local authority housing is prohibitive, and many women remain in situations of abuse for lack of any safe alternative.

### 7.18. Police

Women reported that they would be much more likely to call the police if they had previously had positive experiences with them, and stated that when they are kept informed of progress in their case(s), this create a sense of a good experience. Women noted that police need to use patience and professional curiosity to help overcome the language and culture barriers which can otherwise prevent them from gaining a full understanding of the situation from the woman concerned.

### 7.19. Social services

Women reported feelings of mistrust towards Social Workers which can be further impacted by their authoritative manner, especially if attending jointly with police. This can be experienced as intimidating by many women from ethnically diverse backgrounds and prevents the building of trust which would enable women to open up about their circumstances and any potential abuse.

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Women also expressed a desire for a more holistic approach, taking account of their needs as well as their children.

## 7.20. Banks

Financial control is a common tool in cases of abuse and women stated that changes to the policies of banks would better enable them to gain the financial independence they require to escape abuse and find safety. They also asserted that a more sensitive approach from staff would help to reduce rather than increase the distress of the situation.

# 8. Developments

A number of projects or programmes have already grown out of the activities and findings of the BAMER Project.

## 8.1. Ilam Programme

Ilam-El-Hifzat, shorted to Ilam, is a version of the Freedom Programme which was developed by MK-ACT to be culturally relevant for women from ethnic minority backgrounds. The programme explores information about the power and control involved in abusive relationships in the context of specific cultural features such as language, concepts of shame and honour, and community dynamics. It has been shown to be effective and have positive outcomes for participants in rebuilding safe lives and futures.

## 8.2. New Bridges

Two stakeholder and collaborator agencies, Oxford Against Cutting and The Sunrise Centre (in Banbury) worked together to create some significant activities:

- ‘Reaching Services’ workshop, supported by leaflets, to raise awareness around definitions and signs of abuse and what services are available to provide support,
- ‘Delivering services’ for professionals to understand and address any aspects of services which may present barriers to women coming forward,
- ‘Data master’ workshop, exploring the benefits and challenges to collecting and sharing meaningful data around honour-based abuse, and
- A film created around a drama written by a group of young Asian females, which shares important messages for peer audiences, but is also able to support the ‘Delivering Services’ workshops.

## 8.3. No Recourse to Public Funds Pathway Development

In recognition of the limited options and risk of destitution faced by women with no recourse to public funds who need to flee abuse, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service formed a partnership with the Sanctuary Hosting scheme in Thames Valley. The scheme offers temporary, safe, accommodation through placement with voluntary hosts. The three organisations collaborated to form a defined referral pathway for victims and survivors fleeing abuse so that this option is embedded into practice and so that the complexity and timescales

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associated with this can be minimised. The pathway has been successfully piloted and will be rolled out across Thames Valley to ensure equal opportunities to access this resource.

## 9. Recommendations

1. Developing specialist, ethnically sensitive VAWG training
2. Delivering workshops for community groups
3. Consistent data collection, reporting and sharing
4. Delivering ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising
5. Developing clear pathways for victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities
6. Improving responses from VAWG services for clients from ethnic minority communities
7. Improving engagement with women's community groups
8. Commissioning VAWG services with specific support for ethnic minority victims and survivors
9. Ensuring issues experienced by those who are from ethnic minority communities are heard at strategic and operational boards
10. Developing a detailed VAWG service directory

## 10. Future work

As previously discussed, this project uncovered a wealth of information and issues that were beyond its scope. Of those, some form important areas for future work, either to complement what has been achieved in this project, or to take it further:

- In depth work in reviewing statutory agencies policies and procedures on responding to different abuses which have affected women from ethnic minority communities,
- Exploration of how to take forward the learning from this project which was outside its remit for recommendations, for example mental health services, and the courts,
- Explore ways in which service provider organisations of all types can be supported to develop more diverse workforces, and
- Consideration should be given to viability of the development of a holistic, specialist, ethnically focused support service.

## Glossary

**Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER)** – a collective term for people living in the United Kingdom whose heritage is not white British.

**Children's Services** – often referred to (especially in this report) as 'social services', this is the team within the local government Health and Social Care department with responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues, and for supporting families.

**Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (known as Cafcass)** – Cafcass represents children in family court cases in England. They advise the family courts about what is

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safe for children and in their best interests. They make sure that children's voices are heard at the heart of the family court setting.

**Community Groups** – a grass-roots community-based group or organisation which works for the public benefit and the activities carried out by the group will benefit a particular group of people within the community.

**Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** – a groups formed from responsible statutory agencies within a Local Authority area who work together to protect their local communities from crime and to help people feel safer. Some Local Authority areas join with neighbouring areas for this function (for example South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse form the South and Vale CSP).

**Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)** – the principal public agency responsible for conducting criminal prosecutions in England and Wales.

**Council** – this is the term often used to refer to the local authority, the local government agency with statutory responsibility to implement and oversee certain areas of public services and public life (e.g. housing, waste collection services, parks etc.).

**Data Protection** – see 'General Data Protection Regulation' below.

**Designated MARAC Officer (DMO)** – a trained professional who represents their organisation at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – see also below.

**Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC)** – this allows people who may be eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain under the Domestic Violence Rule to access public funds whilst they make their application, if they can meet the basic initial test for domestic violence and destitution. It lasts for 3 months and during this period they can claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), make a homeless application, or go into a refuge.

**Domestic Abuse (DA)** – a pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, abusive and violent behaviour perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner, or family member. Such abuse includes: coercive and controlling behaviour, psychological or emotional abuse, financial and economic abuse, physical or sexual abuse, stalking or harassment.

**Domestic Abuse Risk Levels** – There are 3 levels of risk relating to domestic abuse, which refer to the risk of serious harm posed to the victim and is assessed through the DASH RIC (see below). Serious harm is defined as 'a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible'

- Standard – there are no significant current indicators of risk of serious harm
- Medium – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender is likely to cause serious harm if there is a change in circumstances, i.e. a failure to take medication, relationship breakdown, pregnancy
- High – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.

**Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour-Based Abuse Risk Indicator Checklist (DASH RIC)** – an evidence-based tool for practitioners who work with victims of domestic abuse to assess the risk posed to victims and survivors, and to identify those who are at high risk of harm.

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**Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) & Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO)** – this is an emergency non-molestation and eviction notice which is issued by the police following a domestic abuse incident. The Notice is served first, and the police must apply to a magistrate’s court within 48 hours for an Order. The Order prevents the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. Breach of a DVPO is a criminal offence with a maximum sentence of 2 months imprisonment.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** – the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

**Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order (FGMPO)** – it is a legal means to protect and safeguard victims or potential victims of female genital mutilation. Each Order is unique to the individual and can include surrendering a passport or requirements that no one arranges for genital mutilation to be performed. The maximum sentence for breach of a FGMPO is 5 years imprisonment.

**Forced Marriage (FM)** a marriage where one or both partners is married without giving their consent or against their will.

**Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO)** – the court can make an Order that can be used to protect the person who has been, or is being, forced into marriage against their will. The maximum sentence for breach of a FMPO is 5 years imprisonment.

**Freedom Programme** – this is a group work programme for female victims and survivors of domestic abuse to help raise their awareness of the abusive tactics used by their male partners, written by Pat Craven. It has been noted by some that the programme is culturally specific to white Western societies.

**General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** – it is a set of rules which gives citizens more control over their personal data held by private and public organisations. These organisations must ensure that personal data is gathered and processed legally and under strict conditions. The organisation is obliged to protect the data from misuse and exploitation, as well as respecting the rights of data owners, including the right to privacy. There are financial penalties for breaching the data protection.

**Health and Social Care** – the department within a local authority with responsibility for the safeguarding and support of children and vulnerable adults, through Children’s Services and Adult Services, respectively.

**Honour-Based Abuse (HBA)** – in some communities the concept of honour is extremely important. HBA is a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.

**Indefinite Leave to Remain** – is an immigration status granted to a person who does not hold the right of abode in the United Kingdom but who has been admitted to the UK and is free to take up employment or study.

**Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA)** – work with victims and survivors who face a high risk from domestic abuse to address and support their safety needs.

**Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA)** – provide specialist tailored support to victims and survivors of sexual violence, irrespective of whether they have reported to the police.

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**Intersectionality** – is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g., gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height, etc.) combine to create unique, layered experiences of discrimination and privilege.

**LGBTIQA+** – stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual', and many other terms (hence +).

**Local Authority** – the local government agency with statutory responsibility to implement and oversee certain areas of public services and public life (e.g. housing, waste collection services, parks etc.).

**McKenzie Friend** – a person who accompanies a victim to court to help them as a Litigant in Person. A Litigant in Person is an individual who makes a claim without legal representation from a solicitor or barrister. The McKenzie Friend can sit with the victim in court, offer advice and support as well as taking notes. They cannot litigate or file court documents or statements.

**Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)** - is a monthly meeting between statutory and other relevant agencies, who discuss the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and if necessary their children, and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. Victims and survivors are commonly referred to MARAC but police, but any professional agency can refer.

**Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC)** – MATACs are to ensure agencies work in partnership to engage serial domestic abuse perpetrators in support, take enforcement action where required and protect vulnerable and intimidated victims. The multi-agency meetings assess and plan a bespoke set of interventions to target and disrupt the perpetrators and/or support them to address their behaviour.

**No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)** - a term used for people who are subject to immigration control and have no entitlement to welfare benefits, to home office asylum support for asylum seekers or to public housing.

**Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)** – the staff working for the local Police and Crime Commissioner who is an elected official charged with securing efficient and effective policing of a police area.

**Refuge** – a refuge is a safe house for a person and their children fleeing domestic abuse. Generally, the person fleeing domestic abuse will be housed in a refuge outside of the area in which they have been living for safety reasons.

**Sharia Law** – is a religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition. It is derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the Quran and the hadith. Sharia law acts as a code for living that all Muslims should adhere to, including prayers, fasting, and donations to the poor. It aims to help Muslims understand how they should lead every aspect of their lives according to God's wishes.

**Social Services** – an outdated term, but which is still in common use by the general public, to refer to the Children's Services department within the local government Health and Social Care department. It has responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues, and for supporting families.

**Thames Valley BAMER Project (TVBP, also referred to as the BAMER Project)** – a two-year project in the Thames Valley area to identify the needs and barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who have been affected by abuse perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner, family member(s) or community.

**Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)** – any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Such violence includes: all forms of domestic abuse; sexual assault or rape; child, early or forced marriage; female genital mutilation; honour-based abuse; and, trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation.



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# Thames Valley **BAMER Project** Final Report

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October 2020

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By Agya Poudyal  
Foreword by Liz Jones and Wendy Walker  
Edited by Becci Seaborne



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# Foreword

There is a wealth of research and knowledge around the needs of women who have suffered abuse at the hands of partners, families, and strangers. The Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Coordinators were receiving increasing anecdotal evidence of women from Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) communities not feeling confident to disclose abuse and being reluctant to approach services, both statutory and voluntary, which were viewed white British, and therefore unable to meet their needs. In addition, Thames Valley has seen an expansion in diversity, particularly in larger towns and cities over the last 10 years, which one could assume means more women were not having their support needs met. Together with the Domestic Abuse Coordinators, and third sector charities, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner successfully applied to the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Transformation Fund to run a two year project to determine what the needs of local women from BAMER communities were and take the learning to improve responses and support.

At the time of the application for the funding the acronym BAMER was in everyday use and became the title of the project, and you will see it used throughout this report. We are very much aware now, after speaking to women from diverse communities, the use of the acronyms BAMER, BAME, and BME are not acceptable and there is a preference from some for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse (BAED) or minority ethnics, and this is further changing still. If the term BAMER makes you uncomfortable, please accept our apologies and be assured that outside of this report we have stopped using it. We also recognise when we talk of BAMER communities they are not a homogenous group, a fact which has been highlighted through our work.

This report will not be the end of our work. We, the Domestic Abuse Coordinators, OPCC, third sector charities and the seven wonderful women who were employed to speak to and support women across the Thames Valley, are all very passionate about equality, improving lives, tackling abuse in all its forms and making things safer. As such, we have formed a BAED Partnership Group to take forward the recommendations in this report.

We would like to acknowledge the courageous, amazing, insightful, eloquent women who engaged with this project, the community group members, and community facilitators. We are incredibly grateful to all of them for sharing their lives and experiences and we in turn will do our best to ensure those who come forward in the future receive support which meets their needs.

## **Liz Jones**

Domestic Abuse Lead for Oxford City Council, and  
Founding Member of the Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Coordinators Network

## **Wendy Walker**

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

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# 1. Overview of the project

## 1.1. Context

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global pandemic that affects females from all socio-economic backgrounds. In the UK, one in four women are domestically abused by a partner, ex-partner or other family member, and one in five women are sexually assaulted by a perpetrator during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Violence and abuse perpetrated against Black, Asian, ethnic minority and refugee (BAMER, or ethnically diverse) women often go unreported and are hidden due to systemic socio-cultural and institutional factors. It is, therefore, hard to ascertain what percentage of women who are domestically abused and/or sexually assaulted come from ethnic minority communities. Consent and rape within marriage are not recognised concepts among many cultures.

Among other forms of violence against women and girls which are specific to ethnically diverse women, 137,000 women and girls who have migrated to England and Wales are living with the consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, in 2018 the Forced Marriage Unit supported 1,764 people via its public helpline and emails.<sup>3</sup>

Although existing VAWG services are open to women from all backgrounds, abuse and violence perpetrated against women from ethnic minority backgrounds often vary in form and context from those more prevalent in the dominant culture. The surrounding issues have multiple layers which prevent them from being able to engage with services or make disclosures. Even after gathering the courage to approach services and make disclosures, there are many institutional and policy-related hurdles women must overcome to receive effective support. Such barriers extend to issues surrounding immigration law, not having access to public funds, dominant cultural beliefs embedded in patriarchy and colonialism, and not being able to speak the language. It is also important to consider that ethnically diverse populations are not a homogenous group and additionally there are cross-cutting issues of gender, race, caste, and class from within ethnically diverse populations, and services should reflect and understand these intersectional dimensions.

The Thames Valley BAMER Project was developed against this background with the aim of enabling and empowering women from different ethnicities, experiencing various forms of abuse and violence to approach, access and receive needs-led support from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The project recognises the need to develop and strengthen VAWG services for different strands of abuse and violence faced specifically by ethnically diverse women, and to ensure that the support available meets their specific and unique needs as informed by women from ethnic minority communities.

The Thames Valley BAMER Project was a two-year project running between April 2018 and March 2020 and was funded through the Home Office 'Violence Against Women and Girls Transformation

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<sup>1</sup><https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/07/violence-against-women-and-girls-and-male-position-factsheets/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/fgm-female-genital-mutilation-uk-girls-number-doubles-year-england-wales-a8660036.html>

<sup>3</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/869764/Forced\\_Marriage\\_Unit\\_Statistics.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869764/Forced_Marriage_Unit_Statistics.pdf)

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Fund'. The project was managed by Thames Valley BAMER Board, chaired by the OPCC with representatives from Local Authorities and local VAWG services.

The Thames Valley BAMER Project recognises this report is focused on a broad generalisation of needs and acknowledges that each community is different and should be studied in more detail going forward. Some groups of women see BAMER as an othering term whereas some felt that the distinction is necessary to cater to the distinct needs and demands of different ethnic communities.

## 1.2. Aims and objectives

The Thames Valley BAMER Project aims and objectives were set out in the bid to the Home Office, and the stated aims were to:

- Assess, improve, and better coordinate the multi-agency response to violence against women and girls in ethnically diverse communities across the region;
- Generate and map localised knowledge and networks to facilitate systemic change, and to provide a robust evidence base to inform future commissioning and support third sector grant applications;
- Improve awareness of issues relating to violence against women and girls in Thames Valley's ethnically diverse communities; engage and empower these communities to identify and challenge these abuses, and to ensure they know where and how to access timely and appropriate support; and
- Ensure that women from ethnic minority communities in Thames Valley who have abuse and violence perpetrated against them have their needs met through improved and better-informed service provision and pathways.

These aims were to be achieved by the following objectives:

- Recruitment of three strategic roles across Thames Valley (one per county) with a remit of working with communities and professionals to pull together localised key issues and learning for working with ethnic minority communities across the region. They will also assess current service provision, identifying gaps and leading practice, drawing on national examples of excellence and lessons learned;
- Production of a 'by and for' ethnically sensitive public information campaign to increase awareness of issues relating to violence against women and girls;
- Training of community champions to encourage and enable early intervention for those from ethnic minority communities at risk of or currently experiencing violence or abuse;
- Training for frontline professionals to respond appropriately to incidents of abuse or violence perpetrated against women from ethnic minority communities; and
- Recruitment of six multi-lingual specialist community outreach workers (BAMER Support Workers) across Thames Valley (two per county) to both add onto and enable access to mainstream services.

---

The funding achieved was less than applied for which accounts for the reduced capacity and resources in relation to the scope of the project, as described below.

### 1.3. Structure

The Thames Valley BAMER Project operated across the Thames Valley Region, which is constituted of the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. These are further divided into Local Authority areas. The Local Authorities work jointly with other statutory bodies to form Community Safety Partnerships, who are formed across the Thames Valley as illustrated below.



The Thames Valley BAMER Project was primarily delivered by six BAMER Support Workers; two in each county. These roles were employed by four different VAWG service providers who were appointed through open competitive tendering by the relevant Local Authorities on behalf of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. They were coordinated by the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Officer who oversaw the project operation across Thames Valley, and was hosted by Oxford City Council as an independent statutory body. The project itself was managed by the BAMER Board, which was made up of representatives of the following organisations:

- Office of Police and Crime Commissioner – Bid author, fund-holder, Chair of the Board
- Oxford City Council - Bid signatory, host to Strategic Officer
- Reading Borough Council - Bid signatory
- Slough Borough Council - Bid signatory
- Buckinghamshire County Council - Bid signatory
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council - Bid signatory
- Bracknell Forest Council - Bid signatory

- 
- West Berkshire Council – Bid signatory
  - Oxfordshire County Council – Bid signatory
  - Wokingham Borough Council – Bid signatory
  - Milton Keynes Council – Bid signatory
  - A2Dominion Domestic Abuse Services (Delivering Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, ODAS) - Host to two BAMER Support Workers (Oxfordshire County Council area)
  - MK-ACT - Host to two BAMER Support Worker (Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council areas)
  - Hestia - Host to one BAMER Support Worker (Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough, and Bracknell Council areas)
  - Berkshire Women’s Aid – Host to one BAMER Support Worker (West Berkshire, Reading Borough, and Wokingham Council areas)
  - Oxford Against Cutting – Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator
  - Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre – Bid signatory, key stakeholder, collaborator

Additionally, the Thames Valley BAMER Project commissioned an independent project evaluator to assess the process and initial impact of the project operation.

## 2. Methodology

The Thames Valley BAMER Project worked in relation to the following strands of abuse and violence across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire:

- Honour-based abuse (HBA)
- Forced marriage (FM)
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Stalking and harassment
- Domestic abuse (DA)
- Sexual violence

This report is written based on The Thames Valley BAMER Project's experiences of talking to women from ethnic minority communities, supporting clients through casework, data gathered from voluntary and statutory services, and outcomes of the project activities. The project was completed in two stages and this report encapsulates the activities and outcomes of these processes.

The project, however, has been more complex and larger than it was initially envisaged. The project uncovered more complexities which are outside the scope of this project and need a more targeted project approach in the future. Many of the achievements of the project are not easily quantified. Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the activities, approach, and the methods of collecting information for this report.

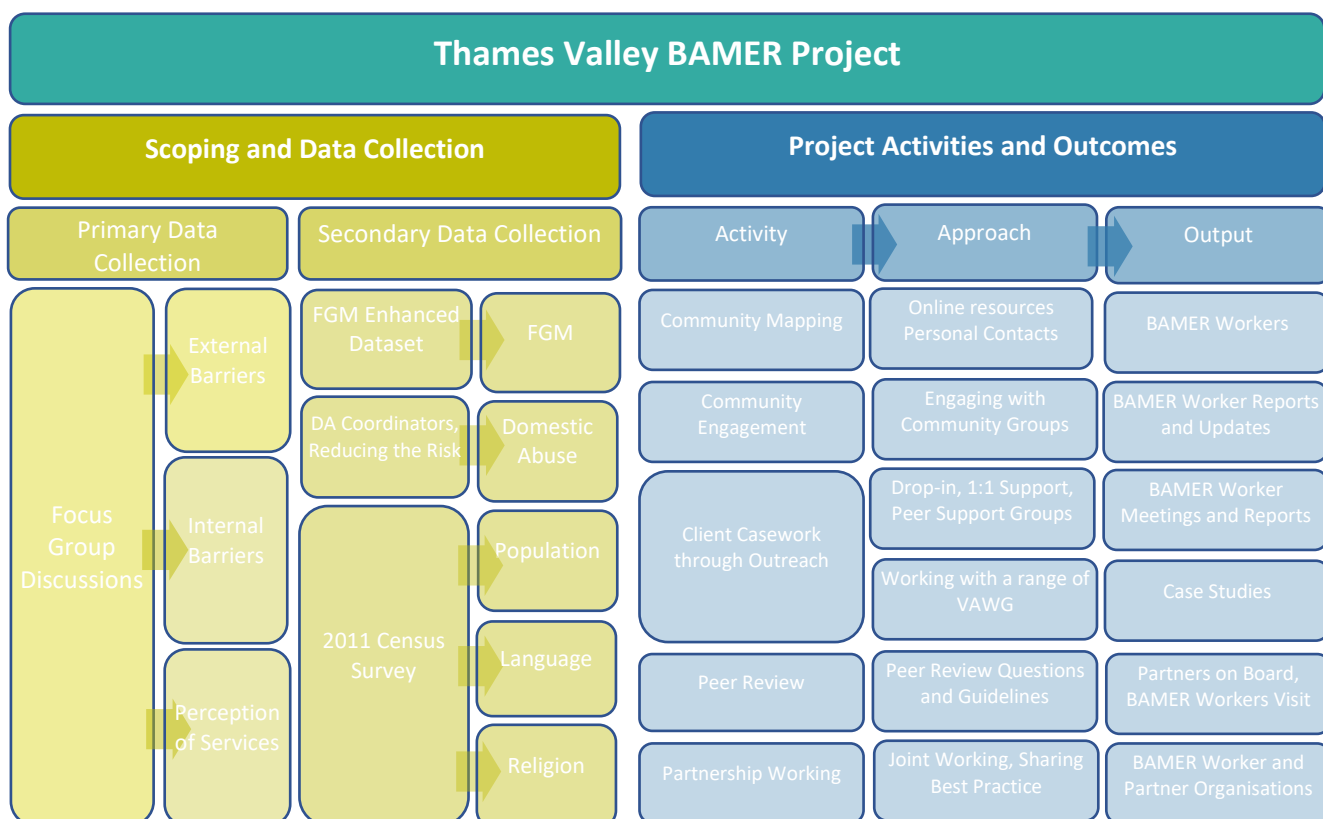


Figure 1 - Project Activities, Methodology and Outcomes

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## 2.1. Key project concerns

The nature of this project required all activities to be completed whilst giving due concern to the following issues.

**Confidentiality and safety** were given considerable discussion and care by the BAMER Support Workers when designing and delivering focus groups, so that the activities did not pose additional risks to the women or their families. This was especially taken care of during group discussion activities where women feel vulnerable in exposing their situation to other women. For focus group discussions and individual interviews, women were informed about the purpose of the project in advance and asked for voluntary explicit consent which they could withdraw at any time. Full confidentiality was always maintained. In some cases, audio recordings were not consented to but note taking was.

**Language** was a key factor; focus group discussions and individual interviews were generally conducted in English and where possible the first language of the client. All the BAMER Support Workers and the Strategic Officer spoke two or more languages, including English.

The project operated in three core stages explored below; scoping, activities, and measuring outcomes and impact, the first two of which were completed simultaneously.

**Partnership working** was a major component of the project and provided some significant learning experiences. The outcomes of this, collected from BAMER Support Workers, is included in the report.

## 2.2. Scoping

The scoping of the project was to establish a current state analysis of reporting and responses in relation to violence against women and girls amongst women from different ethnic backgrounds. To do this, it was important to understand the demographics of populations in different parts of Thames Valley and how the national statistics compared with the local situation. This scoping review provides a starting point for a more comprehensive review. Both qualitative and quantitative data were reviewed to understand issues faced by ethnic minority women concerning violence against women and girls, but data analysis methods have largely been qualitative. The scoping was carried out in two ways:

### 2.2.1. Primary data collection

Primary data for scoping was collected to understand the following issues faced by women from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This was achieved via focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews which grew out of the community engagement (see below):

- Internal barriers women faced in approaching and accessing VAWG services,
- External barriers women faced in approaching and accessing VAWG services, and

- Perceptions of women regarding different statutory and voluntary services in relation to VAWG issues.

The discussions were conducted by BAMER Support Workers after engaging with different community groups over time, to build a rapport. The different approaches undertaken with the focus groups is discussed in more detail below.

### 2.2.2. Secondary data collection

Secondary data was collected for understanding the context with different strands of violence against women and girls. Data was gathered as follows:

- 2011 Census survey was used to analyse data on population, religion, and language to understand the demographics within Thames Valley<sup>4</sup>,
- Data on female genital mutilation was collected through the female genital mutilation enhanced dataset, a repository for individual level data collected by healthcare providers in England,
- Information on forced marriage was obtained through reports from the Forced Marriage Unit,
- Domestic abuse data were received from the region's various Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), from domestic abuse services and from some sexual violence services,
- Data from domestic homicide reviews were received from the Community Safety Partnerships in Thames Valley, and
- Honour-based abuse data was collected through Karma Nirvana, a national charity.

### 2.2.3. Data interpretation and dissemination

Data interpretation and dissemination required analysis of both primary and secondary data collected through focus group discussions and online research. This included understanding internal and external barriers and other information obtained through the BAMER Project activities:

- Analysing project data received, drafting interim reports and the final report,
- Using data analysis to inform ongoing engagement with communities, and
- Providing recommendations on how to make services more approachable and accessible for ethnically diverse women, based on the project activities.

## 2.3. Community activities

The second operational aspect of this project involved the community-based activities, as outlined below.

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<sup>4</sup> It is acknowledged the information from this Census will not accurately reflect the situation in 2018-20

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### 2.3.1. Community mapping

Activities were carried out by both the Strategic Officer and the BAMER Support Workers by exploring existing contacts, online information, and snowballing information about existing services. Mapping was recorded in a spreadsheet.

### 2.3.2. Community engagement

The community engagement activity for the project took place over two years in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and West Berkshire, and one year in East Berkshire. Activities were carried out by BAMER Support Workers engaging closely with existing community groups mostly run by women:

- Raising awareness by engaging with existing community and women's groups and developing new ones,
- Mapping ethnic communities, community groups and existing services across Thames Valley,
- Assessing needs and identifying issues through focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews, and
- Engaging with women who have used VAWG services and women who have not, to map casework and services, and to understand barriers to access.

### 2.3.3. Outreach

Outreach activities ensured that BAMER Support Workers were available for one-to-one support with clients who wanted support around experiences of abuse following the community engagement work. In all but one area this was offered by the BAMER Support Workers; in one area (covering three local authority areas) the BAMER Support Worker focused on community engagement work and referred or signposted women to appropriate services.

Where the BAMER Project's outreach service was available it was also offered to women who were referred into the established VAWG services in the usual way and were assessed as likely to benefit from the specialist approach from BAMER Support Workers.

Apart from group work programmes, outreach support was always in the form of one-to-one casework, although the format for this varied and was provided in the following ways:

- Two areas offered specialist, ethnically sensitive group work programmes.
- Three areas offered a traditional outreach service through an arranged appointment system with a specific allocated BAMER Support Worker over a period of time.
- Two areas provided drop-in surgeries where women could attend between defined times for an impromptu appointment with the covering BAMER Support Worker. This was often as a one off, although this could be repeated or lead into the more traditional outreach service.

- 
- Two areas facilitated peer support opportunities.

Referral routes into the service varied across the areas and service providers. In general, referrals were either received and put forward via established helplines and referral routes, were proactively identified by BAMER Support Workers from the engagement with community groups or were received from those groups themselves.

Information on outreach was collected through updates in the Thames Valley BAMER Project operational meetings and reports sent in through BAMER Support Workers. Not all BAMER Support Workers had client work as part of their job description but learning was still identified when supporting clients in different ways. Information on client work was collected through BAMER Support Workers, case studies and interviews.

### **2.3.4. Trainings and presentations**

BAMER Support Workers trained professionals and community groups on different strands of VAWG:

- Training helpline staff in VAWG services on engaging with clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds,
- Developing a training package to support agencies in addressing the barriers that ethnically diverse women face in accessing services through the New Bridges programme (a collaboration between Oxford Against Cutting and Sunrise Centre, Banbury),
- Developing training for front-line workers who engage with clients from diverse ethnic backgrounds,
- Completing Ilam-El-Hifzat training to enable delivery of a culturally sensitive version of the Freedom Programme for ethnically diverse women (MK-ACT BAMER Support Workers in Milton Keynes),
- Advising local domestic abuse strategy groups of the project's progress and findings through presentations at meetings, and
- Presenting an introduction of the project to the Crown Prosecution Service.

### **2.3.4. Peer review audits**

Although these were not part of the original project brief, the project decided to carry out peer review audits to understand how existing providers were set up. Several agencies providing support around violence against women and girls were asked to complete an internal audit questionnaire on their approach to supporting ethnically ethnic minority victims and survivors. They were then visited by a BAMER Support Worker from another organisation for one day to talk about processes, procedures, and anything else which needed more clarification. This highlighted the service providers' perspective on supporting women from different ethnic background.

## 2.4. Measuring outcomes and impact

### 2.4.1. Performance framework

The performance of the project was reviewed by developing and completing a performance framework to understand the achievements of the project. This also helps describe the project and illustrates the project cycle.

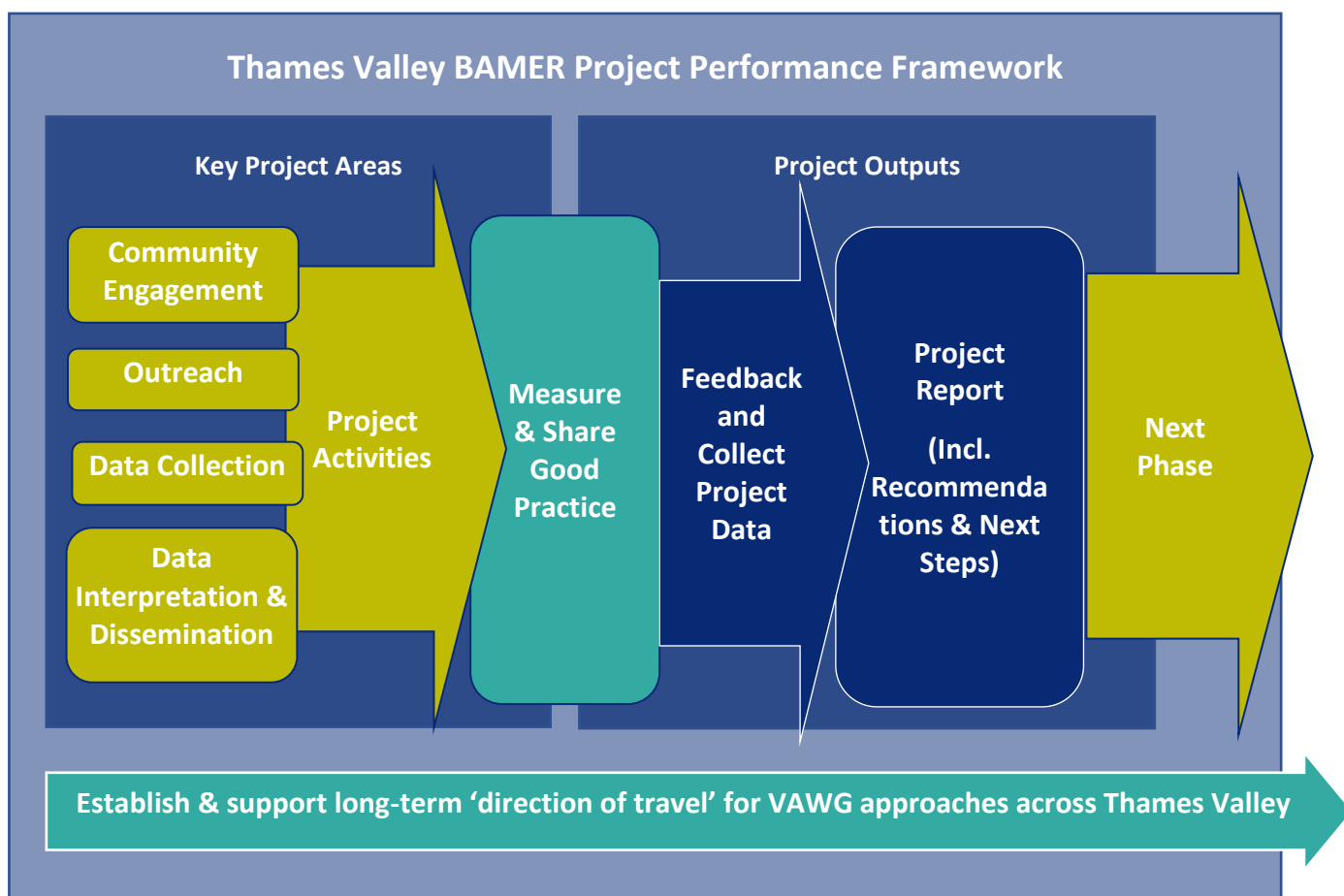


Figure 2 - The Thames Valley BAMER Project Performance Framework

### 2.4.2. Theory of change

The following theory of change framework (Figure 3) was designed by the project group and based on the Department for International Development (DFID) theory of change model to measure the outputs and outcomes of the project. Two years is a short time to measure the impact of any project of this nature, but there is evidence of initial progress towards the end goal of meeting the needs of ethnically diverse women. The impact mentioned in this theory of change framework below is the aspirational goal for the project which can only be fulfilled by continuing and further developing the work done by the Thames Valley BAMER Project.

## Theory of Change Framework for Thames Valley VAWG BAMER Project

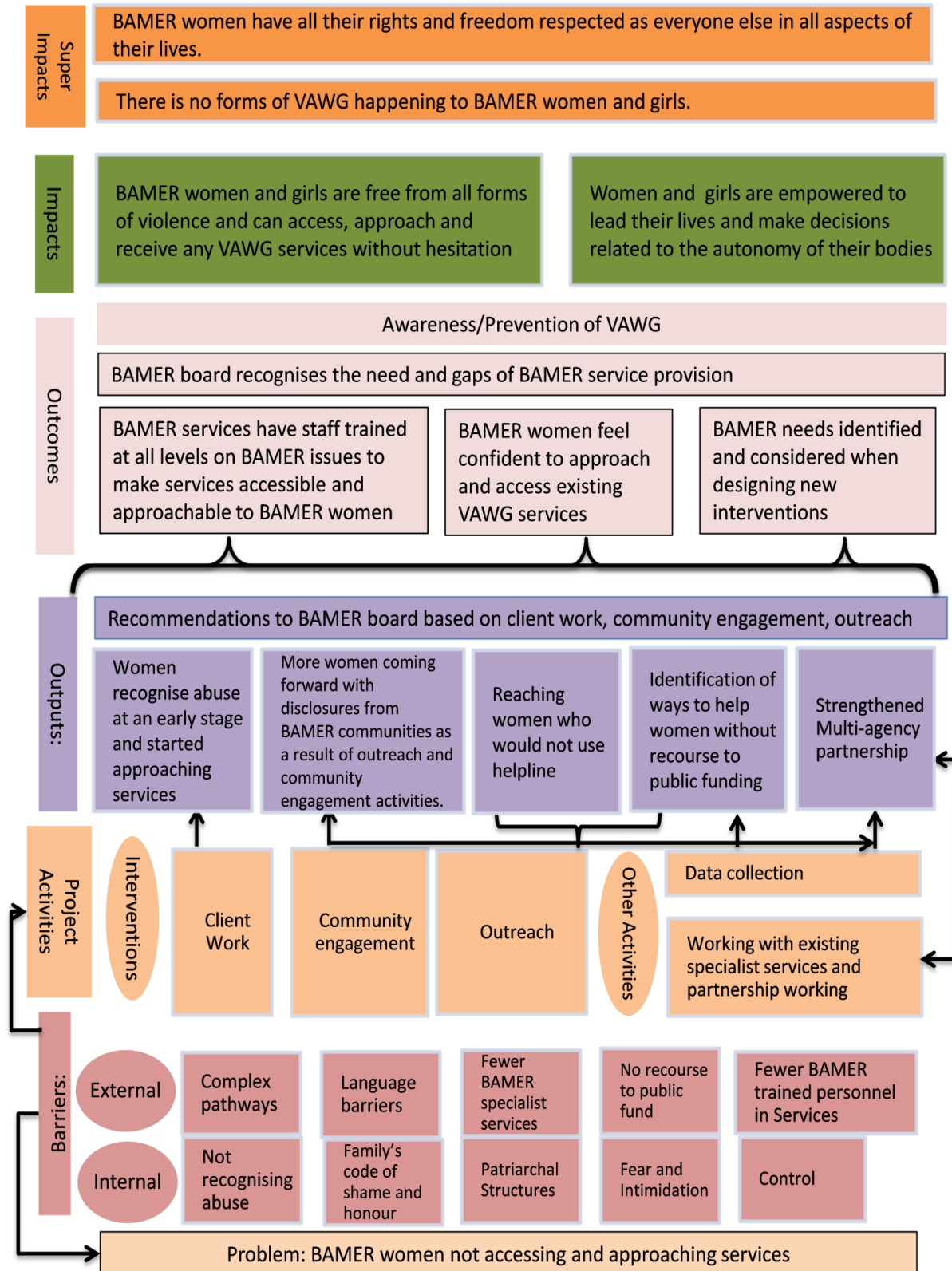


Figure 3 - Theory of Change Model for the Thames Valley BAMER Project

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## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Findings on population demographics in Thames Valley

#### 3.1.1. Ethnicity

##### *Defining and identifying ethnicity*

There are challenges in identifying the ethnic identity of populations who hold European passports. For example, many Brazilians hold Portuguese, Spanish or Italian passports and are counted as Portuguese, Spanish or Italian and not Brazilians. It is similar with East Timorese populations who are also here on Portuguese passports. This can make it difficult for service providers and statutory agencies to easily assess any likely needs arising from ethnic identity, or appreciate that there is a difference between the two identities.

In addition, some minority communities are not captured in the 2011 Census as they arrived in the United Kingdom from war torn countries in the past 9 years, for example Syrian and East Timorese refugees. In most areas where ethnicity data is recorded, those with Black African or Black Caribbean heritage are recorded under the Black population umbrella which does not acknowledge the differences between these two groups.

##### *Minority ethnic representations in Thames Valley*

Census survey data from 2011 were used to understand the demographics in Thames Valley, which has a population of 2.1million with approximately 25 percent from minority ethnic communities. The Thames Valley has a rich and diverse population featuring a few urban areas of higher population density, alongside some smaller rural towns, and some very rural and more isolated populations, and ethnic make-up varies greatly across the region. The areas with the highest ethnically diverse populations are the more urban areas:

- Slough (Berkshire) with 54.3 percent
- Oxford (Oxfordshire), 36 percent
- Reading (Berkshire), 35 percent, and
- High Wycombe (Buckinghamshire) with 32.8 percent

The highest population of ethnic groups in Thames Valley are:

- Pakistani with 65,156 (3 percent)
- Indian with 55,623 (2.6 percent)
- African with 37,764 (1.8 percent)
- Polish with 25,140 (1.2 percent)

County: Local Authority Area:		Berkshire					Buckinghamshire		Oxfordshire
		Bracknell	Reading	Slough	Windsor & Maidenhead	Wokingham	Bucks	Milton Keynes	Oxon
Ethnic Identity									
Africa	African (mixed)		802	607			1,098	1,597	1,557
	African		6,087	7,548			4,032	13,058	7,039
Asia	Indian		6,087	21,922			11,368	8,106	8,140
	Nepali	1,014	2,614			143			796
	Afghan		153	814			222	304	316
	Filipino		630	940			1,107	758	1,938
	Pakistani		6,967	24,869	4,238		21,236		7,846
	Bangladeshi		695	549			1,089	1,989	2,491
	Chinese		1,603			1,203	2,554	2,722	5,618
	Thai		198				397	234	544
	Turkish		157		145		159	108	327
	Iranian		100		87		169	105	281
Europe/ Eurasia	Russian		362		263	179	150		1,113
	Polish		3,495	7,621			3,924	3,164	6,936
	Eastern European		890	644			1,602	796	2,910
Latin America	Caribbean		3,279	3,096			5,175	2,524	3,070
	South Central America		190		170		289	162	550
	Caribbean (mixed)		3,279	1,667			4,573	2,243	3,759
	Brazilian		69		53		106	65	356
		<5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-15,000	15,001-20,000	>20,000			

Table 1 - Ethnic Population Distributions across Thames Valley

### 3.1.2. Language

Lack of or low proficiency in English can affect a person's ability to access health and other services. It can also have a detrimental impact on access to wider community and support networks, and on social and cultural capital in terms of understanding how systems and institutions operate.

At the time of the 2011 Census survey there was a total of 5,500 people in Oxfordshire who could not speak English or speak English sufficiently. Of these the largest numbers were in the working age groups 25 to 34 and 35 to 49. Data published as part of the annual school census in January each year shows an increasing proportion of pupils at primary schools in Oxfordshire with a first language other than English. In January it 2017 was slightly higher than the regional South East average at 14.4 percent in Oxfordshire compared with 14.3 percent in the South East region. Given that refugee and migrant populations continue to arrive in the Thames Valley it is reasonable to assume that this pattern is replicated in the other counties, but the data was not available. The following table gives a picture of the major languages spoken across Thames Valley.

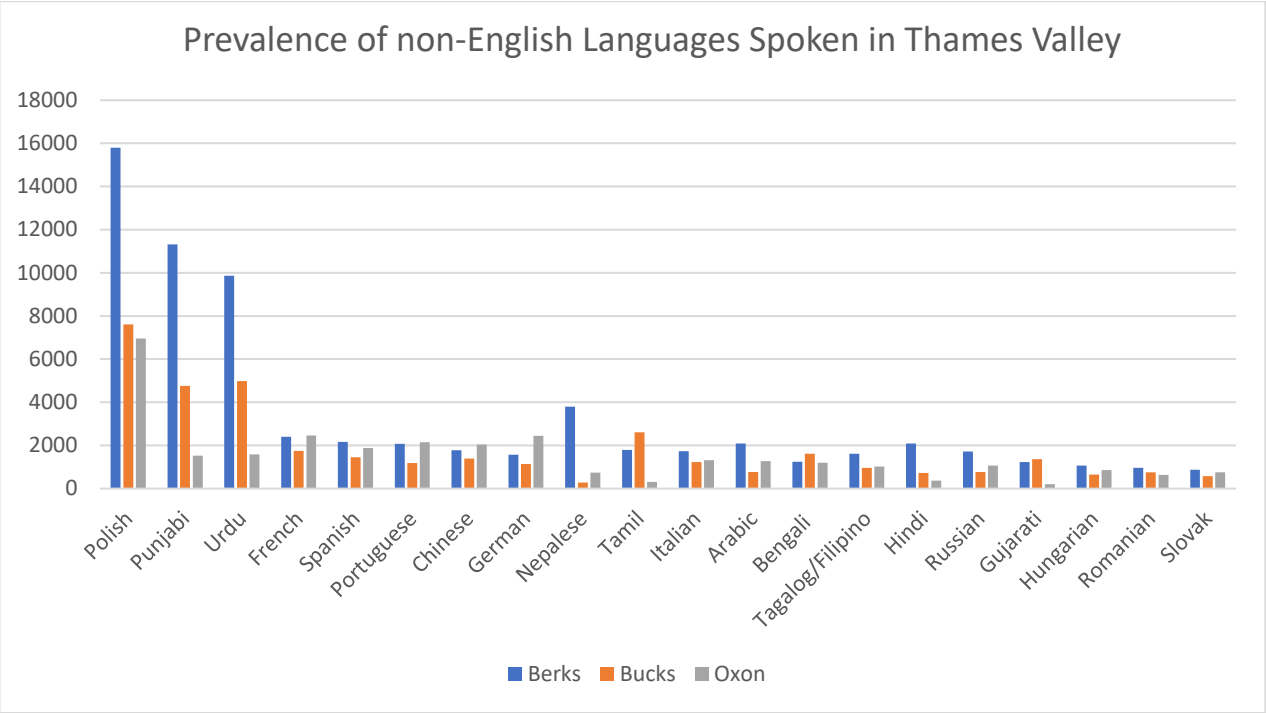


Figure 4 -Prevalence of non-English Languages Spoken in Thames Valley

### 3.1.3. Religion

Thames Valley hosts a range of places of worship, which reflects the diverse religious backgrounds of the populations residing in the region. According to the 2011 Census the largest religious group in Thames Valley are Christians, with others represented as shown in the following table. It is worth noting that some members of the dominant white culture in the Thames Valley will also form part of the Christian religious group, so it is hard to understand what proportion might be made up from minority ethnic communities.

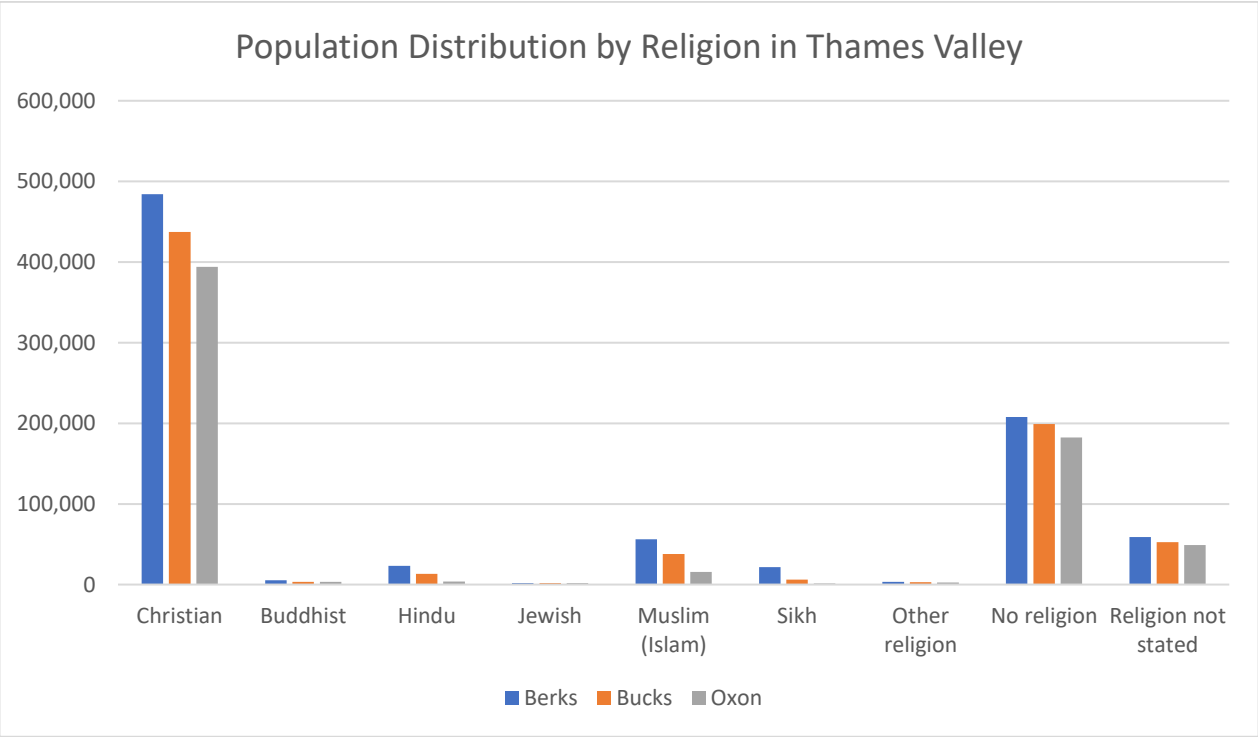


Figure 5 - Population Distribution by Religion in Thames Valley

## 3.2. Findings on statistics relating to violence against women and girls

### 3.2.1. Female Genital Mutilation

Official data on female genital mutilation is reported in the female genital mutilation enhanced dataset, via healthcare providers across England. The current data show extremely low numbers on female genital mutilation. The accuracy of this data is contested by many as it is onerous to gather accurate and exact information regarding the prevalence of female genital mutilation due to the nature of how, where and when the violence takes place. In 2018-2019 a total of two defendants were prosecuted for female genital mutilation; one was convicted and the other acquitted. The Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order is also very useful in preventing non-medical cutting. Between July 2015 when they were introduced and June 2019 there were 375 applications and 418 orders made in England and Wales.<sup>5</sup> There have been no prosecutions for breaches of a Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order so far. The following is the representation of the numbers in Thames Valley.

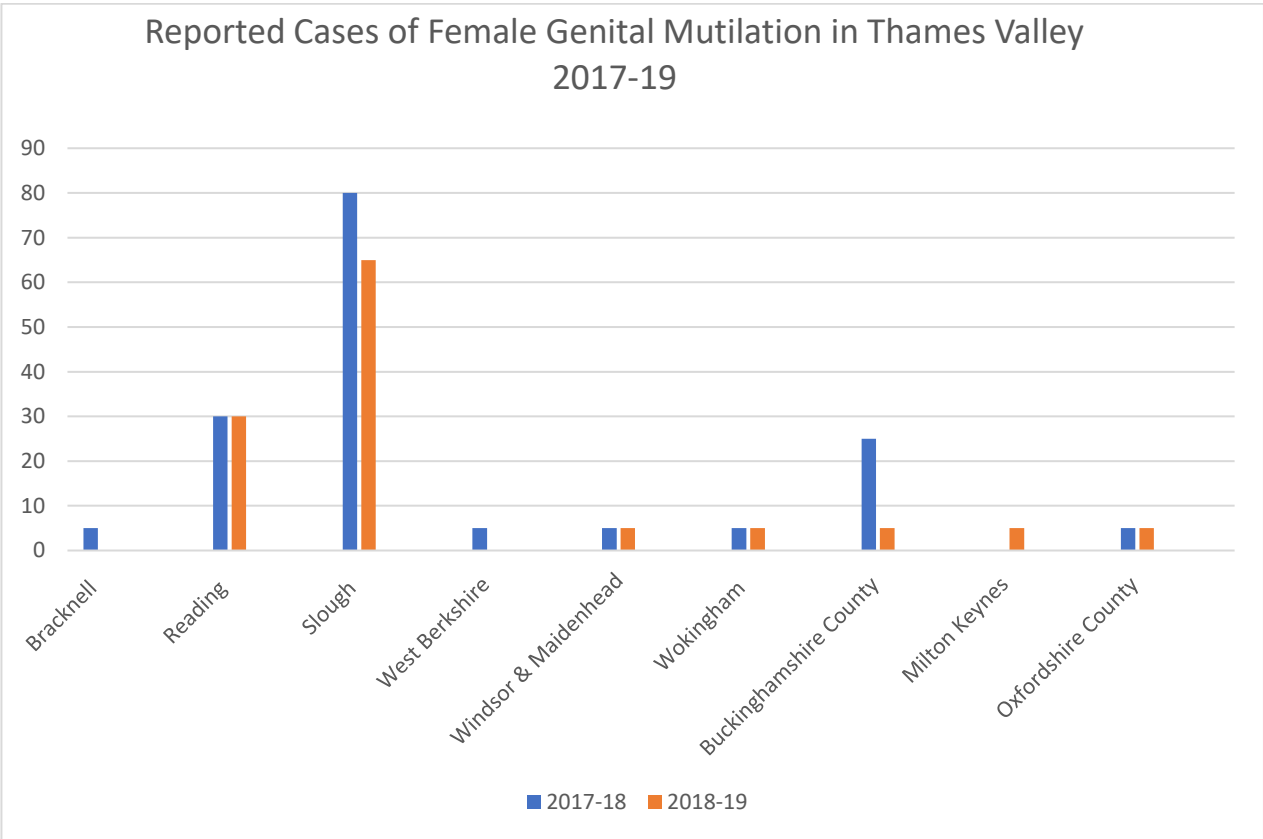


Figure 6 - Reported Cases of Female Genital Mutilation in Thames Valley 2017-19

<sup>5</sup> Family Court Statistics Quarterly, England & Wales, April-June 2019; Ministry of Justice

The above data are based on the numbers reported to the NHS. Of all the countries where female

*“Patients disclose sensitive information when a safe, confidential space is created. It can take years for women with FGM to seek medical help. Clinicians are concerned that mandatory collection of confidential information without consent will damage trust in the doctor-patient relationship and discourage women with FGM from seeking medical attention. Separate and detailed data collection systems do not exist in other areas such as domestic abuse and rape.”*

genital mutilation is performed, the largest diaspora populations in the UK tend to reside in Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Reading, Thurrock, Manchester, Sheffield, Northampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Slough, and Milton Keynes. This picture is not reflected in the NHS enhanced female genital mutilation dataset, which leads to questions being raised about the accuracy of the data. The prevalence rate in Oxfordshire, for example, is often challenged for its low numbers and lack of accuracy. Additionally, the number of women who are recorded in this database is low when compared with the number of women who have reported to the specialist female genital mutilation Rose Clinics in Oxford and Reading, raising further questions about its accuracy.

In identifying potential reasons for the under-reporting, Dr Brenda Kelly of Oxford Rose Clinic writes why reporting female genital mutilation cases could jeopardise the confidential relationship between patient and doctor, discouraging women from seeking medical help.

The mandatory disclosure by health professionals of female genital mutilation identified in health consultations may prevent women with female genital mutilation complications from engaging with doctors for fear of repercussions such as being criminalised.

Many communities that practice female genital mutilation continue with the practice despite this being a criminal offence since 1985. While framing this kind of violence within the legal context might deter some from performing female genital mutilation, advocacy work, awareness raising

activities, campaigns and work on prevention must complement the legal framework.

Legal changes demonstrate a commitment to end the dangerous practice, but not involving communities’ voices in making legal reforms could result in alienating those communities. Including community voices in any kind of female genital mutilation work allows communities to take ownership of prevention projects, giving better prospects for impact. The number of women and girls who have been subjected to female genital mutilation may show the magnitude of the problem, but there is also a need to collect data on those who are *at risk* of female genital mutilation in order to focus work on prevention activities. Awareness raising activities, advocacy and campaigns must also focus on women and girls who have just arrived in the UK from countries practising female genital mutilation. It is considered that 20,000 girls are at risk of female genital mutilation every year but how this number translates in Thames Valley is difficult to explore.

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### 3.2.2. Domestic Abuse and Violence

In the year ending March 2018, 2 million people in England and Wales aged 16-59 experienced some form of domestic abuse. Out of this, 1.3 million were women. The police recorded a total of 599,549 cases of domestic abuse, which is an increase of 23 percent from the previous year.<sup>6</sup>

Across the Thames Valley region there has been a steady increase in reports of domestic abuse to the police; 46,904 in 2017-18 up to 50,600 in 2019-20. In 2019-20 there were 24,292 domestic abuse related non-crime occurrences and 26,308 domestic related crime reports, which amount to 10 percent of all recorded crime in the area.<sup>7</sup> Ethnicity breakdown is not currently available.

Thames Valley MARAC data for 2017-18 and 2018-19 records 1,651 high risk cases (764 in 2017-18 and 887 in 2018-19). MARAC cases from ethnically diverse backgrounds represented 25.5 percent of all cases which is what would be expected given the make-up of the wider community, which is 25 percent. However not all agencies accurately recorded ethnicity so the percentage may be even higher.

#### *Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)*

Despite significant attempts it was not possible to obtain comprehensive and comparable data for each area within the Thames Valley. Since 2011, when they were introduced, there have been 35 domestic homicide reviews in Thames Valley within the areas who responded to requests for this information. Of these, 12 involved either a victim or perpetrator from an ethnically diverse background, or both. The table below shows the distribution of domestic homicide reviews involving people from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

### 3.2.3. Forced Marriage

Women who are forced to marry have no agency to decide on what they would like to do with their lives. In some cases, traditions are more strictly observed in the diaspora than they are in their countries of origin, and many forced marriages take place under the pretext of arranged marriage which is a cultural norm for many minority ethnic communities, the social and emotional duress to comply being interpreted as consent. The Forced Marriage Act (2007) introduced the Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) and is a well-intended piece of legislation. Following their introduction in November 2008, there were 17 applications for FMPOs and 25 orders made in the first quarter of 2009. Ten years later in the first quarter of 2019 there were 95 applications and 167 orders made<sup>8</sup>, demonstrating a steady rise but not to a high number. This may be due to agencies not recognising a person is at risk of forced marriage and indicates that more training could increase understanding of the triggers and dynamics which may lead to forced marriage. The peer review undertaken by this project also highlighted a gap in training around this, which would also assist in preventing the isolation of whole communities that practice forced marriage. As with female genital mutilation, this piece of legislation alone is not enough to fight

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018#domestic-abuse-recorded-by-the-police>

<sup>7</sup> Crime Summary for Thames Valley, Rolling 12 months, Thames Valley Police

<sup>8</sup> Family Court Statistics Quarterly, England & Wales, April to June 2019, Ministry of Justice

the practise of forced marriage. The discourse needs to go beyond that of legality and should be simultaneously considered against the concepts of honour and shame, consent under duress, sexual chastity, purity, pre-marital sexuality, and virginity. There needs to be more investment in prevention and abuse recognition both at the community level and among services.

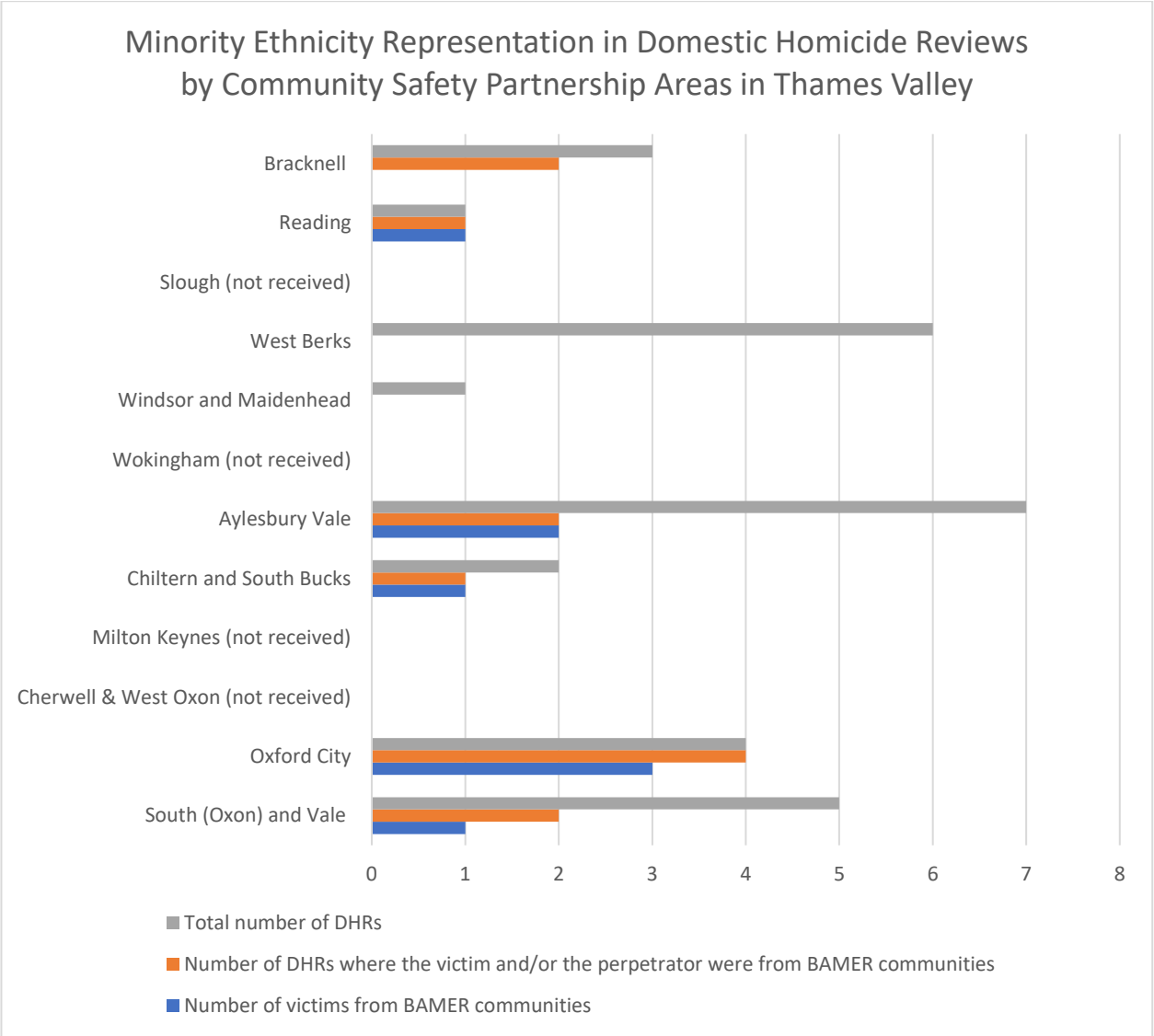


Figure 7 - Ethnicity Representation in Domestic Homicide Reviews by Community Safety Partnership Areas in Thames Valley

Data on the prevalence of forced marriage in this report are based on the cases known to the Forced Marriage Unit. Within the scope of this project there was no capacity to estimate forced marriage cases that had not come to the attention of the Forced Marriage Unit, voluntary and statutory agencies. The sensitivity of the issue poses challenges on data collection limiting the analysis of this report to only numbers that have been recorded by the Forced Marriage Unit. A lot of forced marriage among men is not easily identified or recorded, and as with women many of these take place under the pretext of consensual arranged marriages.

The Forced Marriage Unit had 1,355 cases in 2019, of which 80 percent were female and 19 percent male, and the gender was unknown in 1 percent. The numbers of cases coming to the Forced Marriage Unit have remained steady since 2011. 41 percent of cases were linked to Pakistan, 11 percent to Bangladesh, 5 percent to India, 4 percent to Afghanistan, and 2 percent to

Iran, Somalia, and Romania. There was a total of 66 countries related to potential forced marriages in 2019.

In 2018-2019 there were a total of four offences of forced marriage charged by the Thames and Chiltern Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). There were four defendants prosecuted and three of them were convicted.

3.2.4. Honour-based abuse

Although honour-based abuse is extensively seen around the world, the true scale of the problem is not known. There are 17,000 reported incidents of honour-based abuse in the UK each year<sup>9</sup>. At least 12 murders happen in the name of honour each year in the UK<sup>10</sup>. Karma Nirvana host the national helpline for victims of honour-based abuse.

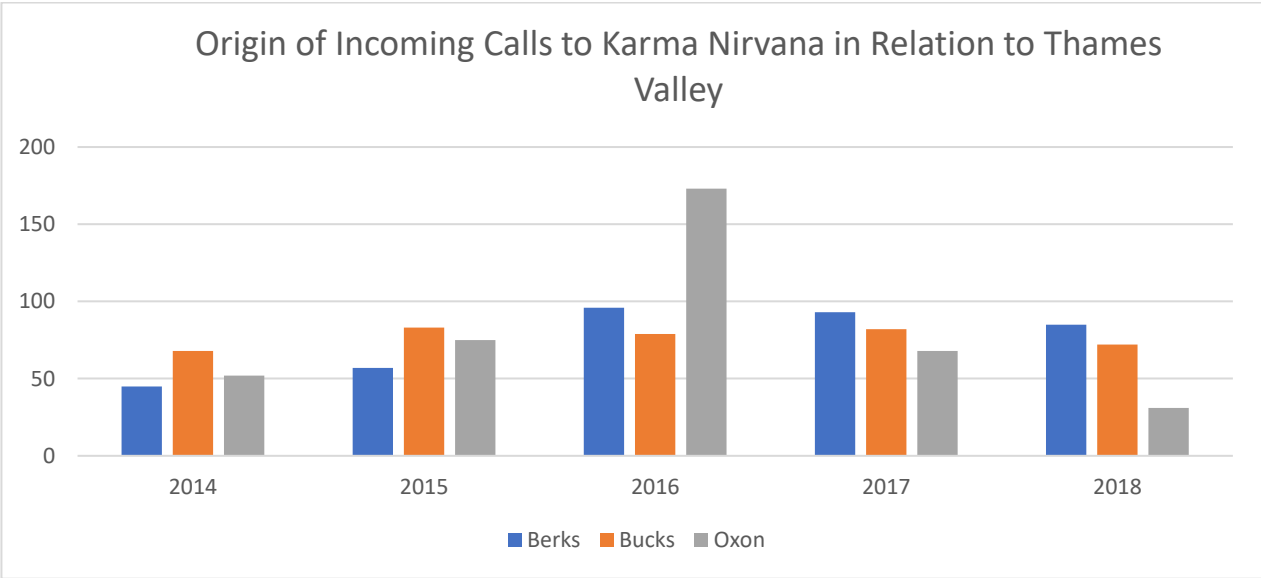


Figure 8 - Origin of Incoming Calls to Karma Nirvana in Relation to Thames Valley

Usually in the case of honour-based abuse, perpetrators are related to the victims or their families. In many cases there are multiple perpetrators, who could be a victim’s own parents, brothers, uncles, and other extended family members. This often leads to victims wanting, or feeling compelled, to protect the perpetrators, resulting in hidden crimes, due to under-reporting.

There were 72 prosecutions in the Thames Valley relating to honour-based abuse in 2018-19, with 41 convictions and a conviction rate of 56.9 percent.<sup>11</sup>

113 occurrences were identified as being honour-based abuse or forced marriage related offences between April 2016 and March 2017. This was an increase from 86 in 2015/16. A further 279 non crime occurrences were identified as having concerns in respect of honour-based abuse or forced marriage but where no offences were identified; an increase from 202 in 2015/16.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk/cms/content/so-called-honour-based-abuse>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, as 9

<sup>11</sup> CPS, 2019

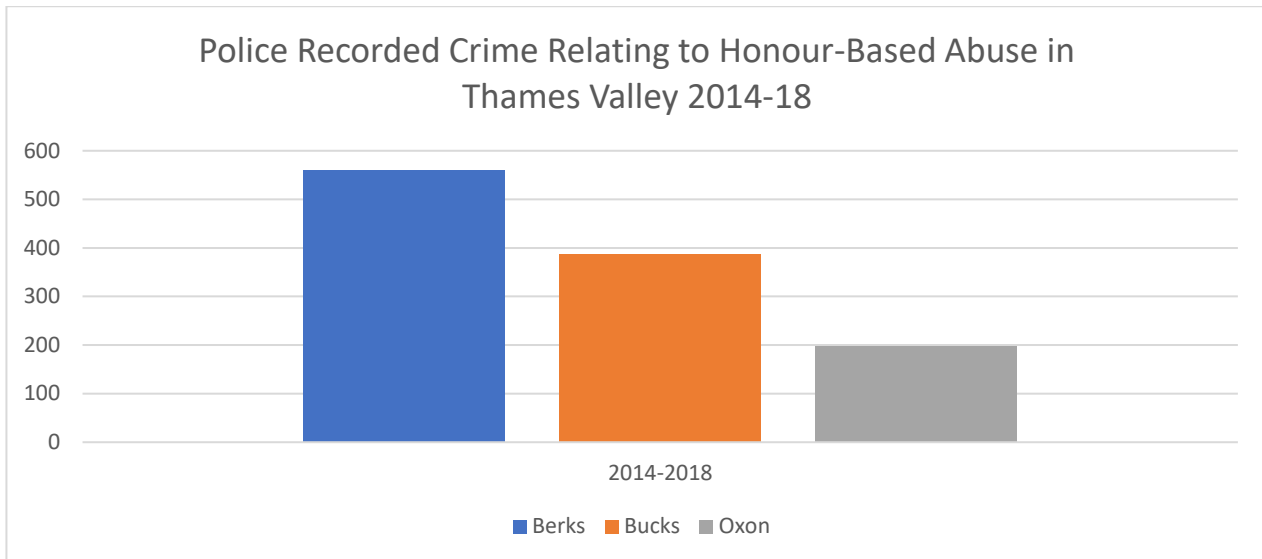


Figure 9 - Police Recorded Crime Relating to Honour-Based Abuse in Thames Valley 2014-18

Victims are often from a Pakistani background, but the crime spreads across different ethnicities as illustrated in the following tables. Officers are more conscious about this issue in South Asian communities which could be the reason their higher representation.

Some challenges in collecting data relating to honour-based abuse and forced marriage are as follows:

- Analysing honour-based abuse and forced marriage occurrence data vis-à-vis outdated population data may be somewhat restricted;
- Accuracy of the data gathered is hard to ensure because victims' and perpetrators' ethnicities are not recorded in all cases; and
- Quality assurance and guidance on gathering this data needs to be updated and reviewed.

### 3.2.5. Sexual violence and abuse

Sexual violence is significantly under-reported, with studies saying anything between 10 and 20 percent of victims and survivors actually come forward and disclose.<sup>12</sup> There are multiple reasons for this, including, shame, fear of not being believed, victim blaming culture, fear of exposure, and fear of the criminal justice system.

Thames Valley Police recorded 4,776 sexual offences (1,783 rape and 2,993 non-rape) in 2017-18; 5,447 sexual offences (1,838 rape and 3,609 non-rape) in 2018-19; and, 5,825 sexual offences (2,105 rape and 3,720 non-rape) in 2019-20.<sup>13</sup> Ethnicity breakdown is currently unavailable.

The Thames Valley Independent Sexual Violence Advisory (ISVA) Service had 367 referrals in 2017-18, 40 (11 percent) of which were clients from ethnic minority communities and in 2018-19 there

<sup>12</sup> <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/statistics-sexual-violence/>

<sup>13</sup> Crime Summary for Thames Valley, Rolling Summary, Thames Valley Police

were 496 referrals, 55 (11 percent) were from such communities<sup>14</sup>. Whilst this is not the only ISVA service within Thames Valley, their data provides some sense of the picture. Ethnically diverse communities make up 25 percent of the Thames Valley population, which suggests there may be underreporting. However, ethnicity is not recorded in approximately 50 percent of cases therefore the actual amount of people from ethnically diverse communities may be much higher.

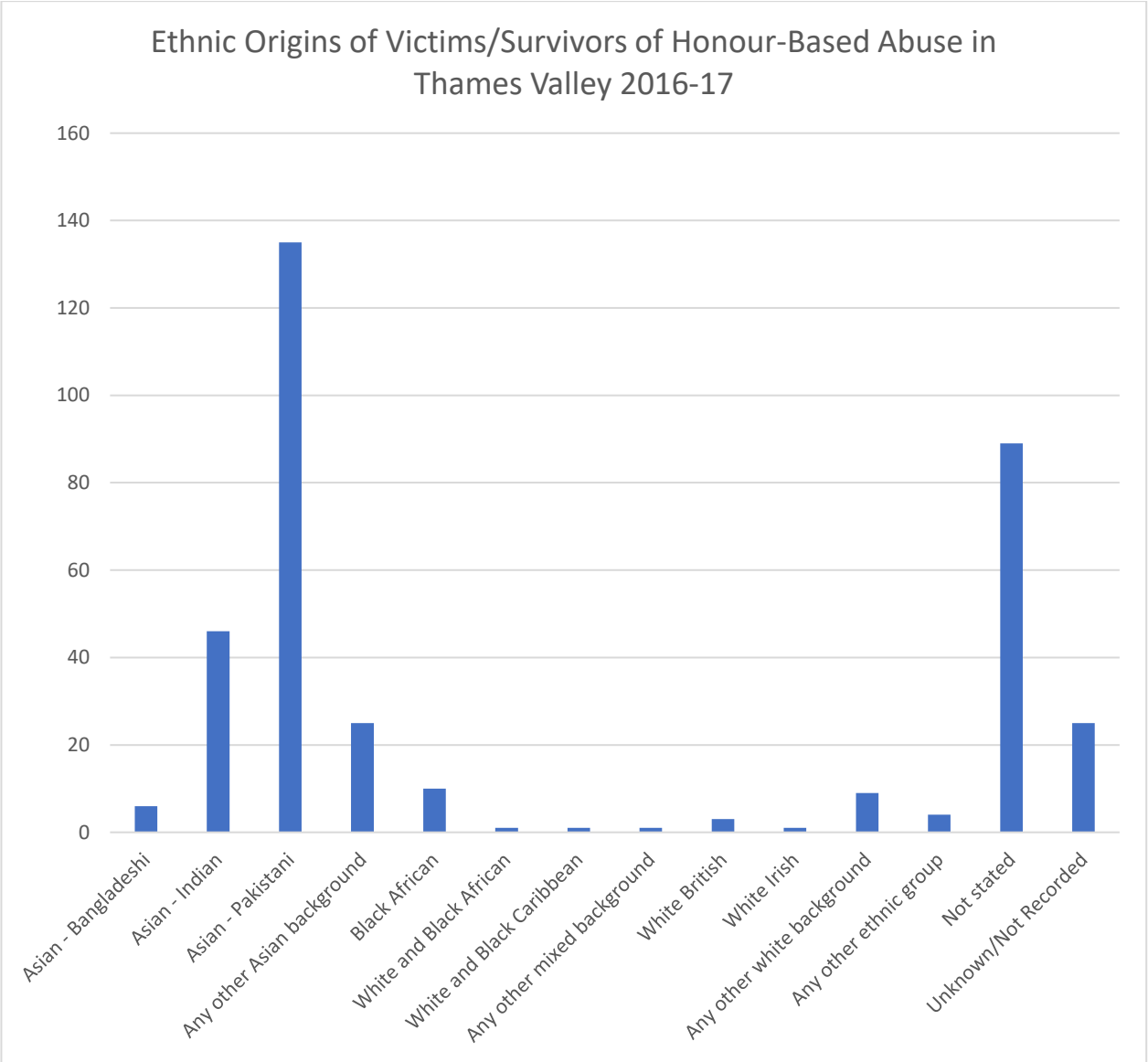


Figure 10 - Ethnic Origins of Victims/Survivors of Honour-Based Abuse in Thames Valley 2016-17

### 3.2.6. Stalking and harassment

Stalking is a high-risk factor in domestic abuse cases yet very few agencies capture data making it difficult to determine how common it is for abusers to stalk their (ex-)partners. The National Stalking Helpline received 1,560 calls from the Thames Valley region in 2018, 30 percent (468) were from ethnically diverse communities which is a higher than the 25 percent in the wider population. This data will have covered all types of stalking, although domestic related stalking is the most prevalent. It is difficult to determine if stalking is under-reported, incorrectly recorded or not recorded.

<sup>14</sup> Thames Valley Performance Report, 2017-18, 2018-19, Refuge ISVA Service

### 3.3. Findings of focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews

The focus group questions were structured around how communities felt about the support they were accessing and what agencies could be doing to enable ethnically ethnic minority victims to access them. The focus group questions aimed to gather information on the experiences from within community; on how and when they approached the services, and the extent to which they felt their needs were being considered in the delivery of these services. A holistic approach was needed to understand the issue of violence against women and girls. Working in this area involves working in tandem with multiple services ranging from health, education, housing, courts, interpreter services and many others with equal attention given to each of these needs.

The focus group participants were also asked about their views on what they would like to have in place to make the services more accessible to them and how a more holistic approach could be developed to address these issues. The focus group discussions explored the issues of the 'BAMER' group as a whole and where possible has investigated issues faced by particular ethnic minority groups. The participating women in the focus groups represented women who had been subjected to violence or abuse, women who made disclosures of violence or abuse perpetrated against them during the project, as well as women who had no disclosed experience of abuse or violence.

		County:	Berks	Bucks	Oxon
Number of Focus Group Discussions:			9	4	7
Ethnicities represented			Berks	Bucks	Oxon
Africa	Eritrean				✓
	Somali				✓
	Sudanese				✓
	Tanzanian		✓		✓
	Zimbabwean				✓
	Mixed African				✓
Asia	Bangladeshi		✓		
	Chinese		✓		
	Indian		✓	✓	
	Iranian				✓
	Nepali		✓		
	Pakistani		✓	✓	✓
	Syrian		✓		✓
	Turkish				✓
	Mixed (Kurdish)				✓
Europe	Portuguese		✓		✓
	Spanish		✓		
Latin America	Brazilian				✓

Table 2 - Focus Group Discussion Held across Thames Valley

### 3.3.1. Barriers to accessing and approaching services

“

*Maidenhead mosque really works hard to challenge these attitudes.*

...

*My husband did not allow me to work as he wanted to control my finances. I couldn't ask him for money, and I couldn't stand up for myself. I didn't know that this was being abusive.*

...

*I used to cry and forget and forgive and offer many chances. Due to being threatened and accused of sleeping with others constantly. He used to believe that I was only with him in order to remain in the UK and his parents believed that I got married to him to be able to live in the UK.*

”

#### *Internal Barriers*

**Fear and intimidation** from perpetrators, family members, and agencies was a common experience for many ethnic minority women, which keeps them in the abusive relationship. This fear and intimidation manifests in a number of ways:

- Fear of disgracing the family by leaving an abusive relationship,
- Feeling intimidated to approach services as they are concerned they would not be able to explain the abuse they have suffered,
- Scared of being left a destitute and not be able to provide for children as they are economically dependent on partners,
- Fear of being separated from the children or being taken back to the country of origin if abuse is disclosed, or
- Many women fear the data of their immigration status would be shared amongst the statutory services and the Home Office.

**Control** is a prominent feature in the lives of many ethnic minority women. Women from different ethnic groups shared that after moving to the UK on spousal visas, it took time for them to make friends in a new place. Many do not have a proper social support system to seek help enabling spouses or family members to control aspects of their lives. Control among women can be seen in various forms:

- The control of movement under the pretext of providing protection, often preventing women from seeking employment or going out unaccompanied.
- The need to seek permission from in-laws to visit friends.
- Being denied access to mobile phones.
- Abusers withholding access to passports.
- Women being permanently accompanied by husbands and dependent on them for information on their legal status.

Many women on spousal visas are controlled with threats of deportation and are taken advantage of because of their insecure immigration status and the fact this means they have no recourse to public funds. Some groups agreed that women are discouraged from going out and about without being accompanied. This resulted in control of mobility for a lot of women.

One group felt however that this attitude is changing with the help of community leaders.

**Failure to recognise abuse** is common and many women stay within an abusive relationship remaining silent and tolerating the abuse that they go through because the violence has not been 'bad enough' to warrant leaving. The patriarchal structures on which societies are built implicitly expect women to endure abuse even when this has been disclosed to her family, friends, or neighbours. Elder generation family members would not see control and 'occasional hitting' as domestic abuse. Some expressed that they probably understand this to be domestic abuse but do not want to accept it as that would bring shame to the family. Discussions highlighted that women only think of violence against women and girls as physical abuse and do not see financial abuse, emotional abuse and controlling behaviour as violent or abusive.

**Consent and rape within marriage** is a relatively new concept even in the dominant white culture. Among many ethnic minority women sex was something that could be demanded by the husbands once they were married, and this was not perceived as rape. There was a huge gap in understanding the concept of consent in these situations.

**Language** caused additional vulnerabilities where women could not speak or understand English. The abusers may have a better grasp of the English language and therefore they use it to exploit the vulnerability of their partners who may be less articulate.

Abusers, especially if they are white British, will tell victims that no one will believe them because they are 'foreign and do not speak English well'. Women reported that agencies are biased towards those who speak better English.

**Codes of shame and honour** were highlighted as ways of silencing victims. Consistent with available research, focus group discussions reiterated the oppressive use of honour and shame. What constitutes dishonouring differs from one community to another or from one

“

*I thought violence would only be physical. I didn't know it could be going to bed with him even when I didn't want to. I also thought that, because I was married to him, I had to sleep with him, as and when he demanded. I thought this is normal if you are married.*

...

*When you go to the GP, again you get stuck because of the language. You have to depend on another person to make an appointment for you. You also have to take them with you because how would you explain things to the doctor. So going to the GP is a so much of an effort. It is also awkward to ask for help from the same person so many times.*

...

*I tell people that I am widowed instead of divorced to avoid being judged. I think people will respect you more if I say widowed instead of divorced.*

”

---

family to another, but some behaviours that are considered breaking a family's honour code are:

- Divorce,
- Identifying as belonging to a LGBTIQ+ group,
- Wearing makeup,
- Holding hands or kissing someone of the opposite sex in public,
- Having a boyfriend, or
- Saying no to a forced/arranged marriage

These could result in various forms of violence such as forcing the person to be married, isolation, mental and emotional abuse, physical and sexual assault, and as divorce is shameful, it is used as a tool for intimidation. Many women do not want to make disclosures about abuse or violence because they feel the shame of exposing their problem to the rest of the society.

### *External Barriers*

**Insecure immigration status and no recourse to public funds (NRPF)** are prevalent issues amongst ethnically diverse women. A woman with a less secure immigration status, abused by her partner and family is more likely to be isolated than others. Women who fall under this category include:

- Refugees who have been given legal status but do not have the required documents to claim welfare benefits,
- Refused asylum seekers,
- People who entered the UK without permission or were trafficked,
- People who have lost their documentation who can remain on the condition of no recourse to public funds,
- Visitors, students, and spouses who have been granted leave to remain but can no longer do so because of a change in circumstances (requiring legal representation to remain in the UK), and
- Undocumented migrants.

Insecure immigration status is not just an issue among women who have migrated to the UK on a spousal visa, but also among students who find themselves in abusive relationships. When insecure immigration status interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities of women at home, threats of deportation are frequently used by family members. Although many of these threats are not substantiated, this is used as a tool for intimidation and control in many cases.

In some situations, some minimal support may be available for migrants with insecure immigration status while in others the support is simply non-existent. For asylum seekers facing destitution, there is a separate system of asylum support in the form of housing and financial support that the government provides under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Women from the EU do not feel the pressure of immigration laws to the same extent as women from outside the EU because of they have eligibility to receive benefits under certain EU conditions. There is uncertainty regarding how this scenario would change upon the UK's formal exit from the EU.

The process to secure an immigration status which allows access to welfare benefits became more complicated for women on spousal visas when a two-year probation rule was increased to five years for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK. This has adversely affected women who have

“

*I was involved in a very abusive relationship with my boyfriend who continued to beat me up for 2 years. I was unable to receive support as I had no recourse to public funds in the UK because of my immigration status.*

...

*[A participant reported a doctor saying]*

*You Asian women don't take your medication.*

*You fast and ruin your health.*

...

*I tell people that I am widowed instead of divorced to avoid being judged. I think people will respect you more if I say widowed instead of divorced.*

”

already completed their two-year period in the UK who now need to wait three more years to secure this status. Many women fear cancellation of their spousal visas in situations where their own immigration status is tied to their husbands. That gaining indefinite leave to remain is an extremely expensive and lengthy process is a further barrier. This financial burden increases for women who are not economically independent.

There is limited provision across the country for women fleeing domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds. If they are in receipt of the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession fund, they are able to access public funds and have refuge spaces. There is often a delay in this process which on occasion could result in homelessness and impact on mental health which may lead to the women choosing to remain with the abuser.

**Racism and unconscious biases** are embedded in the white dominant culture of the UK. Discourse on racism might seem to obscure the realities of violence against women and girls but it would be myopic not to look at the interaction of the two to see why abuse and violence perpetrated against ethnic minority women is so underreported, and the impact it has on support services.

Many different forms of blatant and structural racism, and unconscious bias in daily lives affect the ways in which services interact with ethnically diverse women, and how these women form their ideas about these services. Discrimination and stereotypes faced by women in other spheres of life, and ideas formed about their religion or outlook prevents a lot of women from approaching services. Even in situations where services have acknowledged the problem, they have faced a backlash for prioritising the needs of ethnic minority women. In February 2019, Wycombe Rape Crisis faced a backlash from racist groups for encouraging ethnically diverse women to approach their services. These kinds of experiences leave many services helpless to offer more relevant and accessible services even in the most well-intentioned situations.

As women in the project asserted that accent is becoming the new race, findings suggest that second generation women who have British accents are more comfortable approaching services than women who have just moved to the UK.

During discussion in a focus group, first generation women expressed being conscious about their accent when considering approaching services, as it was often commented on.

Some also talked about the remarks and words that may not be meant with malice but could be offensive not just to the person experiencing it but to others who hear it as well, preventing them from approaching well intentioned services. Some see it as a form of othering.

**Accessibility to services** takes a physical form and for many women this was a major concern. Travel time is longer for women who do not drive, and in focus group discussions held with women from different African communities, women expressed that getting bus passes would be their main priority to take them to the services. Regional services can be difficult for ethnically diverse women to access if they are not able to drive or do not have the economic means to use public transport, or if their partner will not allow them out unaccompanied.

Another factor that affected accessibility was women's understanding of living in the UK and familiarity with the systems. New migrants were a lot less confident compared to earlier migrants when it came to accessing available support. Second generation migrants have more in common with white British populations, whereas new generation migrants often find themselves uncertain about cultural identity, pulled into two different directions.

Complex referral pathways cause problems even for women from white British backgrounds as well as for ethnically diverse women because of several cross-cutting themes and issues. Some women can go through severe distress and could be re-victimised as they are signposted from one agency to another trying to explain their stories multiple times in a second language. In some cases, women expressed they had found speaking

“

*Hate crimes towards Muslim women in the media affected the desire to disclose for one woman in our discussion. Other women in this discussion agreed and have heard stories of being attacked, hijabs being ripped. Many stated that they fear going out of their home.*

...

*I struggled to find a rented accommodation when my husband and I arrived in the UK. We saw a room advertised but when they met us we were told the place is gone. I don't think it is as blatant these days but there used be advertisements saying, 'No Asians' thirty years ago.*

...

*We experienced racism when we first came here, but just when we thought we have moved on from that, people have started using the word immigrant [pejoratively].*

”

multiple times about their experiences of abuse empowering, in particular if they are believed by each agency. Often, though, women have experienced going from one service to another, repeating their stories in a second language and found themselves entangled within different working models, ethos, and principles of the various organisations. Multi-agency working and reliance on non-statutory services seem unusual to many women from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Additionally, although multi-agency working aspires to a holistic approach to providing services, there are loopholes and pitfalls which need to be tightened to provide better experiences for ethnic minority women.

The pathways ethnic minority women rely on to access services are different than those used by the white British population. For example, many expressed they did/would not use the helpline as their first point of contact with services or health professionals because they are unable to speak confidently in English. Ethnic minority women face additional social hurdles to those faced by women from white British backgrounds to access the same level of support. Referral pathways are already complex and challenging, even for someone who understands the broader systems at play, but for someone who is not able to speak the language, pathways tend to add more complexities and barriers. Some women expressed that they do have some particularly good experiences with services, while for some, any kind of engagement with services has caused more distress to their wellbeing. This usually depends on the professional concerned on a case-by-case basis, and their sensitivity to ethnic and cultural issues.

The diagram below (figure 11), demonstrates how complicated the pathway is for victims and survivors, and with the additional barriers faced by those from minority ethnic communities it becomes even more confusing.

“

*The local mosques are trying to educate people that domestic abuse is not right, and this is helping.*

...

*Some women do not know there are groups that exist and therefore they do not receive any information.*

”

**Lack of information** prevents informed choice, and ethnically diverse women in some focus groups advised that there is lack of information about services in general. They expressed that information on VAWG services was lacking in different languages including in braille and sign languages specifically targeting minority ethnic populations. General awareness raising activities on the available services for women who have been subjected to violence or abuse, and on different strands of violence against women and girls were recognised as a gap. Women who are unable to work or socialise outside of the home will have fewer, if any, opportunities to hear the messages about where they can access support. Women agreed that in some communities, perceptions of services have started to change due to engagement activities carried out by the BAMER Support Workers in this project and by some local mosques. Participants stressed that information passed on through community groups travels quickly and could reach women who do not engage with community groups through word of mouth.

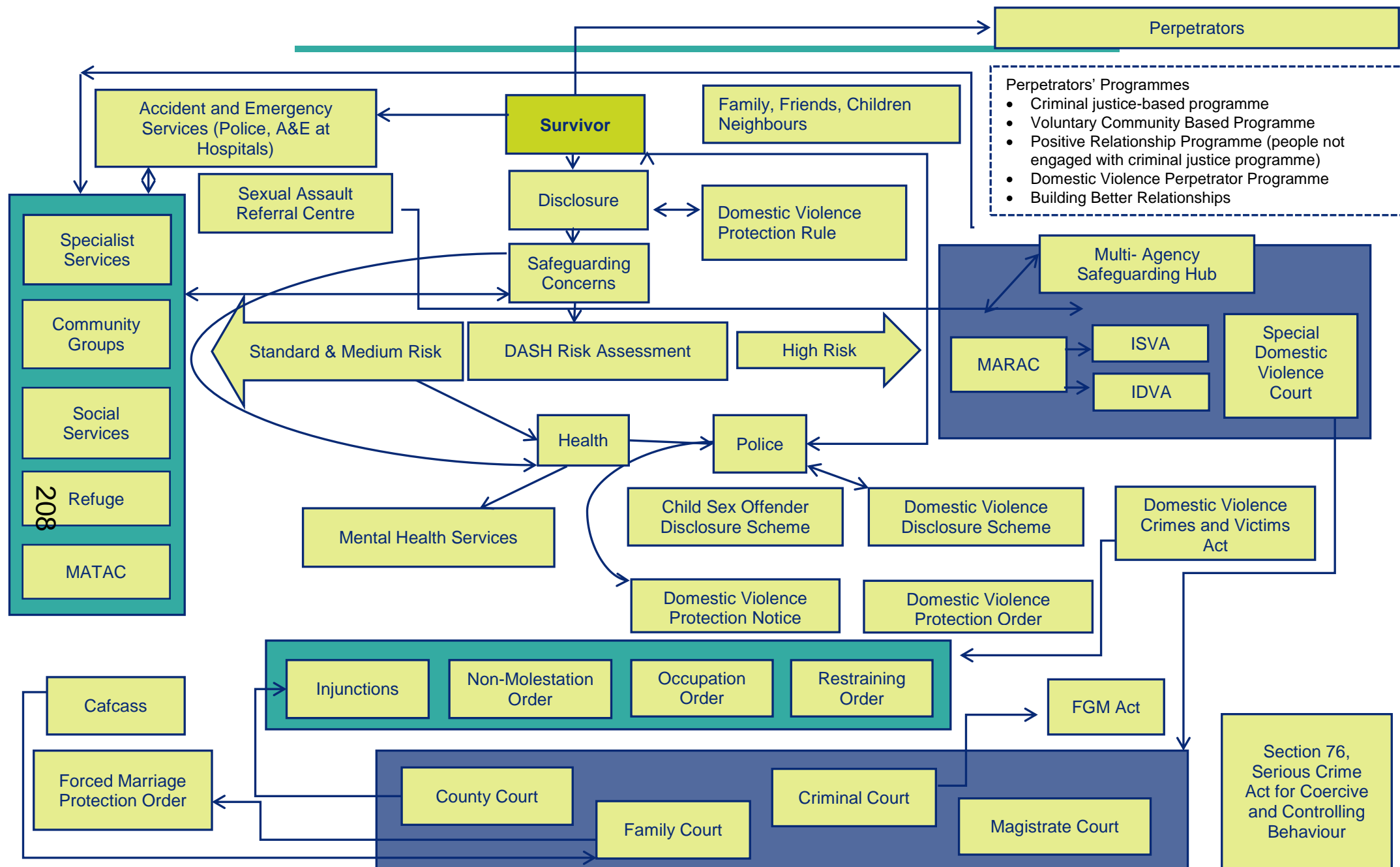


Figure 11 - Domestic Abuse Pathways for Survivors

Information and awareness are also lacking for perpetrators, for men, for wider family and community members (in-laws) and for adolescent school children both in terms of fostering healthy relationships as well as for raising awareness about the issues and services available.

### 3.3.2. Perceptions of services

#### *Community groups*

Engaging with communities on an intimate level has the power to give communities the agency to fight issues of violence against women and girls from within. Externally proposed solutions to violence and abuse against ethnic minority females is a missed opportunity for sustainable and transformative change to put a stop to crimes such as honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage by and for such communities. Community engagement groups play a pivotal role in bringing awareness on issues of violence against women and girls as well as about the services available for ethnic minority women in general, all of which play a crucial role in tackling such abuse and violence holistically.

Women expressed that community engagement groups enable them to integrate into society better, helping to build confidence to seek support, and enabling access to services. For many women, community groups were important for providing emotional support, a reason for women to socialise, and a good break from the usual routines their day-to-day lives require of them. For some it is a good space to learn about what is happening and a safe space to make disclosure. Women from ethnically diverse backgrounds tended to seek help from people from their own communities before contacting statutory or voluntary services because there was less chance of being misunderstood. Although women are happy to join a women's community group, in some instances, spouses or other male family members may prevent them from attending such groups.

“

*At community groups, we get to learn about our rights here, we make friends, and it is talking space for us without judgement.*

...

*We learn many things in the groups such as taking public transport. It allows us to share feelings that cannot be shared in our own families because women in the groups tend to understand you better.*

”

“

*Our bad experiences with police in our home countries make it difficult to engage with services despite their good intentions.*

...

*I feel more comfortable when being examined by someone from my own background. I want to ask you a question, how many BAMER policemen are there actually? We do not feel represented in the police.*

...

*We know police are available to intervene but the community does not want to go to the police because this would result in the situation being out of the families' control and cause an embarrassment to the families. Sometimes you just need someone to talk to*

”

## Police

Police are the first port of call for victims entering into the criminal justice system therefore their experience needs to be positive and empowering to promote confidence amongst others to come forward. Most women felt that the police respond adequately to their needs with the caveat that at times there is a long delay in initial response.

Some for whom English is a second language, however, are not offered interpreters. Even when a person's English appears to be good, reporting sensitive information to the police can be frightening and stressful, which impacts a person's understanding and ability to process information. Women in these circumstances need to feel confident they have a full understanding of what is being asked and the information they are being given, so provision of an interpreter at all times is important. Women also describe a variability in response depending on the police officer that you are talking to and their sensitivity towards cultural differences. An assumption that the police in the UK are like the police in the countries of origin of keeps them intimidated by the police system and prevents reporting. Many women who engaged with this project lacked familiarity with the police systems in the UK and often have impressions of justice systems based on their knowledge and experience elsewhere.

One woman expressed that having a domestic violence police officer has been helpful, although anecdotally there was fear of rejection from the police because of minority ethnic identity. Women reiterated the need to have a diverse police force where their cultural nuances are understood. Caution should be taken as this is not the same for each community.

## Employment

In most cases, women expressed that seeking an immediate solution to the various forms of abuse and violence they face is only part of the problem. Many women who seek protection are unemployed and express that agencies have often found it difficult to deal with other multi-layered structural forms of abuse and violence, hindering their ability to create alternatives for them to end abusive relationships. Ethnically diverse women are burdened by lack of financial resources, child-care responsibilities, and the unemployment and a lack of employment opportunities.

In engaging with Syrian families, it was identified that there is a huge need for employment and job opportunities for women. Even income generation activities at smaller scales have been very well received by the community. At a community group run in East Oxford Community Centre women were engaging in sewing and knitting activities which allowed members to develop small scale income generation. In a Pakistani women's group, members expressed that this kind of activity allows them to earn and handle petty cash to either buy things for themselves or their children instead of depending on their partners for all their financial needs. In some situations, the income could be used by the group to book the venue or to invest other group activities to make the community groups more sustainable.

Amongst those women from diverse ethnicities who were working, many who have skills and qualifications to do skilled jobs were working in unskilled labour. Some women who participated in the focus groups had degrees, for instance in engineering. Many others had experiences, skills and expertise but had not been able to get into employment at all. In almost all the focus group discussions, a recurring theme was a strong desire to find work. Many women who engaged with the Thames Valley BAMER Project also stressed that language is the biggest hurdle for them in terms of getting a job, and some expressed that in their community women taking up certain jobs is considered to be shameful.

## Classes in English as a second language

All focus group discussions talked about the importance of being able to speak English to live in the UK. Language skills have affected almost every aspect of the life of people from different ethnic heritage in the UK. For some this has been a major hurdle in finding a job, while for others accessing health or any other services, has been more difficult because of the language barrier.

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*I could only apply for factory jobs as my English was poor, but they could not allow me to work with a saree on as there were many machines*

*Where I come from women working in a restaurant, bar and pubs is seen as us being unfaithful.*

”

“

*Also asking evidence of the case when you can't produce it is tough. If you don't bring evidence your application can be refused.*

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### *Courts and justice*

Where there is abuse there often follows interaction with the criminal justice system and/or family courts, either through divorce proceedings or social services intervention around child protection. The women who engaged with this project described a number of concerning issues regarding their experiences with courts and justice.

Women reported conflicting decisions made by family courts in relation to the decisions made by criminal courts, especially in terms of child custody. This is a hindrance to many women seeking justice. Many women approaching court services are concerned about the possibility of

Cafcass recommending unsupervised contact between their children and the perpetrator. There is also a pervading concern that social services will simply remove their children from them.

The cost of court services is high and for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds who are dependent on their partners or families for finances, this is prohibitive. The proof of domestic abuse required in court for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession is hard to find for women who do not come forward and disclose, for all the reasons previously explored here.

### *Health professionals*

The responses that women receive from health professionals were crucial in understanding the confidence they had in contacting other services, particularly those related to violence against women and girls. Engagement with ethnically diverse women highlighted the fact that pro-active screening processes in accident and emergency departments are helpful in preventing abuse and violence from getting worse. While it is helpful to have professionals from diverse ethnic backgrounds in services, it must also be recognised that not all patients might want to make disclosures to professionals within the same community for fear that news of their abuse might spread to the wider group, or that perpetrators might be alerted to the disclosures, especially where entire families or communities are involved in the abuse. Some women felt that talking to a white British person made them feel more comfortable than talking with someone from their own background.

Diversity in the healthcare workforce does, however, ensure that there are options for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds who want to engage with ethnically diverse medical professionals. The majority of women in this project said that their experience with GPs would be better if there were no language barriers. Most women understood that it was difficult to include representation of all ethnic groups in all GP practices, but said that having a face from one or more ethnically diverse community in the practice makes them feel there is someone who understands their cultural context better than white British/Western professionals.

Women also talked about how, in addition to cultural nuances, it would be helpful for GPs to take consideration of the experiences that they have had in their home countries. Many expressed that some doctors are really good, but you don't receive immediate services.

Women in the project also spoke about Health Visitors and agreed that one of their functions is to ensure that women are kept safe, which requires building trusting relationships with women.

### *Mental health services*

Mental health issues are taboo in many ethnic minority populations. Inability to identify mental health concerns, and taboos around this were the main issues discussed by the women in terms of not seeking relevant health care. Language, child-care, access to transport and taboos around mental health were all significant barriers to accessing mental health services. Women felt an easier point of contact for emotional support was generally family, friends, religious leaders, or the community groups because of the stigma linked to mental health issues.

Knowledge of mental health support services was typically limited to going to the GP with little knowledge about tertiary care or charity, voluntary and third sector services as alternatives. Where there have been poor experiences with GPs, this will mean women are unlikely to seek support for mental health issues.

Additionally, there was an overall fear amongst participants about being prescribed anti-depressants. Many of them said that doctors do not respect their reluctance to be on medication. Many of them just wanted emotional support from mental health practitioners, family, friends, and community.

Immigration status is a serious concern in relation to mental health issues for recent migrants and women who have faced abuse and are without recourse to public funds due to concerns that this may negatively impact their applications. This interacts with lack of awareness of non-statutory mental health services to increase the impacts of these barriers.

*It doesn't matter whether he is white British or from a migrant background, if he understands what you are trying to explain to him.*

...

*I think this is because of my Hijab but I can't be sure why people are sometimes rude.*

...

*I would like service that intervene before things get bad. For example: When I had a baby I was depressed and oblivious to it. I was new in the country and did not know anyone. My health visitor help me by referring me to groups that were helpful before I get worse.*

...

*I came from war torn country. I still go through a lot of PTSD. I used to hear people and get flashbacks of the incidents that happened to me during the war but didn't find a doctor who would understand that background.*

*Our relatives are not open to it. They are too scared of it, and hesitant to support us openly. They are only supportive from behind the scenes.*

...

*It takes about ten days to see my GP even in an urgent situation but once I arrived five minutes late, and had called them to let them know but my GP just refused to see me. All this TV show about health care do not tell the truth behind GP service experience.*

...

*Case of 'love marriages' a woman may have gone against her family to marry someone of her choice and would not feel able to tell their parents if abuse is happening. She said that the men take advantage of this fact and know that she will not go to her family for help and therefore they think they have license to do what they like forcing them to stay in abusive marriages affecting their mental health*

Women expressed that mental health problems with men were even more hidden than among women and that they are expected to deal with it themselves and be strong. For example, men are expected to take the financial burden of the family so do not express the feelings of stress they experience around this; this then manifests through other behaviours such as alcohol consumption.

Women experiencing mental health issues may be more vulnerable to abuse or at higher risk when abuse is taking place, so reaching women from ethnically diverse communities is vital. Women in this project noted that those in their communities often face disadvantage with reduced opportunities which also makes them susceptible to mental health issues and abuse.

Emotional support networks from family and friends were considered important aspects of dealing with mental health issues; and women were clear that this was not to be replaced by professional services. In many focus groups women said they felt isolated and did not have a circle of family and friends, especially when they were first generation migrants. Second generation migrant women seemed more aware of mental health issues compared to women from the first generation. This is an important aspect to consider when designing programmes around mental health, as more tailored and targeted information may be required to reach first generation migrant women, and they may have different needs.

Individuals perceive symptoms in different ways, which affect how they engage with services. Mental health issues are taboo in some cultures which causes women to delay seeking help and fail to access treatment. Participants understood language as a barrier to communicating their needs, and how not being able to express their symptoms has led to further distress. Culturally sensitive, holistic mental health services are key to improving mental health outcomes for people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and enhancing their experiences and confidence in accessing support.

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Women in one of the focus groups felt that a stress management course they were attending is an invaluable service and is a place they can get all sorts of information and advice. They can discuss problems and know it will be dealt with professionally by the facilitator. They felt more women should attend these groups as they help to educate people, and this is what can empower them in their own personal situations.

### *Domestic abuse refuges*

Effective housing provision should be accessible for all women facing domestic abuse in order to secure their safety; housing is a significant factor in domestic abuse, as a lack of housing options acts to keep women trapped in abusive situations. Focus group discussions highlighted some of the experiences of ethnically diverse women on this issue. Many women also felt that those who have recently migrated may find it acts to keep women trapped in abusive situations. Focus group discussions highlighted some would find it harder to settle in a domestic abuse refuge environment because of their sheltered upbringing and lack of experience of systems in the UK.

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*We were told about the refuges by our social workers but were never clearly explained. My friend thought that she needed to share a room in the refuge.*

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Women were concerned about being placed in a refuge far away from home which is common practice because of the risks posed to survivors from the perpetrator(s) and their associates in the home location. For many not being able to speak in English and not living in close contact with their cultural communities can be very isolating. One participant stated that alienating someone isn't going to help them in the long run; although she understood refuges need to keep women safe from the perpetrator(s), she felt women should be near to their support networks. This issue would put people off approaching refuges.

Participants in one focus group discussion had little idea about how refuges operated or what they were for. Two Indian participants in one group had a negative image of a refuge, which they imagined to be as dorms or like a prison or refugee camp.

On asking if there should be refuges solely for ethnic minority women, participants had a mixed response. Some did not mind because they could learn from other people and other cultures, however some felt it would be better to have a culture-specific service because the people would understand each other's behaviour better.

In most focus group discussions participants identified they would not want to share facilities with other families, especially if they or others had children. They would not want to be sharing with other domestic abuse survivors, as they stated their own issues were quite difficult to deal with. A Chinese British participant knew some Chinese individuals who were living in refuges who

had positive comments about their experiences and are learning new skills and cooking together. Women in the project felt that specific refuges for particular ethnic backgrounds were a good idea, especially for those who have to come to the UK from overseas. Having language and similar lifestyles in common would help them bond and create friendships – people from the same culture can relate to each other and be more sympathetic. Some suggested prayer rooms should be incorporated into refuges. In one focus group discussion, a Chinese participant asserted that being with other Chinese people who can speak the same language would be important.

### *Social services (local authority Children's Services)*

Women in the project spoke considerably about 'social services', the term commonly used when discussing the local authority Children's Services which fall within the Social and Healthcare teams. Focus group participants highlighted that there were multiple problems in accessing and engaging with Children's Services. Fear of social services taking away the children was a major concern for women which was often used by abusers as a tool for manipulation. They identified a need to bring an awareness raising programme. Some women noted that they see other families with child protection issues but no social services involvement, but once social services become involved their case seems to become more and more complicated.

Having a specialist BAMER Support Worker was regarded as one of the most important aspects of receiving a fully helpful and supported experience for many women.

Participants seem to have the understanding that social services were more likely to support women who had children. This is because under section 20 of the Children's Act, women are eligible to receive certain benefits if they have children depending on them, and so in their experiences this is often a

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*We want social workers and services who listens to us and investigates appropriately and sign posts to appropriate services.*

...

*I was too overwhelmed and lacking in confidence to do what the social worker was asking me to do.*

...

*My husband had a support [social] worker and [who] felt that whatever he says and does is right. I was scared of him. It was actually my son from my previous marriage who spoke up and told the hospital staff about the situation at home. He told the staff that my husband was beating him. This is the first time we felt supported.*

”

*A woman said that they would go to their local temple (gurdwara) noticeboard to look for information on domestic abuse and violence.*

...

*In my religion if someone is behaving badly towards you, you should ignore it and eventually the instigators should realise themselves that you are not retaliating and should back off.*

*However, when you take this approach for 11 years and it doesn't work, it is hard to go back to the parents or stay with the in laws.*

reason for involvement. Women also felt that social services tended to prioritise their children's needs before their own, meaning that their needs were not seen as a matter of importance.

One woman stated that social workers are replaced frequently, and this is a problem as no one ever knows her case properly because it keeps getting passed onto new workers. She felt they make mistakes because of this, yet it is the mothers who suffer the stress and have sleepless nights.

On the other hand, one participant explained how her social worker was helpful in the case where her daughter was complaining about her; the social worker helped to explain to the daughter how the mother does care for her. Another woman also stated that social workers were helpful and offered support when she gave birth by caesarean-section and had four other children to care for.

Children's Services do not get involved in cases unless there are safeguarding concerns. In some focus groups there were discussions about unannounced home visits by police and CSC and women asserted that proportionate and sensitive management was important.

#### *Local authorities and housing departments*

A Pakistani women's group asserted that the local authority – usually referred to as the Council – need to support funding for their group. Women on spousal visas and without recourse to public funds reported finding it difficult to receive support from the local authority and having no option but to return to the abusive relationship. Others expressed that that they find it difficult to produce evidence of abuse when it is

not physical which makes it difficult for Local Authorities to understand what was actually happening and respond appropriately.

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### *Religious institutions*

Women mentioned how religious institutions can provide solace to victims of domestic abuse just as they do to those otherwise oppressed and broken. There was a common understanding among women that no religion sanctions abuse in any circumstances, and one participant stated that religion does not promote staying quiet and taking abuse. However, some women also talked about non-interventionist approaches, and the mediation and reconciliation roles that religious authorities sometimes played without understanding what victims go through. Quite a few women were also found to be self-policing themselves for fear of reprisals. Churches, mosques, and temples have been places where women tend to go to seek guidance, support, and mental peace. It was noted, however, that only men are the leaders of temples and mosques so the women were not confident in the extent to which they would understand problems from their perspective.

*Any ban on Sharia council must provide an alternative solution for people who have had religious marriage but no civil registrations.*

Many women who followed Islam preferred to seek help from a learned Muslim who would follow the guidance of the Quran in giving advice on abuse and violence against women and girls, and felt that they would not advise her to take actions against her faith and belief. Some women expressed that they would seek solutions within their religion but would be equally open to receiving support from secular VAWG services (Berkshire Women's Aid in their cases).

### *Sharia Law and its legality in the UK*

For many Muslim women marriages are only conducted within the religious framework of a Sharia council and not the civil, legal framework within the UK. Hence, if there has only been a religious marriage under Sharia law, seeking recourse through civil law is not always possible, and marriages cannot be considered terminated without a religious divorce. There has at times been talk nationally about a ban of Sharia councils, but they can play a significant role in assisting women trapped in abusive marriages.

### *Counselling*

Women in one focus group said that they did not receive adequate help to leave their marriage and many of them had to suffer in silence. Many women refused to go to the police for not wanting to escalate the problem and would rather start off with emotional support.

Relationship problems in many households within ethnic minority communities are suppressed at initial stages, escalating to a further level, and leading to violence. Furthermore, many ethnic minority women who have recently migrated on spousal visas do not have networks to talk about these issues confidentially. They also noted that people are reluctant to help women in these situations because of the backlash from the community. They would not want to be blamed for breaking up marriages and families particularly as they are not confident in their own advice. One participant said that she did help a woman whose mother-in-law would beat her, however, they eventually 'reconciled' and both blamed the participant for interfering and

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*I did the Freedom Programme and that help me recognise all that was going wrong in my relationship. Then had courage to speak to Mum and big sister about what was happening. Would be better if BAMER needs were included in it.*

...

*We tend not to speak to families back home about our issues because they have their own issues and there is nothing they can do to help you. We feel that we will be just worrying them. [Those] back home think that when you are in the UK you have everything. Because we come from war torn countries, sometime families rely on you for financial support.*

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therefore she would be hesitant to help again. Most of the women said that they offered support to others by talking to them and allowing them to talk about their issues; they felt talking helps their mental health, at least.

### *The Freedom Programme*

Although the impact assessment<sup>15</sup> of the Freedom Programme on ethnically diverse women needs further attention and analysis, communities have received the programme well across the region, with requests to tailor it to the needs of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Within this project one of the agencies developed a group work programme specifically for ethnic minority women, based on the Freedom Programme, to empower them to identify abusive behaviours. Named Ilam-El-Hifzat, anecdotal reports from the facilitators indicate this program was well received by the beneficiaries who were supported on it. Another area in the Thames Valley ran the Freedom Programme specifically for Punjabi and Urdu speakers.

### **3.3.3. Other findings**

#### *Newly recognised forms of abuse*

Focus group discussions revealed forms of abuse and violence against women and girls which are only newly recognised within white Western societies. Such issues discussed in these sessions included as transboundary abandonment, breast ironing, and black magic. In one of the focus groups, women said that some girls are married in India and are then left there with their in-laws

and are not given a chance to come to the UK. In the same focus group, participants also talked about patterns within their community where men dupe girls in India into getting married to someone with an alcohol dependency, or somebody who is already in a relationship with

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.thegriffinssociety.org/system/files/papers/fullreport/research\\_paper\\_2009\\_01\\_watkins.pdf](https://www.thegriffinssociety.org/system/files/papers/fullreport/research_paper_2009_01_watkins.pdf)

someone in the UK. Women also talked of issues of polygamy where only one of the marriages were registered in the UK and unregistered marriages took place and their wives are made to work for their in-laws. In many cases this would amount to modern slavery, and potentially also trafficking in the UK.

### *Social support networks*

When talking about social support networks, it is important to note the transnational nature of migration. Many communities' lives are not just impacted by their own or by their close family members but by their social circles, relatives, friends, and extended families who do not live in the same continent. Gender roles are affected by social structures and cultures in many contexts.

Lack of established social support networks in the UK was a key reason given for why ethnic minority women did not have the courage to leave an abusive relationship. Many women said they cannot return to their parents as it is common to be asked to reconcile with the perpetrator because divorce brings shame. In one focus group women discussed how in some arranged marriages, couples marry without knowing each other properly and the woman can find herself trapped in the UK in an unhappy or abusive marriage, unable to return home. Additionally, many women said that they would refrain from asking for help from the community for fear of being talked about and feelings of embarrassment.

Some women stated that although they might receive support from their marital families, they would still be unwilling to disclose their abusive relationship because this results in the families having negative attitudes towards the husband in the event of any reconciliation. For

*We tend not to speak to families back home about our issues because they have their own issues and there is nothing they can do to help you. We feel that we will be just worrying them. [Those] back home think that when you are in the UK you have everything. Because we come from war torn countries, sometime families rely on you for financial support.*

...

*I will live with the abuse rather than get divorced. Divorce in my culture means my life is over.*

...

*I had never thought I would marry someone in the UK, and had no idea of available support. My husband was abusive and I wanted to separate but when I approached the council to understand support available to me, I did not receive any help. I was told I would not get help with housing benefit, and I could not financially support my two children. I felt as though I had no choice but to return to my husband and later had two more children with him.*

“

*My sister in law is in physically and mentally abusive marriage for 30 years. If there were any problems the couple would go to elder family members to resolve issues. The family would encourage her to make the relationship work. They would help resolve the issues, but it remained within the family. She couldn't think of receiving any other forms of support.*

...

*Even here I am expected to live with my parents-in-law and this is accepted as normal. I lived with them for 6 years before finally moving out.*

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other women separation may lead to being stigmatised within their community. Marriage gives many women status which some have said is more important to them than the abuse they receive from their husbands.

### *Confusion around cultural expectations and identity*

The BAMER Support Workers noted a range of experiences amongst different generations. For example, speaking and understanding English language was not a problem for second generation ethnically diverse women. Some participants felt that they were stuck between two generations and cultures. Some of the second-generation children felt that the push for them to hold onto some aspects of their culture, language and family relations were stronger in their families when compared to families in the country of origin.

### *Patriarchy, family, and child-rearing*

Some ethnic minority women expressed that toxic masculinity and patriarchal structures are reinforcing traditional gender norms which keeps women at a disadvantage. Some said that excessive pampering of male children makes them dependent on their wives later in life and also makes them feel entitled.

For some, children were used as tools of manipulation to keep them in abusive relationships, which not only put them at risk, but also impacted their children emotionally. One woman stated that there are safe houses for women that want to leave abusive situations, but you can only go there if you are willing to cut ties with all your family and community. She felt that compared to her generation who 'suffered in silence' many younger girls will not 'take it' and they would leave abusive relationships as they are more empowered.

One participant said that while growing up her mother made her, and her sisters do the housework while her brothers were not asked to. She was taught that girls should be subservient to males; the boys also learnt this message. Others agreed that this was normal practice and women noted that males are socialised in such a way that they cannot communicate and express their emotions or trauma openly. This can result in any emotional issues impacting their behaviour towards their partners.

The group also talked about how parents-in-law could be abusive towards their daughters-in-law. One participant acknowledged that sons nowadays would not even listen to parent's opinions and can also be rude and aggressive towards parents.

The family dynamic is significant, and one participant felt that there is less domestic abuse happening within the younger generation, and that families are less involved in resolving marital issues strictly within the family context. The group acknowledged, however, that family support is crucial to give victims the emotional and physical support required for their wellbeing.

The group believed the parents are in a difficult situation, because it is seen as their duty to look after their children and they do not want people to gossip. While most women felt controlled by their mothers-in-law, in some situations mothers-in-law felt that there is a degree of role-reversal happening currently, with harassment taking place the other way around. It is worth considering whether this is the reaction of women who are not used to females asserting themselves or being independent and non-subservient, and therefore are interpreting their behaviour as disrespectful.

Some communities have cross-cousin marriages which brings not just two people, but previously connected families together, which makes it complicated for women to disclose about abuse in a relationship. This would also bring further shame to the family and breakdown in numerous relationships within the wider family.

Victim blaming was one of the main issues when participants talked about family dynamics and can be seen in many of the discussions and testimonies in this section. Feeling indebted to the abuser was also common, with many women on spousal visas feel beholden to the abusers for bringing them to the UK, whilst others were just sad to be leaving their home countries.

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*My relative's son's marriage broke down because of his temper and he moved back in with his parents but now he makes life hard for them; he controls his parents and doesn't let them do what they want and [they] are helpless because they are worried that he might take his own life if they do not allow him to do what he likes to do.*

...

*My husband used to tell my son that he was the 'Boss' as he is a male.*

...

*Women will always be blamed and asked 'why do you wind him up?' 'That is just how men are. Their family will also hold similar views and ask them to put up with the situation.*

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*He used children to manipulate me and this had an impact on the children. My eldest son was prevented from travelling abroad with me and this way he controlled my movement as well because I wouldn't go anywhere without my child. Although I opened about it to my relatives, they were too scared and hesitant to support me openly. They only seem to empathise behind the scenes.*

...

*My in-laws did not support me and called me stupid and therefore, put the blame on me. It is difficult when the mind-set that women should carry on regardless persists. If my son does something like this and I know of it, it is my duty to tell him that he is wrong.*

...

*Now children will not talk to extended family and decide for themselves on how to go ahead with their lives.*

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## 4. Outcomes

### 4.1. Community mapping

#### 4.1.1. Approach

Community mapping was achieved mainly through the word of mouth and rigorous online research on what services and agencies are available. The exercise aimed to identify existing ‘BAMER’ and non-‘BAMER’ services in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire and to look at community groups. The exercise provided an understanding of:

- The prevalence of existing community groups and their ethnic representation,
- The location and spread of ‘BAMER’ and non-‘BAMER’ services, and
- Community priorities and the gaps.

Self-help and support groups, forums, and organisations for groups from ethnically diverse backgrounds were available across the Thames Valley region. This project collected details of some of the agencies and organisations working on violence against women and girls, and although significant efforts were, the list is not exhaustive.

It is difficult to ascertain total number of community groups that are actually providing support around abuse and violence against women and girls within ethnically diverse communities because it is hard to identify groups operating in an informal setting. Most ethnic minority communities in the region with a larger population have their own community groups that meet occasionally. Currently 99 community groups were identified in Thames Valley, but the number could be higher given the large area and the diverse population make-up of the region.

#### 4.1.2. Outcomes

The number of diverse ethnic specialist groups focusing on issues relating to refugees and asylum, and English language support are on the rise, however there are gaps in the number of organisations focusing on forced marriage, honour-based abuse, and female genital mutilation. Although this kind of support is being provided at the national level through organisations like Karma Nirvana, the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation, Latin American Women Rights Service and Southall Black Sisters, at the local level very few diverse ethnic specialist services exist. The Rose Clinics in Reading and Oxford, and Oxford Against Cutting are operate around female genital mutilation, but there are no diverse ethnic specialist support services at a local addressing honour-based abuse or forced marriage.

Many services focusing on south Asian women were identified in Slough and Milton Keynes. More services for African women were recognised in Oxford. Translation services for East Timorese population and other smaller groups of population could not be identified. Most

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diverse ethnic services relating to violence against women and girls were identified at a national and regional level and to a lesser extent in some local areas in Thames Valley. Of the services identified at local level, most were located in those areas with higher concentrations of ethnic minority populations in: Slough, Reading, Oxford and Milton Keynes. Although Slough has some Polish community groups, there are very few within Thames Valley despite their population being quite high.

## 4.2. Community Engagement Activities

### 4.2.1. Approach and process

The community engagement activity of the Thames Valley BAMER Project took place over two years in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Berkshire. It provided learning about different needs and aspirations of communities regarding existing statutory and voluntary services in Thames Valley, and assisted in developing responses to these. An important factor considered for engagement was building meaningful relationships with ethnically diverse and underrepresented communities from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Within a twelve-month period of the project 33 community groups were engaged with. The purpose of community engagement activities was to explore avenues to inform community groups of existing VAWG services, raise awareness about violence against women and girls, and gain an understanding of women's experiences in accessing services through focus group discussions. The project engaged with women by through on-to-one sessions involving them in activities at group sessions. This involved collaborating with communities to find joint responses to issues of abuse and violence that arise within different communities by considering alternative methods and approaches to enable women to approach and access services.

The BAMER Support Workers recognised at the outset that meaningful community engagement requires connections with the communities that would require significant time and investment. One of the key strategies of community engagement activities was to make it easier and more convenient for more people to participate. Therefore, engagement efforts were focused on exploring relationships with existing community groups instead of forming new ones. BAMER Support Workers collaborated with community groups and participated at community events to build trust and offer opportunities to exchange experiences and ideas to create accessible and approachable VAWG services for different ethnic communities. This made it easier for women to engage without having to attend a separate meeting.

Focus was centred on an intersectional approach, accounting for multiple, layered inequalities within ethnic minority populations. Consideration was given to disabilities, gender, and class/caste differences within the groups. These efforts focused on reaching as many different women from ethnic backgrounds as possible to offer information about violence against women and girls in a targeted manner.

Region	Stated Group Identity	Berks	Bucks	Oxon	Totals
African and Caribbean	African and Caribbean			①	1
	African Women			①	1
	Caribbean		①		1
	Kenyan, Somali, Ethiopian groups		①		1
	Mixed ethnicities from Africa			①	1
	Somali, Eritrean and other East African group	①			1
	Sudanese	①			1
	Swahili	②			2
	Tanzanian	①			1
Asian	Indian	②			2
	Indian and Pakistani	②		①	3
	Indian, Pakistani, South Asian heritage		①		1
	Filipino	①			1
	Nepali	①			1
	Pakistani	①		①	2
	Punjabi	①			1
	Indian and Pakistani heritage Urdu speakers	①			1
European Middle Eastern	Polish			①	1
	Kurdish Women			①	1
	Syrian		②	②	4
Roma, Traveller and Gypsy	Irish Traveller	①			1
	Roma	①			1
	Traveller community			①	1
Mixed	Arabic	①			1
	Jewish women of mixed ethnicities		①		1
	Kurdish, Pakistani women	①			1
	Learning disabilities (ethnicity not defined)	①			1
	LGBT community (ethnicity not defined)			①	1
	Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Sudan, Uganda	①			1
	Mixed ethnicities	①⑦	⑨	②	28
	Mixed ethnicities - asylum seekers			①	1
	Mixed ethnicities - children			①	1
	Mixed faith		①		1
	Muslim	①			1
	Muslim - children	①			1
	Muslim - LGBT			①	1
	Refugees from different regions			①	1
	Sexual health support young adults	①			1
	Women from FGM practising communities	①			1
Not defined	Not defined	②		⑤	7
<b>Totals</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>81</b>

Table 3 - Community Groups Engaged with by the Thames Valley BAMER Project

Community engagement efforts included the following activities:

- Individual engagement
- Group engagement
- Art and craft workshops
- One-to-one support
- Training and presentations provided to community groups
- Organisation of seaside day trips
- Cooking sessions
- Eid celebrations
- Honour Killings Memorial Day
- Christmas meals
- Walking activities
- Ethnic diversity empowerment event through speakers
- Trip to the House of Commons (Freedom Programme for Urdu and Panjabi speakers in Hestia)

Community engagement activities took place in different stages:

Level 1	Identification of community groups
Level 2	Approaching the community groups by phone and email
Level 3	Meeting the organisers or leaders of the groups
Level 4	Meeting the group members, attending the group meetings
Level 5	Training, joint working, and organising community events
Level 6	Drop-in sessions, one-to-one support, focus group discussions
Level 7	Putting referral pathways in place

One of the most significant outcomes of the community engagement activities was the emotional and wellbeing support it provided to the women who attend these groups. On average 10-12 women attended the community groups every week. Although the primary purpose of such groups was not defined in terms of providing emotional support, many women identified this as a benefit of attending. Women described receiving emotional support in a culturally appropriate manner as one of the driving factors for them attending the informal self-help community groups. Other outcomes are outlined as below.

## 4.2.2. Outcomes

### *Awareness raising*

The community engagement activities have helped bridge the gap between the service providers and service users, increasing the capacity for women and girls among different ethnic groups to identify signs and symptoms of violence against women and girls. Most women engaging with the community groups had little prior knowledge of domestic abuse with only a few recognising non-physical acts as abuse. Coercive control, among other strands of violence against women and girls, were less talked about and training on these issues by BAMER Support Workers proved

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effective in terms of raising awareness. Many women did not know how to respond when someone in the community made disclosures. The community engagement activities trained women in how to respond and access support, offering signposting and links to support and relevant helpline numbers.

One of the main advantages of working with community groups is being able to spread the message of different forms of violence against women and girls and available support through word of mouth, overcoming any language barriers.

### *Improved service delivery*

Improving the quality of VAWG services and being responsive to the needs of ethnically diverse women cannot be done without their participation in the process and in services. As a result of community engagement activities, BAMER Support Workers anecdotally identified a rise in the number of ethnically diverse clients accessing domestic abuse services. This was also supported by anecdotal reports from community group facilitators who expressed appreciation for the support provided to group members by the BAMER Support Workers.

Although the project was meant for women, it identified that male victims of domestic abuse in minority ethnic populations often chose not to disclose for reasons of shame and honour. Community engagement activities played a crucial role in informing the communities that the VAWG services in Thames Valley served both male and female clients. This was evident in the anecdotally reported increase in the number of male clients in two of the BAMER Project provider services.

### *Increased participation*

Communities have come to know about Thames Valley BAMER Project and have seen increased participation with BAMER Support Workers. The positive effect of the engagement is underscored by the fact that communities do not want the BAMER Support Workers roles to end.

The project engaged with groups that already existed, but one provider also developed some community groups themselves to engage with women. The groups provided cooking sessions as a backdrop from which to offer emotional support to women with a range of issues. For many women this allowed them to come out of their homes to fight isolation without sessions being explicitly being about their experiences of violence or abuse.

Continuous engagement with community groups helped develop trust between clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds and services. Groups expressed a desire for ongoing engagement because of the benefits they have gained so far. The project was able to touch base with communities that were overlooked by services.

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### *Other issues in communities*

There is a complex relationship between abuse and violence against women and girls, and other issues experienced within communities. Exploration of this is beyond the scope of this project, but important observations were made in relation to some of these wider issues.

Suicide rates are three times higher in ethnic minority populations compared to the white British population. It was noted that there is poor awareness around suicide and mental health issues amongst some groups. Issues of stigma around abortion were also talked about in the community engagement activities as were issues around consent and the concept of rape within marriage, both of which require more awareness and understanding.

## **4.3. Client Casework through Outreach**

### **4.3.1. Approach**

Specialist ethnically and culturally sensitive one-to-one outreach support was developed in various forms in response to the community engagement work but was also provided for ethnically diverse clients approaching the domestic abuse services through previously established routes, such as helplines. Some of the providers recognised the need to develop personalised, individual support and safety planning in response to the interest and engagement brought forward through work with community groups. As a result, specialist ethnically sensitive outreach services were offered by five of the six BAMER Support Workers, across Berkshire East, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. Those supported in this way included women who had been subjected to all or any of the forms of violence against women and girls, often those who had previously been unable to identify or describe abuse being perpetrated against them, and those with insecure immigration status and/or without recourse to public funds. Frequently, women accessing the outreach support were experiencing multiple, intersectional, and complex issues.

### *Intensive and holistic support*

The support differed from the outreach support otherwise provided by the domestic abuse services by offering direct and responsive access to a support worker who was specifically focused on their intersectional experiences within the context of violence against women and girls, with specialist knowledge of the issues faced by ethnic minority women to support this approach. It was often more frequent and intensive than other outreach support, incorporating contact several times a week to assist clients with understanding correspondence, attending appointments, signposting to services, and advocating with agencies such as local authority Children's Services (social services), housing departments, solicitors and legal services, police, courts and so on. In this sense the specialist ethnically sensitive outreach service was able to offer holistic support incorporating intensive emotional and psychosocial support alongside practical advocacy.

Provider:		Berks East (Hestia)	Berks West (BWA)	Bucks/Milton Keynes (MK-ACT)	Oxon (ODAS by A2Dominion)
Number of Clients Supported by Outreach:		N/A	14	27	27
Ethnicities represented		Berks East	Berks West	Bucks & MK	Oxon
Africa	African (non-specific)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	British African	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
	Egyptian	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Eritrean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Moroccan	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nigerian	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Sierra Leone	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Somali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Sudanese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tanzanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Zimbabwean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Mixed African	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	White African	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
Asia	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bengali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Iranian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nepali	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Palestinian	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓
	Sri Lankan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Syrian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Thai	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Turkish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
	Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Europe	Estonian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Hungarian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lithuanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Polish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Portuguese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Romanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Latin America	Brazilian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
	Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
Mixed	Arab	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓
	Kurdish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
Strands of VAWG Supported		Berks East	Berks West	Bucks & MK	Oxon
Domestic Abuse			✓	✓	✓
Honour-Based Abuse			✓	✓	✓
Forced Marriage			✓	✓	✓
Stalking		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	✓

Table 4 - Clients Supported Through One-to-one Work (Outreach/Casework) through the Thames Valley BAMER Project

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These outreach programmes did not operate a waiting list, and in some areas they were designed so that women were able to access them directly, without having to go through the helpline which is usually the single point of access for domestic abuse services. Within the BAMER Project, the overall approach to client casework through outreach was:

- Reaching women who needed support through continuous engagement with community groups,
- Aiming to intervene at an earlier stage when the risk from abuse or violence was assessed as 'standard' or 'medium', to prevent escalation and crisis,
- Working sensitively to gain further information, often identifying higher or more nuanced risk factors than those perceived by other agencies, enabling more appropriate responses and interventions, and
- Offering counselling sessions via trained professionals to ensure that clients had access to emotional support where there were intense and complex issues present.

This work was primarily undertaken through the following activities, which were put into practice in specific ways by each provider:

- Group work – two of the BAMER Project providers offered group work programmes.
- Ongoing scheduled one-to-one support – all three providers offering outreach across Berkshire East, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire provided a traditional form of outreach but tailored for the client group as previously described.
- Drop-in surgeries – one of the providers developed this form of support, offering three surgeries per week; on average two-three women attended each surgery.
- Peer support sessions – one of the providers facilitated a group where roughly eight women met for 1.5 hours per week. Additionally, an established peer support group in the same area saw an increase in membership of women from ethnically diverse communities following the launch of the BAMER Project.

### 4.3.2. Outcomes

#### *Empowerment*

**Information and rights** – The specialist outreach work supported ethnically diverse women to feel empowered by providing information and enabling them to understand and access their rights, and their entitlement to welfare benefits. In particular, clients were supported to:

- Review their eligibility to access public funds,
- Access to immigration solicitors,
- Apply for immigration status in the UK,
- Resolve immigration issues and gain secure status,
- Apply for the destitution domestic violence concession, and

“

***BAMER Support Workers***

*We get better response from authorities when we accompany our clients to the services. We are better able to explain their situations and stories without them having to repeat their stories to multiple services.*

...

*One BAMER client who I went to for child protection meetings did not know what to say and had no understanding of what the meeting was for, how it impacted her and her children and what to say. Accompanying women like her has a big effect on what the outcome of the meeting will be.*

”

- Work in partnership with social services, Local Authorities, the criminal justice system, and police to keep themselves and their children safe.

**Language and connection** – The outreach service supported women who speak different languages either through direct interpretation or through the Language Line telephone interpretation service. The outreach work could provide one-to-one support through transition from community groups to outreach support services and, in reverse, was able to connect women to existing community groups. When the outreach activity started, numbers were low, but the community groups began making referrals and those accessing outreach support increased. Outreach sessions have empowered women to overcome internal barriers which prevented them from approaching services and making disclosures of abuse.

**Awareness of abuse** – Women victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities are more aware of the layers of abuse and ongoing issues beyond the one incident which brought them to services. Through such discussions, BAMER Support Workers have also identified honour-based abuse cases and how this can manifest in different ethnicities and cultures.

**Disclosures** – Many women involved with the project did not previously know where or how to report abuse. Any kind of engagement with women from ethnic minority communities requires building trust, and the BAMER Support Workers have built strong relationships in this regard. They have enabled women to gain the confidence to discuss their experiences of abuse with other agencies, and at times to report their issues to the authorities. Women involved with this project who were initially unwilling to disclose have subsequently felt able to discuss their abusive experiences during their involvement with the project.

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### *Advocacy – improved experiences for women*

One of the greatest strengths of the BAMER Project's outreach support was to improve women's experiences with the other services and agencies they interact with. BAMER Support Workers achieved this by assisting women to considerably reduce the amount of times they are expected to retell their stories to multiple agencies and by accompanying them to appointments with different services and advocating for them. When clients attended with the BAMER Support Workers, they reported that services were more responsive, and actions were completed more quickly.

**Bridging gaps** – BAMER Support Workers have also bridged the gaps between services and women from ethnically diverse backgrounds through such advocacy, which they have appreciated. Many clients are not able to write statements when required, or do not understand what they are expected to write. Many cannot explain what is happening due to their lack of English, and others are in too much distress to explain themselves effectively. Women from ethnic minority communities are mostly distrustful of engaging with Children's Services for fear that their children will be removed but were more receptive after receiving further information about the Social Worker's remit. Clients feel more confident in approaching services with the support of BAMER Support Workers. The project was also able to connect women from minority ethnic communities with English language classes to help reduce the barriers and isolation they were experiencing. The BAMER Project focused on intersections within the client populations, carefully considering and supporting male clients, LGBTIQ+ clients and clients with disabilities, all of whom tend to experience greater barriers in accessing services.

**Navigating pathways** – BAMER Support Workers have helped women to navigate pathways in and around services relating to violence against women and girls. One of the most beneficial services the Thames Valley BAMER Project provided was accompanying women and advocating for them at local authority, police, and court appointments. Navigating pathways and interactions with agencies becomes especially challenging when the client is not able to speak English.

### *Safeguarding women without recourse to public funds – safe and secure accommodation*

Outreach support also provided a crucial safety net, safeguarding women from ethnic minority communities and ensuring they were not left destitute by supporting them to access safe accommodation.

The BAMER Support Workers empowered women to understand their eligibility for public funds and their rights and responsibilities in the UK. They helped clients to find urgent temporary accommodation as well as finding more permanent solutions to support women who do not have any recourse to public funds. In doing this the Thames Valley BAMER Project has formed new partnerships with agencies who are working with women who have insecure immigration status.

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One of the BAMER Support Workers supported a Syrian woman on a spousal visa who had fled abuse from the north of the country. She was helped by a friend within Thames Valley initially, but once the friend was no longer able to host her, she had nowhere to go. She slept on the streets of a large town in Thame Valley for one night, but on accessing the BAMER Project a Support Worker found her a safe space through the Sanctuary Hosting scheme. Meanwhile, the BAMER Support Worker pursued a destitution domestic violence concession application, and as a result was able to secure funding and find a space for her in a domestic abuse refuge in the longer term.

All BAMER Support Workers were trained by Project 17 in how to support women without recourse to public funds to enable them to better support women who are ethnically minoritised around these issues.<sup>16</sup>

### *Reunions with children*

Work undertaken by one of the provider services in the BAMER Project has reunited mothers with their children in three separate cases. This was achieved in close partnership with Reunite International who work on reuniting families with children abroad. In one case the BAMER Support Worker advocated for and supported the work of Reunite International to bring a child from a Senegalese background back to the UK who had been taken abroad. The child was being forced to go through female genital mutilation but was safely reunited with her mother because of the work undertaken.

### *Safeguarding ethnic minority women*

BAMER Support Workers have prioritised the safeguarding of women from ethnically diverse backgrounds and providing emotional and psychosocial support has enabled women to gain confidence to leave abusive relationships to protect themselves and their children.

Many women without recourse to public funds have underlying mental health issues because of experiences relating to this. Compounded by abuse these experiences could lead to severe distress and potentially to self-harm or suicidal behaviour. A Syrian woman who had no recourse to public funds had been referred to a community mental health service based at a specialist hospital in the Thames Valley. She tried to commit suicide whilst at the hospital but was helped by the nurses who then referred her to the local domestic abuse service. She engaged with the BAMER Support Worker in the service, who then worked together with the mental health services to understand and reduce her distress and to find safe accommodation for her.

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<sup>16</sup> Project 17 is an organisation working to end destitution among migrant children. It works with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support.

### ***BAMER Support Workers***

*One client's passport was under the control of the perpetrator. Clients who are on spousal visas find it difficult to flee because of their insecure immigration status.*

...

*Providing immigration support is very time consuming and could be very limiting if we only stick with one client. With BAMER work, we have been able to get other members in the team to work on immigration issues in order to enable support for more clients.*

...

*Home Office takes six months to respond. Everyone says that she is an over stayer because it has been three months she made an application since the expiry of her leave to remain. If we weren't providing any support she would have been without any money. It really doesn't help that the Home Office doesn't provide any documentation to show that her application is being processed.*

### ***Immigration support***

BAMER Support Workers have worked with clients where their insecure immigration status has been used as manipulation as part of the abuse, and to keep them trapped in the relationship. They have helped women to obtain immigration solicitors and legal aid, which is difficult to access due to complexities in the system and stringent limitations on funding for legal support.

Immigration support provided by BAMER Support Workers has mainly been in terms of supporting them to apply for the destitution domestic violence concessions by connecting to professionals trained and licensed in providing immigration advice, however this is not always without challenges.

### ***Supporting clients with newly recognised forms of abuse***

The Thames Valley BAMER Project has worked with clients on various other forms of abuse which are more recently recognised within Western societies, such as:

- Transboundary abandonment
- Breast ironing, and
- Issues of black magic

Among forms of abuse that are more recently coming to the attention of Western professionals, one of the services worked with a client where her husband had switched off his phone and failed to collect her from the airport when she came to join him to live in the UK. When the police subsequently approached him about this, he said he did not want anything to do with her. It transpired that she had previously managed to flee to the UK when she was being forced to have female genital mutilation performed against her in her home country, and he did not want to be with her because the procedure had not been

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completed. Similarly, BAMER Support Workers mentioned that there are cases where wives are left abandoned with in-laws in South Asia after marriage.

### *Supporting male clients*

Agencies have anecdotally reported an increase in male clients from ethnic minority communities, although these remain low overall. During the project, four male clients were supported by BAMER Support Workers in two of the services. One of those agencies has also strengthened their relationship with a male refuge in Birmingham to support male clients better in future. Of services who were not involved in delivering the BAMER Project, Oxfordshire Sexual Assault and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC) offer advocacy to male university students in Oxford who have been subjected to sexual violence. Other (national) resources to support male clients include, the Men's Advice Line (run by Respect), the ManKind Initiative, and Survivors UK.

## **4.4. Partnership working**

### **4.4.1. Approach**

Violence against women and girls in ethnic minority populations is a problem with multiple complexities. It requires both intensive and holistic support from different agencies working in different sectors to bring together resource, expertise, and ideas. Therefore, there is a need to unify efforts from all agencies to provide a better service whilst gaining clarity about different pathways.

Through the BAMER Project, multiple agencies came together to work in partnership with one another to support ethnically diverse women, to identify good practice, and to advocate for survivors from diverse ethnic communities as appropriate. The project brought together different domestic abuse services, Local Authorities, and voluntary sector organisations. Partnership working aimed to achieve the following goals:

- Effective communication between partner agencies to provide support to victims,
- Awareness raising and information sharing (e.g. local schools),
- Signposting clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds to other agencies to meet specific needs, and
- Effective communication strategies to ensure reduce the need for clients to go through multiple agencies repeating their stories of abuse.

### **4.4.2. Outcomes of partnership working**

#### *Holistic and intensive support*

The project built improved relationships with partners working with women without any recourse to public funds and those with insecure immigration status. Providers in two different areas worked in close partnership with Sanctuary Hosting to temporarily house clients with no

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recourse to public funds until a more permanent solution is found. One of those providers has also linked with their local authority to develop a formal referral pathway to ensure that access to this scheme is embedded into practice.

One of the domestic abuse services worked closely with a local mental health hospital to pick up alerts to safeguard women with mental health issues. Agencies have also worked in close coordination with Karma Nirvana to distribute leaflets on honour-based abuse. Similarly, opportunities to develop partnerships to support women subjected to abuse were also explored with Rights of Women and Solace Women's Aid.

One agency's partnership with Reunite International helped bring three children back from abroad to their mothers where they had been separated because of controlling/abusive behaviours by the perpetrator.

Engagement with statutory agencies has also improved significantly, and BAMER Support Workers report that social services are aware of their work and often ask for their involvement in cases.

There has also been work with immigration lawyers to pursue options for pro-bono work which is free to the client.

### *Networking opportunities*

BAMER Support Workers have joined forums to meet other professionals in the field. Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Forum, and Windsor and Maidenhead Domestic Abuse Forum have been useful spaces to share ideas and network with other professionals working with ethnic minority women. These groups have provided platforms for sharing information on what is happening in the area, new legislation, and systems that are in place. Windsor and Maidenhead Community Cohesion Partnership was helpful for networking with professionals, community leaders and charities working on abuse and violence against women and girls, among other issues.

### *Workshops and trainings*

BAMER Support Workers collaborated with their local VAWG charities to develop trainings and workshops. They provided training on domestic abuse with extensive discussions about the violence and abuse perpetrated against women and girls from ethnically diverse communities.

BAMER Support Workers have been working in collaboration with each other to share information about events, workshops, and trainings. All BAMER Support Workers were trained by Project 17 in how to support women without recourse to public funds, and the knowledge, networks and resources from this training was widely used by the BAMER Support Workers in their work.

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### *Leveraging resources and funding*

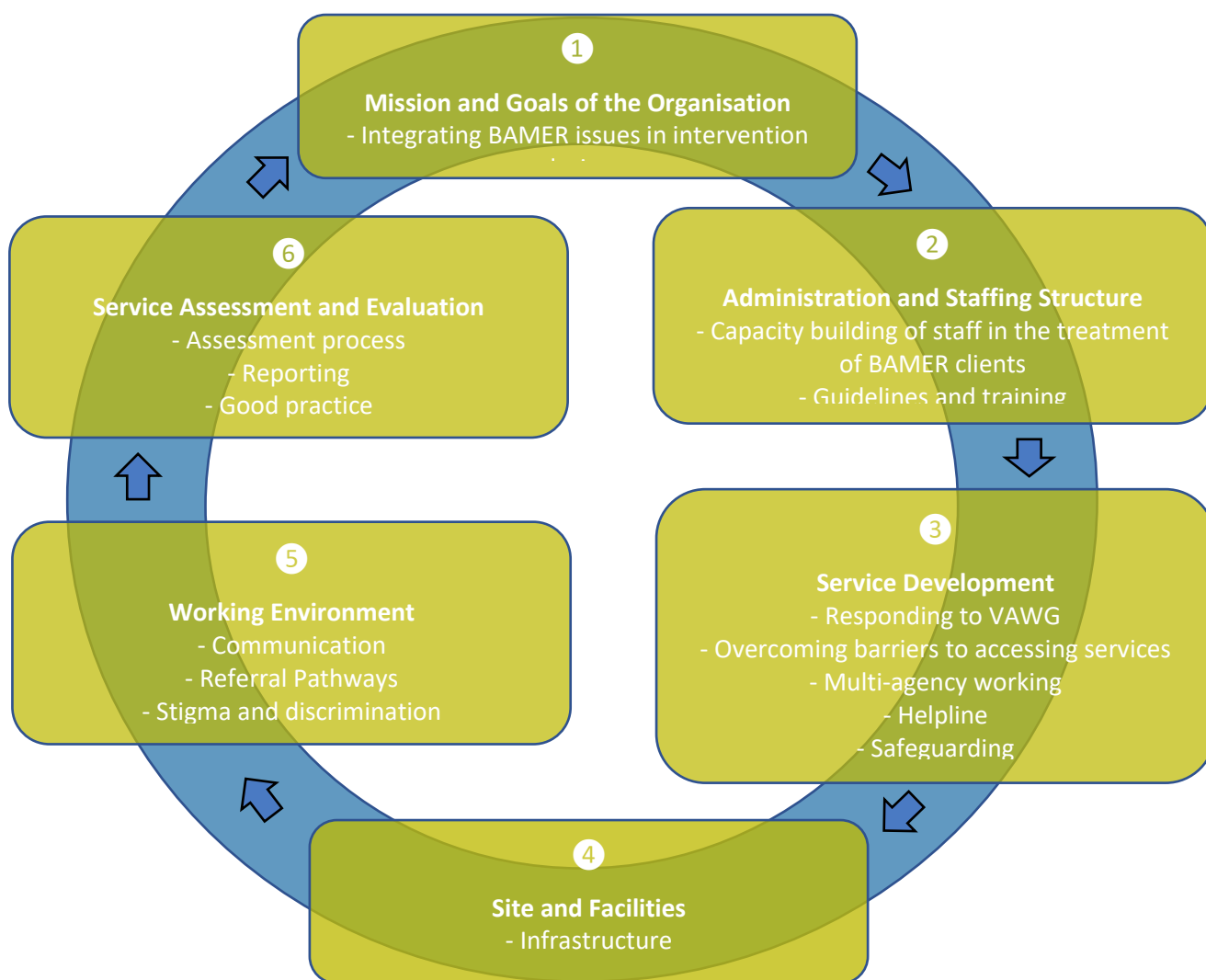
Two of the provider agencies working in the BAMER Project collaborated with local charities and organisations to gain funding and develop projects within the community that supported or complemented the work of the BAMER Project. One such partnership has offered financial support for furniture, child-care, and travel costs for female survivors from ethnic minority communities; another has been collaborating to represent survivors in court regarding welfare and benefits rights.

## 5. Peer Review Audit

The Thames Valley BAMER Project used a peer review audit to collect information on the nature of agency responses to ethnic minority women who have been subjected to abuse and violence in Thames Valley. Seventeen specialist services across the region were asked to complete a comprehensive questionnaire and where possible provide evidence to demonstrate their responses. Five agencies returned their completed questionnaires; three of which had BAMER Support Workers within this project. The information gathered should be viewed alongside that presented elsewhere in this report for a more accurate analysis of the situation.

- MK-ACT
- The Thames Valley ISVA Service
- Wycombe Women's Aid
- DASH Charity
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service

The audit was divided into six thematic sections, as shown below.



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The survey consisted of questions under several themes which are set out below along with an exploration of the findings.

## 5.1. Mission and goals of the organisation

All five organisations confirmed they have an equality, diversity, and inclusion plan in place, however there was a variation in the approach for ensuring that the plan was being implemented. Two agencies are active in ensuring this agenda is being reviewed regularly through:

- An independent consultant review and development of action plans annually,
- Working on building strategic partnerships with groups representing those from diverse ethnic communities,
- Community events targeting women from diverse ethnic backgrounds,
- Active participation of ethnic minority women to acknowledge and celebrate cultural events, and
- Having honour-based abuse and forced marriage statements in place.

Plans were made in terms of the creation of a 'BAMER survivors' panel' to improve services and increasing the number of self-referrals ethnic minority communities.

All organisations participating recognise that women from ethnic minority communities are not a homogenous group and that their needs are different and that intersections within their specific ethnic community must be considered while providing services.

Three of the participating organisations said they currently conduct needs assessments of the issues faced by ethnic minority women that feed into decisions made at higher levels.

One of the specialist services was within a Not for Profit Organisation and therefore does not have a Board of trustees. Ethnically diverse representation on the Boards for the four charitable organisations varied considerably, from all white British boards to one which has 33 percent representation from members from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Only two organisations stated they have an agenda item on inclusivity and experts by experience who regularly attended Board meetings. Management teams are also predominantly White British however all the participating organisations have operational staff from ethnic minority communities.

Although the staff within each of the organisations are all trained on equality, diversity and inclusion and plans are in place, the ability to provide an effective holistic service to ethnic minority women is significantly reduced in a less diverse team.

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## 5.2. Administration and staffing structure

The participating organisations all reported their operational staff are confident in responding to the needs of clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds and when to refer/signpost them to services with specific expertise, for example immigration solicitors. In addition, confident in recognising institutional barriers in other organisations which can deter access to appropriate support. This was established through recruitment processes which ensure there are operational staff from ethnically diverse communities who speak multiple languages which match local need, clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, inclusive policies, robust inductions with extensive training and case management supervision.

The participating organisations understand the importance of training to personally develop their staff. Safeguarding, EDI and Unconscious Bias training are mandated for all. Operational staff in all five organisations are trained in the different strands of VAWG (including risk assessment and powers to prevent further abuse) and Guidelines on the Use of Translators, in four of them it was mandated for all staff. The organisation which does not mandate all their training ensures that some of their operational staff are trained on all aspects, this is due to the fact they work specifically with victims of sexual abuse and violence. Only two organisations said their operational staff are trained on Sharia Law. The BAMER Support Workers did suggest there should be training on breast ironing, acid attacks and the understanding of the motivation behind cases with multiple perpetrators.

## 5.3. Service development

All the participating organisations report they are confident their staff identify signs of different forms of violence and abuse experienced by their ethnic minority clients and can respond and support appropriately. This is due to the level of training the staff have received and the shared learning in team meetings and supervision. Referrals into the services come from other agencies as well as self-referrals. One organisation stated their electronic casework management system is specifically designed to trigger professional curiosity and questions around different types of VAWG and recognise specific needs from women of different backgrounds. In addition, ethnically diverse clients can access support workers from ethnically diverse communities in all of the participating organisations, including those who do not have specific BAMER Support Workers. The additional benefit of having a BAMER Support Worker is the fact they proactively engage with community groups where there are women who would not approach a local service if they were being abused.

Referral pathways are understood by the staff of the participating organisations. The pathways are described by some staff as complicated to use due to interconnectedness of the agencies involved in responding to abuse and violence against women and girls in ethnic minority communities. There is a common understanding that agencies require specialist knowledge of pathways and ethnic or cultural specificities to correctly identify and respond to risks. There is potential to strengthen the development of capability among the staff of participating agencies

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in this regard. Responses indicated that the interconnectedness of abuse and violence against women and girls with the modern slavery agenda was deemed important.

Provision of support group programmes specifically for those from ethnically diverse backgrounds varies across the organisations, from not having any, to facilitating peer support groups, engagement with community groups and a programme specifically designed for ethnic minority women. Many of the support group programmes available are White British centric, for example the Freedom Programme. That is not to say some women from ethnically diverse communities find the programmes not appropriate for their needs, but that they are not applicable to everyone or address some of the additional issues raised by ethnically diverse women, for example honour, and multiple perpetrators.

The focus groups delivered by the BAMER Support Workers for this project identified women were not confident in approaching existing specialist services, did not feel they met their needs or were not aware of the services. The participating organisations in the Audit were asked what they were doing to break down the barriers faced by ethnic minority women. The responses varied. All the organisations offer face to face support, and as mentioned above, clients could be supported by staff from ethnic minority communities. Two of the organisations offer drop-in surgeries which are helpful to women from ethnically diverse communities especially if English is not their first language. Ethnic minority women in the focus groups said they did not feel confident talking over the phone because of their accents and found it easier face-to-face. In the current climate, with meeting restrictions due to Covid it is not possible to provide drop-in surgeries.

All the participating organisations have resources to raise awareness of their service which they distribute in their local areas via campaigns, briefing or training sessions, stalls, events, and community engagement. Most of the leaflets and posters are only available in English, with only one agency having leaflets in different languages. The leaflets are very much centred on either domestic abuse or sexual violence and heavily branded by the organisation. There are no leaflets produced which focus purely on honour-based abuse. This lack of inclusivity may reduce accessibility for ethnic minority women.

Two of the participating organisations use social media regularly (Facebook and Twitter). Whilst setting up a Facebook or Twitter account is free the resourcing of them requires additional funding which small charities do not have; again, the posts on social media were in English. The BAMER Support Workers community engagement broke down some of the barriers to reporting as they would see the women face to face and assisted in building confidence.

The participating organisations regularly seek feedback from clients to improve their service delivery and communications. This is done by distributing questionnaires, on-line surveys, feedback forms and focus groups.

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Partnership working is essential when supporting women who have experienced abuse and/or violence. The participating organisations work in close partnership with a variety of agencies, including but not limited to police, health professionals, Local Authorities, and other charities to ensure there is a holistic response. In addition to working with partners with a particular client the participating organisations attend multi-agency forum such as MARACs, Operational or Strategic Boards, working groups, Child Protection meetings. It is at the forums where the representatives from the participating organisations can advocate on behalf of their ethnically diverse clients which assists the other agencies in developing their understanding of the needs of those client groups. A key part of effective partnership working is information sharing. Information sharing takes on some specific and nuanced risks in relation to abuse and violence against women and girls, especially within ethnic minority communities. For example, an honour-based abuse case may have multiple perpetrators, known and unknown therefore it is vital that information shared amongst agencies is on a strictly needs to know basis to mitigate any further risk to the client.

The obvious way in which to access support is to call or email the organisation; commonly known as the helpline. For the purposes of this section of the report 'helpline' refers simply to the main access point for self-referrers. One of the participating organisations does not have a direct number as the overwhelming majority of their clients are referred in by agencies and self-referrers access their support via a different channel. The other four participating organisations helplines are staffed with specific helpline workers. Only one of the organisations had a helpline worker from an ethnic minority community, however all helpline workers in each of the organisations can access advice from staff from ethnic minority communities within the organisation. Furthermore, there is on-going training and peer group discussions around language use for the staff who only speak English. The BAMER Support Workers report that clients often contact them directly using their mother tongue. The participating organisations all have access to an interpreter service which they use in face to face meetings or on telephone calls and in addition bi-lingual staff are made available to interpret if necessary. Care is taken to ensure that the interpreter is not known to the family or extended family to ensure confidentiality.

The participating organisations all have safeguarding policies and procedures which are reviewed yearly. Staff receive mandatory regular training on safeguarding and feel confident in raising concerns. Two of the organisations who have a Board have safeguarding as an agenda item and one said they will suggest it is included.

## 5.4. Site and facilities

The participating organisations have main offices, all but one are centrally located and on a main bus route where clients can attend on an appointment basis. Generally, clients are met in safe local community venues such as children centres or GP surgeries, where they feel comfortable and not overheard as confidentiality is a priority. Risk assessments on the venues are carried out and lone working procedures are followed. Meetings with clients from BAMER communities

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tend to be during office hours, and as stated above clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds preferred face to face meetings. The audit revealed two of the organisations offered 24-hour telephone support but only for clients in refuge, this is mainly due to financial constraints.

The audit was completed before the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and subsequently, due to social distancing, face-to-face meetings are now the exception. The participating organisations rely on phone calls and on-line meeting rooms to talk to their clients but can only do this if the perpetrator(s) is not in the home, therefore limiting the opportunity to offer accessible support. One area has developed a digital application ('app') which can be discretely used to by the clients to send messages to their support worker. This works well for ethnic minority clients who can read and write English, but for those that cannot there are fewer options to engage with support services.

## 5.5. Working environment

The Audit demonstrates all staff in the participating organisations receive training on unconscious bias and it is regularly considered and addressed within supervision or internal group discussions.

The participating organisations share anonymised data with their stakeholders and funders. It is essential to collect ethnicity data for ethnically ethnic minority victims to commission, plan and provide relevant, tailored services.

The Audit reveals the referral pathways and mechanisms into the participating organisations services were in place, were clear and understandable. However, when referring to external services staff have a good understanding of the pathways, but it can be challenging and confusing for ethnically diverse clients. All the participating organisations report having a separate pathway for clients who were victims of honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation and forced marriage, although the pathways were not shared in the audit.

Self-referrals were accepted by all participating organisations, as well as referrals from community or voluntary organisations, social workers, and other statutory agencies.

The participating organisations all have Equality & Diversity, GDPR and Confidentiality policies in place.

## 5.6. Service assessment and evaluation

The Audit asked the participating organisation to clarify whether they carry out needs assessments and did they include ethnically diverse women in the process to ensure their voices are heard. Although all five said yes only one clearly demonstrated they do include women from ethnically diverse backgrounds in the process and this was done through focus groups. Two of

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the organisations misunderstood the question and stated they used the Safe Lives Risk Indicator Checklist and where relevant use the additional HBA questions.

Two organisations state the outcomes for ethnically diverse clients are regularly recorded and analysed to improve the quality of the outcomes. Reports are produced which include information on clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds as part of the contract monitoring of the services.

With the focus coming from the BAMER Project the participating organisations recognised gaps in their data collection and have made improvements. One organisation also state they have introduced additional questions in relation to assessing risk and needs based on the research and expressed experiences of ethnic minority women.

Feedback from one organisation highlights that the community engagement part of the BAMER Project has helped to address the isolation of women as well as raising awareness of abuse and support to recognise it. It has also supported women to maintain their culture and share it amongst other women; word of mouth awareness raising is often used within ethnic minority communities. Respondents also acknowledge that the project has impacted on some of the domestic abuse services and encouraged wider staff members to take an interest in how aspects of violence against women and girls relate specifically to ethnic minority women. This has assisted with improving existing services.

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## 6. Challenges

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*She said that in the past [the] job centre offered to make her the payment. Then husband found out, got very angry and asked for the payment to be switched back to him.*

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### 6.1. Universal Credit

The single payment policy of Universal Credit (where only one recipient can receive the payment on behalf of the whole household), has a negative impact for ethnically diverse women who have been subjected to abuse or violence, particularly there has been financial abuse and/or they have no independence. These issues were significant even before this policy was introduced and are now compounded by it. Any exemption to this payment policy is only given at the request of *both* parties, which makes it difficult to safeguard victims where there is no cooperation from, or risk posed by, the perpetrator(s).

### 6.2. Communication

Many ethnically diverse clients are unable to respond to BAMER Support Workers phone calls for various reasons such as restrictions placed on them by spouses or family members, monitoring from perpetrators, child-care, and housework responsibilities. In these situations, it is challenging for BAMER Support Workers to get updates from the client despite trying to maintain regular contact.

It is equally challenging to obtain responses from other services, especially statutory services, where professionals operate with high caseloads, stretched resources, and competing priorities. It could also be that lengthy bureaucratic procedures cause delays, resulting in BAMER Support Workers often having to follow-up with services several times before gaining responses. BAMER Support Workers note that risk can escalate very quickly in cases with clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds, making timely responses from other agencies a critical factor in keeping clients safe and meeting their needs effectively.

The project has also found engagement with community groups; BAMER Support Workers reported approaching groups but not receiving any response or feedback. Many ethnically diverse community groups did not respond at all and obtaining responses was especially challenging at the start of the project. One community group only agreed to communicate by email, and any mention of a meeting would be met by a non-response. Non-responses were explained by BAMER Support Workers as groups being closed or self-sufficient, wanting to operate without interaction or interference from elsewhere. Many faith communities take a lot longer to respond.

In some situations, BAMER Support Workers found it challenging when women came to them with issues that went beyond the project remit. Finding themselves in difficult situations, women were asking them for help with utility bills, which workers found hard to decline. In one situation the facilitator of the group wanted the BAMER Support Workers to make leaflets for the group. A BAMER Support Worker said, “You want to engage with them at all levels possible, but where do you really draw the line.” This is especially relevant given the limited resources available for the project in terms of money, time, and capacity of the effectively workers.

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***BAMER Support Workers said:***

*She wanted me to promise that I will not speak to anybody about this. I said that I cannot promise this. I said I will record what she told me and speak to my colleagues to make sure that I am supporting her correctly. She said she is really scared that husband will find out and her family as well. She said she is scared as her brother and mother would phone up and be angry with her.*

*There was a case who wanted to just call me to say hello during the weekend. It was very difficult to not talk to her at the time*

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### 6.3. Attachment to BAMER Support Workers

BAMER Support Workers frequently found that clients would refuse to engage with any other professional. This was often because of the relationship of trust built up with the BAMER Support Worker through the use their shared language. Ethnic minority women needed emotional support to deal with isolation and BAMER Support Workers provided this in many situations, but they also faced dilemmas in balancing their responses to numerous client requests against issues of safeguarding which were considered a priority.

BAMER Support Workers reported that often women whose cases were closed wanted to maintain contact with them because they had developed a positive relationship and had on-going emotional needs resulting from the abuse. The BAMER Support Workers found this challenging as the remit of their roles was to prioritise safety and managing risk and did not allow for providing on-going emotional support once the abuse had ended. Some of the community groups had the capacity and skills to provide this on-going support to the women.

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## 6.4. Emergency Accommodation

For asylum seekers, the Home Office provides accommodation to men and women to prevent them from destitution.<sup>17</sup> One of the clients referred into this accommodation service found it difficult to live in accommodation that did not have a separate space for women. In this situation it was difficult for BAMER Support Workers to offer support because neither staying in the accommodation nor leaving it were viable options for the client in the immediate situation. This accommodation is not available for women with no recourse to public funds, and BAMER Support Workers experienced significant challenges in trying to achieve safe and stable, culturally appropriate accommodation arrangements for women in this situation (see below for more detail on this).

## 6.5. Recording data

Agencies, both from the voluntary and statutory sectors collect different data and the recording of ethnic groups varied. There was no consistency across the region, for example only a few of the support agencies recorded religion, and one support service would not ask ethnicity and only recorded it if it was voluntarily given. Determining a woman's immigration status is important when managing risk both practically to determine if they have recourse to financial assistance, and emotionally to gain an understanding of how extensive her support network is. There is, however, a reluctance amongst some agencies to ask and record this information. The MARAC data provided showed significant gaps in recording ethnicity, particularly by the police. That is not to say the police do not record ethnicity on their systems but if and when they do, this is not shared. Without robust and precise recording of ethnicity data it becomes more of a challenge to strategically plan interventions which tackle inequalities and raise awareness, as well as provide individual, needs-led support.

A key source of data around domestic abuse were the MARACs across Thames Valley. The database used to support the MARAC function is known as MODUS and access is restricted due to confidentiality and the highly sensitive nature of the information stored. BAMER Support Workers did not have access to MODUS so if they needed to refer a client to MARAC, they required assistance from staff on the helpline to input information. Due to high caseloads and high work volumes on the helpline, this created additional pressures here, impacting on waiting times.

In one of the agencies delivering the BAMER Support Workers, ethnically diverse clients could access the service directly through the BAMER Support Workers rather than through the standardised 'single point of access' provided by the helpline. This meant that initial client data recording normally undertaken by helpline staff fell to the BAMER Support Workers, creating additional time pressures. Additionally, in this service, when ethnically diverse clients did contact

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<sup>17</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/821324/Pack\\_A\\_-\\_English\\_-\\_Web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/821324/Pack_A_-_English_-_Web.pdf)

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the helpline, BAMER Support Workers supported the staff with their specialised skills in assisting clients from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This will be a gap when the BAMER Project ends.

## 6.6. Understanding and assessing risk for women from ethnically diverse backgrounds

BAMER Support Workers found it challenging to support clients whose risk had been assessed as 'standard' through the DASH RIC because of the lack of any VAWG services available for this group. Additionally, they reported concerns that due to cultural barriers such as language, cultural beliefs, and knowledge of systems, women from ethnic minority communities may not disclose information that those from the dominant white culture would determine as risk factors. This means they are then assessed as standard risk, and BAMER Support Workers often found that taking a more culturally sensitive approach, would bring forward information which would significantly change the assessment of risk; sometimes to medium or even to high risk. They also observed that they would become aware of wider background information (linked to family or community) which would not be addressed through the DASH RIC but would significantly impact the risk and the dynamics of the situation. Hence lack of awareness of these issues was seen to be preventing other professionals from accurately understanding the risk faced by women who were being supported by the BAMER Project. In this and other regards, the broad range of services that ethnic minority clients deal with need better representation from ethnically diverse communities in frontline roles, who have a deep understanding of the different cultural issues and contexts.

The BAMER Project did not operate a waiting list which enabled responsive support in containing, referring, managing the risk, and providing emotional support to victims. At times BAMER Support Workers could have used additional help especially when it came to dealing with immigration issues which had to be dealt with promptly, but for which there are limited, already stretched, resources.

It was also challenging to find an appropriate venue for meeting ethnically diverse clients. BAMER Support Workers reported using children's centres as being safe for women to enter without being judged.

## 6.7. Cafcass

Ethnically diverse women and BAMER Support Workers found working with Cafcass challenging as they tended to separate women's experiences from their children's experience rather than employing a holistic approach. They often had little understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse, and therefore the risks or impacts.

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## 6.8. Interpreting services

BAMER Support Workers reported that agencies frequently use family members or acquaintances for face-to-face interpreting. This should be immediately addressed; significant caution should be employed in such situations due to the family and community involvement in the perpetration of abuse in some cultures. Even in the absence of such factors, victims will be reluctant to disclose or discuss sensitive matters if a family member is involved in the conversation. This is particularly the case for healthcare appointments.

Using interpretation services over the phone presents its own challenges in terms of the flow of the conversation and can prevent the interpreter from being able to observe body language. The process is not as nuanced and holistic as it would be in person. Not all communities express abuse in the same way and face-to-face interpretation is the best way to capture the full meaning of a woman's narrative. Some BAMER Support Workers found it easier to interact with victims with limited English by themselves rather than being dependent on phone interpretation.

Cost is a factor in using interpretation services, and face-to-face services are significantly more costly than telephone services. This is likely to deter agencies from using this option, or potentially from using interpretation services at all. One Syrian client described how she had a bad experience with trying to gain interpreter services for a meeting with an agency who assured her of such services. Despite significant efforts from her BAMER Support Worker, the agency in question could not afford it, and her experience with the meeting was not satisfactory. Having access to interpreters as BAMER Support Workers is essential for improved service delivery.

In community engagement activities, BAMER Support Workers often relied on the group facilitators for interpretation. In these circumstances, much of what is being communicated gets lost in translation. Sometimes, facilitators may limit what the women are communicating and how they say it as they are not bound by the same professional standards as professional interpreters who adhere to a code of conduct and are independent from the participants.

## 6.9. Working with clients without recourse to public funds

One of the most significant challenges facing BAMER Support Workers was the limited number of services available for clients with no recourse to public funds. In several situations this left BAMER Support Workers working long into evenings and weekends to ensure clients did not have to sleep on the streets. In many situations, reassuring victims that immigration services and social services are not threats was challenging because of information that was spread by word of mouth in their communities.

Budgets within support services are limited and are tightly managed, so most do not have funds to rent a hotel room if no other accommodation can be found. There are examples of police placing a woman who is fleeing domestic abuse with no recourse to public funds in a hotel for one night and advising them to speak to the Council the next day. The Council are unable to provide

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accommodation due to legislation, and the only other safe alternative is a domestic abuse refuge. Finding suitable refuge space is limited as very few will accept a woman without recourse to public funds until they have successfully applied for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession status. The process can take several days, or often many weeks. In the meantime, the woman is still without safe accommodation, and it is unsurprising the only other option is to return to the abuser.

## 6.10. Partnership working

As a brand-new project, the BAMER Project took quite some time to build rapport with existing services and at times other services were reluctant to provide support due to lack of adequate resources. Partnership building with schools was challenging and so more work in this area is important. The project accepted that given the number of ethnic minority communities, the geographic spread, and the complexities of the work, it would not be possible to find the resource to develop a thorough approach to partnering with schools at this stage. The introduction of training around abuse and violence against women and girls in schools requires careful design and continuous engagement with schools to build trust and confidence.

Partnership working also requires an understanding and commitment to the work of the other agencies; whilst this is often easy enough on a superficial level, tensions and conflicts can develop when organisations operate from distinct value systems or from different theoretical frameworks. Role clarity and accountability need to be addressed explicitly when engaging with multiple partners. Confusion can arise regarding decision making processes and specific task allocation, particularly where these may need to shift over time. There are, however, very good examples of partnership working across the Thames Valley. MARACs are fully embedded in each area, managed by MARAC Coordinators who are police civilians and where victims and survivors are supported by qualified IDVAs. On average 45 percent of referrals to MARAC across the Thames Valley are from agencies other than the police. MATACs are being developed and rolled out across the Thames Valley. Whereas the objective of MARACs is to ensure the safety of victims and survivors, the purpose of a MATAC is focused on the perpetrator. Within MATAC, agencies work in partnership to engage serial domestic abuse perpetrators in support, to take enforcement action where required, and to protect vulnerable and intimidated victims through holding perpetrators to account appropriately.

Funding and resources are issues when talking about providing holistic and intensive support through partnership working. Partners may be reluctant to engage with some issues or conversely may seem enthusiastic with others. This can be due to restrictions placed on them around aspects of their funding or because funding is highly competed and/or unavailable for work within the VAWG and ethnically specialised sectors.

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## 6.11. Scarcity of services and community groups

The mapping exercise attempted to identify organisations working on any of the elements of violence against women and girls, and organisations working with one or more minority ethnic community groups. This enabled us to identify areas where there are presently few organisations working in either of these issues. All the support services incorporate honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation services as part of their service. Third sector agencies supporting women affected by any of the VAWG strands in the Thames Valley do not have staff who only worked with victims from ethnic minority communities, with the exception of the host organisations for the purpose of this project. At the end of the project, two areas have further commissioned a BAMER Support Worker who will provide outreach work and community engagement. Organisations working at the national level provide some relief, however there is a need for ethnic minority women to have VAWG services, who specialise in working with their specific needs, at a more accessible level.

Very few specialist ethnicity-oriented services working on honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation were identified. There are very few specialist services in the VAWG sector for ethnic minority women to approach and access support. The number of ethnically specific refuges in the whole country is almost non-existent.

Few services working on prevention were identified. There are responsive/reactive services but very few focusing on prevention work, especially those that focus on work with men and boys.

The mapping exercise identified only one community group for those from traveller communities. More Polish and Chinese groups are believed to exist but very few were identified through this project.

## 6.12. Diversity of the client and engagement groups

The Thames Valley BAMER Project engaged with many community groups of mixed ethnicities, however, these were mostly mixed ethnicities from one continent. Although many of these groups were open for women from all backgrounds, there were more South Asian women if the group leader was from South Asian origin, and more African women if the group leader was from an African ethnic background. Despite there being a few groups from Chinese or Latin American backgrounds, they were not as actively engaged as African, Caribbean, and South Asian groups.

Although diversity is a strength, when undertaking community engagement activities, it could also prove challenging. Bringing women together on an equal footing, when some were empowered and others did not feel as empowered, was challenging in terms of the messages that BAMER Support Workers wanted to disseminate. For example, in one group there were second generation women who were very good at English and had knowledge of domestic abuse, alongside women who only spoke a few words of English and did not recognise any forms of abuse.

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## 6.13. Scope of the BAMER Project and its Work

It was difficult to cover the three counties within the project with only two workers per county. The possibilities were endless in terms of the different localities looked at, the issues dealt with, and ethnicities and communities engaged with. Practically, it was impossible for BAMER Support Workers to cover all of groups and ethnicities identified.

For four BAMER Support Workers who were also doing client work, the community engagement work was time consuming and attention could not be divided equally to all community groups. It was difficult to maintain this balance.

Significantly, BAMER Support Workers stated that professionals such as Social Workers and Police Officers started to call them directly for help with all the complicated cases they were receiving which added to their work load.

## 6.14. Distrust and disengagement

Many groups did not wish to engage with the Thames Valley BAMER Project when they realised that funding for the project had come from the Home Office. Any mention of the Home Office would make them suspicious of the project because of fear in the communities relating to immigration authorities. It required significant effort from the BAMER Support Workers to overcome this barrier.

## 6.15. Supporting male victims

There is a significant gap in support for ethnic minority male victims because there is very little understanding among services about their needs, issues and the dynamics within the family as it centres on males. Male victims reported domestic abuse were supported during this project, although some statutory agencies were suspicious about their authenticity and vulnerability. Training and awareness raising tends to focus more on female victims, as they are in the majority.

## 6.16. Funding issues

Funding within the violence against women and girls sector is generally low but specialist services for ethnically diverse clients operate on particularly scarce resources to deliver safe and appropriate services. Translations of services literature are expensive and many existing community groups that provide safe spaces for women to make disclosures and receive emotional support have limited funding and venue space for long term operations. Specialist BAMER Support Workers in domestic abuse services in this project had high workloads despite not having a secure work contract in most situations, being employed on fixed term contracts for the duration of the project funding. Even with the provision of this project with clear aims and

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skilled professionals, there is not much funding to support women with insecure immigration status, which has rendered many well-meaning efforts futile. As identified previously, resource constraints also negatively impact on the availability of preventative work and perpetrator programmes.

Finally, funding affects the existence and sustainability of the community groups at the heart of this work. There is not comprehensive representation of ethnicities within existing groups, and those who are represented rely on groups who operate on a hand-to-mouth basis with uncertain funding and futures.

## 6.17. Data collection

Data collection has been one of the most challenging aspect of the project. On many occasions lack of data on ethnicity made it difficult to understand the context of the situation. At other times, non-response from agencies proved a hindrance to understanding and analysing the latest, most relevant information on different strands of gendered violence. Often these data gaps were underpinned by issues of confidentiality and data protection measures, which is understandable when sharing sensitive information.

When analysing MARAC data, it was observed that there were categories being collected by some agencies that were not by others. This might mean that we need to bring agencies together to make data collection more consistent and uniform across all agencies.

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## 7. Lessons identified

### 7.1. Identities

There is a need to recognise the difference between and within African and Asian ethnicities and not assume all African and Asian women share the same experience. There are also significant cultural and traditional differences between Black Caribbean and Black African women which need to be acknowledged when supporting them. Not all Black women identify as coming from an ethnic minority background and there are white women from African backgrounds who need to be identified and acknowledged as belonging to this heritage. In doing this work the Thames Valley BAMER Project has broadened and deepened its understanding of different ethnicities, groups, and nationalities.

### 7.2. Scope of the BAMER Project work

At an early stage, BAMER Support Workers recognised the vast scope of this project in terms of breadth of the Thames Valley area, the number of diverse communities within it, and the different strands of violence against women and girls faced by the communities. This required a considerable narrowing of the focus of work to smaller groups, allowing for more intense discussion and engagement. BAMER Support Workers believed this would lead to building greater trust and would bring more candid discussions with the women; this proved to be the case.

### 7.3. Solution-focused approach

Groups were open to engagement when BAMER Support Workers were more transparent about what they were wanting to do. The groups wanted this to be a process of give and take. In most cases people wanted solutions to their problems and this ranged from things like explaining their utility bills to helping contact a service. Engagement was smoother with this approach. Communities want to be empowered from within to ask for help outside of their community groups.

### 7.4. Acceptance of domestic abuse as a community issue

Commonly some groups were resistant to accept that domestic abuse happened in their communities, but when the topic was introduced alongside positive relationship modules, it helped women be more receptive to talk about issues more openly. BAMER Support Workers observed it is difficult for some women to leave the house so when they do attend such community groups it is vital to engage with them fully.

## 7.5. Dependence and empowerment

It was clear that ethnic minority clients want to engage with the BAMER Support Workers who they began their journey with and built trust with.

This was true in the case of a BAMER Support Worker who was on holiday but had difficulty explaining to women about contact during these times. There are issues here of dependency versus empowerment. If your starting point is so much more oppressed, the journey to empowerment can take much longer, especially if women are culturally socialised to be dependent. Our understanding of working with culturally specific ideas about dependence needs to be enhanced.

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**A BAMER Support Worker said:**

*She waited a long time to be able to see me as she was away in the summer to see her unwell mother in Jordan. I was off sick for a while after that and I told her that she could speak to any of my colleagues, but she said she only wants to speak to me.*

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## 7.6. Language, interpretation, and translation

Statutory agencies should always ask anyone disclosing abuse and/or violence if they require an interpreter if English is not their first language. Spouses and family members should never be used as interpreters. At its least harmful this practice creates a barrier for women to discuss sensitive topics, at worst it denies any opportunity for women to disclose abuse. In cases where there could be significant risk to her and/or her children this could be very dangerous.

There are often different dialects within the same language. For example, Arabic has numerous dialects and finding an interpreter in niche languages can be challenging due to their scarcity. Additionally, using interpreters in smaller population groups can pose difficulty in finding an interpreter who is fully independent from the victim and their community. In one case, for example, a Pakistani client required an interpreter, and the BAMER Support Worker discovered they were a friend of the client's mother-in-law. Services should always prioritise the use of face-to-face interpreters where possible when engaging with clients, but must remain alert to the possibility that interpreters may know or recognise the victim.

Posters, information on VAWG services, audio and video materials, and campaigns about violence against women and girls need to be translated into languages that ethnically diverse women from all backgrounds can understand. One of the most significant needs identified for ethnically sensitive work is language. Community groups could usefully link with services that could translate for them, but as previously noted, there is often cost associated with this.

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In providing English language classes, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) service providers need to recognise the range educational backgrounds which can impact the speed and ease of learning. Regular ESOL classes may not be right for some, who might require a different approach to improve their language skills. ESOL classes have considerable potential to enable the coming together of different communities to explore avenues for working with domestic abuse services to design preventative work around violence against women and girls.

## 7.7. Domestic abuse refuge

In domestic abuse cases where women are fleeing to a refuge it is accepted practice for services to place women away from their previous location in unfamiliar area. This project has noted that sometimes placing ethnically diverse women far away from their previous home is counterproductive as this might push her further into isolation. These nuances must be acknowledged when working with survivors of abuse and violence from ethnically diverse communities, whilst balancing them against the need for safety, and looking at the specific risks in each case.

## 7.8. Helpline

Many ethnic minority women are unable or do not want to call helpline services due to barriers around language, including but not limited to: a lack of knowledge about what support they will be given, fear of being reported to immigration authorities, and concern about confidentiality. The number of women who wanted to engage with the BAMER Support Workers started to increase every week after the introduction of outreach activities. Many felt more confident approaching BAMER Support Workers in person or via their community group facilitator instead of calling a helpline.

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*He had been telling me about how stressful he finds it that he is not able to provide for the family. I can't go to work otherwise who will take care of the family. .*

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## 7.9. Financial pressure

Ethnic minority men have financial stress and pressure in respect of supporting the family while the women in their families are not allowed to work. This created the dual issues of both pressure for men and isolation for women in many situations.

## 7.10. Perpetrator programmes

Our community-based interventions for perpetrators are centred round a white Western view of what constitutes a

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perpetrator, their motivation and belief systems. The female role in perpetrating honour-based abuse and female genital mutilation tends to be ignored and less understood. There are no community-based interventions for females. There is an absence of any theme running through a community-based programme for males which addresses honour/shame.

### 7.11. Risk level

The risk from abuse faced by ethnic minority women should not just be seen in terms of the DASH RIC risk score, but in the context of the complexities within and around their situation. BAMER Support Workers have noted that recognising the point of risk escalation is not clear cut in such cases. They have frequently observed that cases appearing to score lower for risk factors can escalate very quickly, or that risk can be misunderstood and underestimated due to lack of cultural awareness by professionals completing the DASH RIC.

BAMER Support Workers have reported experiences where clients have scored medium risk on the DASH RIC, but that due to other information provided by the client, not covered through that assessment, the workers have felt the risk is high and they have felt compelled to intervene to address the client's safety.

### 7.12. Women from the European Economic Area (EEA)

Women from the EEA are not always considered or seen as ethnic minority and are therefore often overlooked. They also face the hardships of immigration as they are required to reside in the UK for three months before applying for benefits, and after that criteria is met they need to meet a minimum earnings threshold to determine whether a person can be classed as a worker. EEA nationals do not have the benefit of any specific domestic violence provision and are not eligible for the destitution domestic violence concession. They must rely on exercising their rights as European citizens to continue to reside in the country. The difficulties for EEA national women start when the spouse stops exercising their treaty rights by leaving work or leaving the UK, as this will cause the residency rights of their family members to cease. The same is true if they divorce. Non-EEA nationals living with EEA nationals face extreme economic hardship and deportation when the relationship ends as they become illegal over-stayers and have no recourse to public funds or support. In addition, EEA nationals residing in the UK as the family member of a UK national, and who are being supported by the spouse, are likely to face significant hurdles in accessing their rights via the abusive spouse for the purpose of obtaining welfare benefits. The requirement for victims to start work or take up self-employment is often exceptionally difficult to meet for vulnerable women, whose ability to find work is impacted by the trauma of domestic violence, fleeing home and often a language barrier or the need to provide childcare.

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### 7.13. Childcare facilities

Child-care is a barrier for many women from ethnically diverse backgrounds to engage with services, where for many ethnic groups the mother always has sole responsibility for the children. With the closure of many children centres there are fewer opportunities for women to engage with services as the children centres provided a safe space and crèche facilities.

### 7.14. Criminal justice system and civil courts

Ethnically diverse women, especially first-generation migrants, have very little understanding of the criminal justice system or how civil courts operate. Solicitors' fees can be out of reach for many women and legal aid is very difficult to access. FLAGDV and the National Centre for Domestic Violence offer pro-bono work for victims of domestic abuse, which is free to them as the client. However, women are often not aware of this unless they engage with support services, so awareness raising to promote knowledge and understanding of the different options available to them would be beneficial.

### 7.15. Mental health issues

Taboos and stigma around mental health issues create barriers to women speaking out about their experiences. Mental health issues are prevalent where there is abuse and violence; this project found that raising awareness and engaging with communities is an important way to empower women to come forward with their issues.

Mental healthcare practitioners do not have information available in different languages, and they often seemed to lack understanding of cultural issues.

At times participants shared that having professionals from one of a range of ethnically diverse backgrounds, regardless of their region of origin, made it easier to communicate. Having more staff from such communities helps develop an understanding of the need for a more culturally sensitive response for clients.

### 7.16. Health

Some women and men from ethnically diverse backgrounds seek support from other members of their community to set up appointments, which will prevent them from approaching health services altogether if it is about sensitive or private matter. Some also need to be accompanied to GP and hospital appointments for assistance with communicating, further compounding this barrier. Any kind of independent accompaniment or advocacy service that can be provided for ethnically diverse women would empowering, and there are indications that training to improve awareness and nuanced understanding could produce a better response from staff in healthcare

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settings, particularly in recognising that signs of may differ from those seen with white British people.

## 7.17. Housing

The lack of affordable housing in the Thames Valley is highlighted when women from ethnically diverse communities need to or do flee domestic abuse. Women in the focus groups explained that leaving an abusive partner is very difficult when they have no alternative home to take their children and remain safe. Even if they are considered a priority for re-housing by the local authority, it can take time to find suitable accommodation which leaves the women and children open to more danger, as leaving a partner is when they are most at risk. Refuge space is often given as the only option; however, this requires them to leave everything behind, including secure tenancies. This can and does have a negative impact on the wellbeing of both the mother and children. Some have stated that remaining with the abuser is preferable to being temporarily homeless, without possessions and facing a very uncertain future. The abuser remains in the family home with very little inconvenience. Ethnic minority women can present to Local Authorities in other areas when fleeing domestic abuse on condition they have evidence of the abuse, however evidence can be hard to obtain and some get turned away, having no choice but to return to the abuser if they have no family or friends who can assist them. If the woman does not have recourse to public funds, the options are even more limited.

## 7.18. Police

Victims have a range of experiences with the police, yet there are some aspects in common. The project heard that positive experiences with the police ensure women will be more likely to them again call again. Being able to approach the criminal justice system, to talk and feel understood, all play a significant role in ethnically diverse women feeling able to seek support from the police.

Women from ethnic minority communities reported they had a significantly better experience when police kept them updated on the case and the process, including outcome, was explained fully. This helps to develop more confidence in the police, and this will be extended by word of mouth through the communities.

Patience is necessary when engaging with ethnically diverse clients as many, especially those with language barriers, cannot always make themselves easily understood when explaining their circumstances. In one example, a Syrian woman who had been wrongly accused by the perpetrator had her children removed and they went to live with him. The woman moved to a small room in a multi-occupation property and was supported by a BAMER Support Worker. They then worked together to help police and social services to understand her side of the relationship. Although it took time, the children are back living with the mother and they are all safely housed. The intervention of the BAMER Support Worker allowed the truth to come out.

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## 7.19. Social services

Women expressed that it is intimidating when social workers visit them accompanied by the police. This feeds into doubt and mistrust, preventing them from opening up about their issues. When social services present in an authoritative manner, it creates an oppressive environment, discouraging cooperation and disclosure. It often produces anxiety which could impact a woman's ability to express herself.

The women engaging with this project reported feeling intimidated by Social Workers' authoritative manner which leads to mistrust preventing them from opening up about their issues. Children are the priority for Social Workers however the women said they would feel more confident to cooperate if they took a more holistic and person-centred approach. The women also said they would feel more comfortable in meetings if they had a McKenzie Friend from their community with them.

## 7.20. Banks

It is for victims and survivors challenging when joint bank accounts are controlled by the perpetrator, or in situations of financial abuse. When banks work sensitively with the ethnically diverse women, they report feeling less distress, and feeling empowered and liberated from abuse far more quickly. In one situation a BAMER Support Worker had to help the victim to open a new bank account because her current account was associated with the address of the perpetrator.

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## 8. Developments

### 8.1. Ilam Programme

Ilam-El-Hifzat (shortened to Ilam) – translated means “knowledge of protection”. It is a 10-week programme developed by MK-ACT to explore the domestic abuse “Power and Control cycle” within ethnic minority communities. It takes into account language barriers, differences between religion and culture, sexual abuse and rape, honour-based abuse, forced marriage, self-harm and wider family and community dynamics.

The Ilam Programme examines the roles played by attitudes and beliefs on the actions of the abuser and the responses of victims and survivors. The aim of the programme is to help the clients make sense of and understand what has happened to them, instead of the whole experience just feeling like they are in the wrong. Ilam also describes in detail how children are affected by being exposed to this kind of abuse and very importantly how their lives are improved when the abuse is removed.

This programme has proven to be effective in achieving positive outcomes for women and children in building self-esteem and confidence, empowerment, understanding of the effects of domestic abuse cycle and the benefits as well as the importance of breaking this cycle. Ilam offers ethnically diverse clients an opportunity to learn how to re-build a safe and secure future by having discussions in a comfortable environment with women from similar backgrounds.

### 8.2. New Bridges

A collaboration between Oxford Against Cutting and the Sunrise Centre in Banbury, the New Bridges initiative looked at closing the gaps between those who are subjected to abuse and violence, and those who offer support and other services in response to this.

#### 8.2.1. Workshops

Full day workshops were organised by Oxford Against Cutting, called ‘Reaching Services’, for women from minority ethnic communities to address “internal” barriers that prevent them seeking support following sexual abuse. A leaflet was created to support families within ethnically minority communities to recognise what constitutes sexual abuse and highlight services; this was developed together with young people and adults from such communities.

The ‘Delivering Services’ workshop was delivered to specialist sexual violence workers to support them to address structural “external” barriers which may prevent victims coming forward. To support this, a short film was produced of a drama created by Asian girls (aged 12-16) to

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highlight key issues around sexual violence in these groups to support the content and aims of the 'Delivering Services' workshops.

The workshop activities with women reported a positive impact, with 100 percent of participants who either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that their understanding of sexual abuse had improved as a result of the workshop. These also led to some useful learning for the facilitators, in relation to the challenges of working with translators and ways to work with small groups in terms of the space available and addressing different cultural and language needs.

The outputs from the project have, to date, had some limited dissemination. The report has been shared to support academic study and was also shared with BAMER Board for this project. At the date of preparing this report the film had 23 views, with the leaflets being distributed widely to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Rape Crisis services.

### **8.2.1. Data Master Workshop**

The workshop delivered in January 2020 focused on data relating to honour-based abuse and received positive feedback and recognition of its usefulness in developing an initial understanding the need for this data, and also the difficulties in collecting, collating and sharing this.

Feedback identified the importance of collecting data on honour-based abuse for a wide range of reasons including being able to identify where abuse might be predicted and to provide focused support. Ideas and good practice were shared on the day, and there is potential to form a cross-Thames Valley working group to build on this learning. The final BAMER Project report will potentially feed into terms of reference for such a working group.

A similar format for exploring issues relating to data may be useful for addressing some of the issues relating to data collection elsewhere in the project, particularly given the period of sharing and overlap which has taken place. Given the importance of understanding data for evidence of need and identifying what has been delivered, this is an area which would benefit from being revisited. Further data workshops might therefore be explored, potentially in collaboration with any working group on honour-based abuse if this is established.

### **8.2.2. Film**

The film was developed by a group of young women who were existing participants of Sunrise's youth group. As the project timetable was so tight, production was unable to take place before the workshops were piloted, so the resource will contribute to any future delivery.

The girls' group included 12 girls, aged 12-16 years, from four different secondary schools, all of whom identify as British Pakistani.

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The project aimed to create a film to support learning during the delivery of the 'Reaching Services' and 'Delivering Services' workshops. There is a considerable lack of short film resources that address the issue of sexual violence against ethnic minority women and girls, particularly the barriers to these groups reaching support services. The film needed to be suitable for secondary school children and older.

The film has been described as "*light touch*", which may be preferable for young girls who need confidence to start talking. Feedback on this has also identified that the materials might be developed to include further scenarios. The impact on the girls who scripted and made the film, and the process they went through to do this is also itself an "outcome".

The film, called 'Be Safe, Be Strong' can be viewed here:

<http://www.sunrisemulticultural.org.uk/index.html#About>

### 8.3. No Recourse to Public Funds Pathway Development

For a woman on a spousal visa with no recourse to public funds, fleeing domestic abuse is extremely difficult as they do not have access to any form of benefits which would enable them to stay in a safe place. Sanctuary Hosting who operate across the Thames Valley provide temporary accommodation with trained hosts to people with NRPF whilst they secure leave to remain in the country. Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service and Sanctuary Hosting came together to develop a pathway for women fleeing domestic abuse whilst they wait for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession, which would enable them to access benefits, including housing.

The pathway was successfully piloted with women accessing legal advice and accommodation within 2-3 days. The women, supported by the domestic abuse service are placed with a trained host from Sanctuary Hosting whilst they wait for their DDV application to be awarded and then move into refuge provision where they can start the process of applying for leave to remain. The pathway will be rolled out across the Thames Valley to assist more women on spousal visas who need to flee domestic abuse.

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## 9. Recommendations

### 9.1. Developing specialist, ethnically sensitive VAWG training

The principle of treating everyone fairly is often conceived as treating everyone the same. Whilst this is helpful in some respects, the issues faced by ethnically diverse women, such as their experiences of abuse and violence, are fundamentally different to those faced by white British populations. This ought to be recognised and services tailored accordingly. This can be assisted by training staff in aspects of cultural differences to provide support and develop skills to work with clients from a range of backgrounds. Some training areas to develop for services are:

- Unconscious bias,
- Understanding of family dynamics within ethnically diverse households and awareness of community groups that women access for support on these issues,
- Training on different strands of violence against women and girls particularly affecting ethnic minority communities, and not as a sub-set of domestic abuse. These should include, but not be limited to: the concepts of honour, shame, and izzat; female genital mutilation; forced marriage; honour-based abuse,
- Training on intersectionality within the whole range of ethnically diverse populations and cross-cutting themes of race, gender, class, caste, disability through the lens of empathy and nuanced understanding, and
- Issues linked to multiple perpetrators must be developed and incorporated in training.

Community members themselves should be central in developing and delivering training to ensure that the nuance of complex cultural issues is fully understood and explored. All frontline staff and managers in VAWG services should be trained in matters of ethnic and cultural sensitivity to have a shared understanding and knowledge base, and to implement policies around these issues effectively into practice.

### 9.2. Delivering workshops for community groups

From the focus group discussions, the project identified areas where communities said they needed a better understanding; this included, but was not limited to:

- Mental health awareness,
- Sexual health awareness,
- Consent and consensual relationships (particularly in challenging existing conservative norms, and myths consent and rape),
- What constitutes toxic masculinity, why it is dangerous and how communities can play a part in addressing it,
- How to access education and the job market, and income generation,

- Financial literacy, managing budget,
- Accessing support services such as domestic abuse services, Citizens Advice Bureau etc. to develop confidence in navigating choices, and
- The criminal justice system and civil courts, how they work and what to expect.

### 9.3. Consistent data collection, reporting and sharing

The data collected on ethnic minority communities varies greatly across the region and between agencies. There is little consistency and significant information is often not collated, which prohibits a clear understanding of the extent of abuse faced by women from all and any ethnically diverse backgrounds. Recommendations include the following:

- Gaps in recording ethnicity data and consistency issues must be bridged by agencies through collecting ethnicity data and recording it appropriately.
- VAWG services should collect data where appropriate on honour-based abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, and stalking.
- VAWG services should consider collecting data on other forms of gender-based abuse and violence such as breast ironing, menstrual taboos, acid attacks, transnational abandonment, and attempted suicide, amongst other issues.
- Data collection ought to be consistent across the different services, and all services should record ethnicities of survivors to understand the different context, type and nature of abuse experienced.
- Commissioners should bring all stakeholders together to facilitate this shared fullness and consistency, and to develop a more centralised data collection system.

### 9.4. Delivering ethnically sensitive preventative work and awareness raising

Consideration should be given to developing a toolkit for preventative measures and awareness raising activities across the Thames Valley. The toolkit should include but not be limited to:

- Resources to raise awareness which can be replicated across the Thames Valley so local facts and figures can be used whilst maintaining consistent messages.
- Information on how to fund, set up and develop a Women's Group.
- Guidance on how to engage and work in partnership with Women's Groups to ensure their needs are prioritised.
- Guidance on how to talk about and understand the concept of honour/shame/izzat, which will assist in building respectful relationships between victims and professionals.
- Information on the women's rights.
- Ensuring that any awareness raising or education on healthy relationships in schools should also be relevant to children and young people from ethnic minority communities.

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- Regular awareness campaigns which are aimed at women in ethnic minority communities and the specific issues they face. These should be coordinated with other agencies for example Thames Valley Police to ensure non-duplication and consistent messaging.

## 9.5. Developing clear pathways for ethnically ethnic minority victims and survivors

Victims with no recourse to public funds who are assessed as 'high' risk are given priority over those assessed as 'medium' and 'standard' risk for the limited provision available, which results in those clients not receiving adequate support. A pathway should be developed to ensure that all victims without recourse are appropriately supported.

Generic support services and specialist VAWG services should develop platforms through which the extensive knowledge and experience of issues relating to female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-based abuse, and other niche areas can be shared and built upon.

Higher priority should be given, both strategically and operationally, to working in partnership with refugee and asylum seeker support services to better understand how clients may need to access and interact with VAWG services.

## 9.6. Improving responses from VAWG services for ethnic minority clients

- VAWG services should consider developing and offering alternative access routes for those ethnically diverse women who are not able or do not wish to use telephone helpline services.
- VAWG services should consider providing drop-in surgeries where appropriate for ethnically diverse women in venues which they are comfortable accessing.
- VAWG services should engage with community groups on a regular basis to maintain trust and information exchange.
- VAWG services should actively and explicitly encourage applications from ethnic minority communities when recruiting to ensure there is diversity within staffing.
- VAWG services ought to consider regular peer reviews to ensure their policies and procedures guarantee women from ethnically diverse backgrounds have fair treatment which meet their needs.
- VAWG services should consider the challenges faced by ethnic minority women who have young children when designing and offering services, and be flexible with the times they can engage with them.

## 9.7. Improving engagement with women's community groups

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Strategic and operational support should be offered for community group facilitators to feel confident in responding appropriately to community members in relation to abuse and violence.

Consideration ought to be given to how to engage with and support Traveller communities since they are particularly under-represented in services and in community groups and are therefore a group that is engaged with less at present.

There is a need to identify more interfaith groups and work with them in collaboration.

Specialist ethnically sensitive programmes with gender transformative approaches would help in developing a sense of empowerment in many ethnic minority women. Community groups could explore this component through various activities, working with the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Community outreach activities must invest time and resources in developing relationships of trust, and should be committed to bridging the gaps between services and community groups where this is in the best interests of community members.

## **9.8. Commissioning VAWG services with specific support for ethnically ethnic minority victims and survivors**

Commissioners of VAWG services should consider the inclusion of BAMER Support Worker posts in the service specifications that providers are expected to meet. These specifications would also benefit from criteria in relation to agencies working in tandem with community groups. One way of achieving this might be to embed specialist, ethnically sensitive programmes in local authority funding strategies and reviews.

Consideration should be given to developing and funding support groups specifically for ethnically diverse communities, for example the adapted Freedom Programme, Ilam-El-Hifzat developed by MK-ACT.

## **9.9. Ensuring issues experienced by those who are ethnically minoritised are heard at strategic and operational boards**

Chairs and representatives on strategic and operational domestic abuse boards and forums should develop structures and systems to undertake case reviews, and share good practice, challenges and lessons identified in respect of issues experienced by those from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Strategic domestic abuse boards and forums should ensure the needs of ethnically diverse women are always considered when action planning and awareness raising.

Such forums should have membership from ethnic minority communities and/or specialist ethnically sensitive agencies, and strategic plans should include working with ethnically diverse

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community groups and raising the profile of the needs of women from any and all of these groups. The learning and recommendations from this report should be incorporated into strategic and operational work.

## 9.10. Developing a detailed VAWG service directory

Strategic boards ought to oversee and facilitate the development of a comprehensive service directory to maximise access to information and support for women from ethnic minority communities. This should be done by and for all ethnically diverse communities with input from professionals with specialist, VAWG and ethnically sensitive knowledge, and should include:

- A full list of services and the types of support offered, including the organisation name, location(s), and access facilities,
- The criteria needed to access the support,
- Local, regional, and national services (e.g. national helplines, ethnically specialist refuges out of area),
- Versions available in all major languages, with options for braille in those languages,
- An online version,
- An advertising and social media campaign to raise awareness of its existence, promotion through community groups and community venues, and
- Regular review and updates.

There are lessons to be learned from ethnically focused community groups that have ceased to exist, through contrasting how some specialist groups and services have survived where others have not.

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## 10. Future work

As previously discussed, this project uncovered a wealth of information and issues that were beyond its scope. Of those, some form important areas for future work, either to complement what has been achieved in this project, or to take if further:

- In depth work in reviewing statutory agencies policies and procedures on responding to different abuses which have affected ethnic minority women,
- Exploration of how to take forward the learning from this project which was outside its remit for recommendations, for example mental health services, and the courts,
- Explore ways in which service provider organisations of all types can be supported to develop more diverse workforces, and
- Consideration should be given to viability of the development of a holistic, specialist, ethnically focused support service.

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## Glossary

**Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER)** – a collective term for people living in the United Kingdom whose heritage is not white British.

**Children’s Services** – often referred to (especially in this report) as ‘social services’, this is the team within the local government Health and Social Care department with responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues, and for supporting families.

**Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (known as Cafcass)** – Cafcass represents children in family court cases in England. They advise the family courts about what is safe for children and in their best interests. They make sure that children’s voices are heard at the heart of the family court setting.

**Community Groups** – a grass-roots community-based group or organisation which works for the public benefit and the activities carried out by the group will benefit a particular group of people within the community.

**Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** – a groups formed from responsible statutory agencies within a Local Authority area who work together to protect their local communities from crime and to help people feel safer. Some Local Authority areas join with neighbouring areas for this function (for example South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse form the South and Vale CSP).

**Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)** – the principal public agency responsible for conducting criminal prosecutions in England and Wales.

**Council** – this is the term often used to refer to the local authority, the local government agency with statutory responsibility to implement and oversee certain areas of public services and public life (e.g. housing, waste collection services, parks etc.).

**Data Protection** – see ‘General Data Protection Regulation’ below.

**Designated MARAC Officer (DMO)** – a trained professional who represents their organisation at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – see also below.

**Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC)** – this allows people who may be eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain under the Domestic Violence Rule to access public funds whilst they make their application, if they can meet the basic initial test for domestic violence and destitution. It lasts for 3 months and during this period they can claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), make a homeless application, or go into a refuge.

**Domestic Abuse (DA)** – a pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, abusive and violent behaviour perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner, or family member. Such abuse includes: coercive and controlling behaviour, psychological or emotional abuse, financial and economic abuse, physical or sexual abuse, stalking or harassment.

**Domestic Abuse Risk Levels** – There are 3 levels of risk relating to domestic abuse, which refer to the risk of serious harm posed to the victim and is assessed through the DASH RIC (see below). Serious harm is defined as ‘a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible’

- Standard – there are no significant current indicators of risk of serious harm
- Medium – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender is likely to cause serious harm if there is a change in circumstances, i.e. a failure to take medication, relationship breakdown, pregnancy
- High – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.

**Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour-Based Abuse Risk Indicator Checklist (DASH RIC)** – an evidence-based tool for practitioners who work with victims of domestic abuse to assess the risk posed to victims and survivors, and to identify those who are at high risk of harm.

**Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) & Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO)** – this is an emergency non-molestation and eviction notice which is issued by the police following a domestic abuse incident. The Notice is served first, and the police must apply to a magistrate's court within 48 hours for an Order. The Order prevents the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. Breach of a DVPO is a criminal offence with a maximum sentence of 2 months imprisonment.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** – the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

**Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order (FGMPO)** – it is a legal means to protect and safeguard victims or potential victims of female genital mutilation. Each Order is unique to the individual and can include surrendering a passport or requirements that no one arranges for genital mutilation to be performed. The maximum sentence for breach of a FGMPO is 5 years imprisonment.

**Forced Marriage (FM)** a marriage where one or both partners is married without giving their consent or against their will.

**Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO)** – the court can make an Order that can be used to protect the person who has been, or is being, forced into marriage against their will. The maximum sentence for breach of a FMPO is 5 years imprisonment.

**Freedom Programme** – this is a group work programme for female victims and survivors of domestic abuse to help raise their awareness of the abusive tactics used by their male partners, written by Pat Craven. It has been noted by some that the programme is culturally specific to white Western societies.

**General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** – it is a set of rules which gives citizens more control over their personal data held by private and public organisations. These organisations must ensure that personal data is gathered and processed legally and under strict conditions. The organisation is obliged to protect the data from misuse and exploitation, as well as respecting the rights of data owners, including the right to privacy. There are financial penalties for breaching the data protection.

**Health and Social Care** – the department within a local authority with responsibility for the safeguarding and support of children and vulnerable adults, through Children's Services and Adult Services, respectively.

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**Honour-Based Abuse (HBA)** – in some communities the concept of honour is extremely important. HBA is a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.

**Indefinite Leave to Remain** – is an immigration status granted to a person who does not hold the right of abode in the United Kingdom but who has been admitted to the UK and is free to take up employment or study.

**Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA)** – work with victims and survivors who face a high risk from domestic abuse to address and support their safety needs.

**Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA)** – provide specialist tailored support to victims and survivors of sexual violence, irrespective of whether they have reported to the police.

**Intersectionality** – is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g., gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height, etc.) combine to create unique, layered experiences of discrimination and privilege.

**LGBTIQA+** – stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual', and many other terms (hence +).

**Local Authority** – the local government agency with statutory responsibility to implement and oversee certain areas of public services and public life (e.g. housing, waste collection services, parks etc.).

**McKenzie Friend** – a person who accompanies a victim to court to help them as a Litigant in Person. A Litigant in Person is an individual who makes a claim without legal representation from a solicitor or barrister. The McKenzie Friend can sit with the victim in court, offer advice and support as well as taking notes. They cannot litigate or file court documents or statements.

**Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)** - is a monthly meeting between statutory and other relevant agencies, who discuss the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and if necessary their children, and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. Victims and survivors are commonly referred to MARAC but police, but any professional agency can refer.

**Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC)** – MATACs are to ensure agencies work in partnership to engage serial domestic abuse perpetrators in support, take enforcement action where required and protect vulnerable and intimidated victims. The multi-agency meetings assess and plan a bespoke set of interventions to target and disrupt the perpetrators and/or support them to address their behaviour.

**No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)** - a term used for people who are subject to immigration control and have no entitlement to welfare benefits, to home office asylum support for asylum seekers or to public housing.

**Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)** – the staff working for the local Police and Crime Commissioner who is an elected official charged with securing efficient and effective policing of a police area.

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**Refuge** – a refuge is a safe house for a person and their children fleeing domestic abuse. Generally, the person fleeing domestic abuse will be housed in a refuge outside of the area in which they have been living for safety reasons.

**Sharia Law** – is a religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition. It is derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the Quran and the hadith. Sharia law acts as a code for living that all Muslims should adhere to, including prayers, fasting, and donations to the poor. It aims to help Muslims understand how they should lead every aspect of their lives according to God's wishes.

**Social Services** – an outdated term, but which is still in common use by the general public, to refer to the Children's Services department within the local government Health and Social Care department. It has responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues, and for supporting families.

**Thames Valley BAMER Project (TVBP, also referred to as the BAMER Project)** – a two-year project in the Thames Valley area to identify the needs and barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities who have been affected by abuse perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner, family member(s) or community.

**Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)** – any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Such violence includes: all forms of domestic abuse; sexual assault or rape; child, early or forced marriage; female genital mutilation; honour-based abuse; and, trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation.



## Delivered by:



## Supported by:



# **Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy and Procedures**

## **1. Policy Statement**

Oxford City Council is committed to tackling all forms of violence and abuse; including Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA). All cases of domestic abuse experienced by employees will be treated seriously.

Oxford City Council recognises that its employees will be amongst those affected by DVA, either as survivors/victims of DVA, friends, family or colleagues of victim/survivors, or perpetrators of DVA.

Oxford City Council is committed to ensuring a safe workplace and to safeguarding the health and well-being of employees. As such, Oxford City Council are committed to taking all reasonable steps to combat the reality and impact of domestic abuse on those being abused and to challenge the behaviour of perpetrators.

Oxford City Council will work to ensure that any employee who experiences DVA can raise the issue at work, without fear of stigmatisation or victimisation and will receive appropriate support and assistance to protect themselves and their children

This policy outlines the role of Oxford City Council in supporting employees who have experienced or are experiencing DVA and where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of DVA.

## **2. Who is covered by this policy?**

2.1 This policy covers all employees of the council.

2.2 This procedure has been drafted in consultation with the Council's Domestic and Sexual Abuse Coordinator, and applies to all employees regardless of status or length of service

## **3. Duty of Care**

3.1 Under the Human Rights Act 1998 all public bodies have an obligation to protect the human rights of individuals and to ensure their human rights are not violated. DVA denies the individual the most fundamental of human rights. Implementing a workplace policy assists authorities to meet their human rights duties in relation to incidents of domestic abuse. Failing to tackle this could lead to an infringement of the Human Rights Act.

- 3.2 The Equality Act 2010 includes a public sector duty and those subject to the general equality must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity for protected groups; and foster good relations.
- 3.3 Health and safety laws ensure workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and wellbeing are considered and dealt with effectively. The main areas of health and safety law relevant to violence at work:

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992

The Reporting of Injuries, diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995

The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996

#### 4. Definition

- 4.1 The Home Office defines Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) 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: 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: 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 victim.” (A list of different abuses can be found in Appendix 1)

- 4.2 DVA occurs in all groups and sections of society and may be experienced differently, due to, and compounded by gender and gender identity, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, culture, class or mental health.

- 4.3 For the purposes of this document the term 'survivor' will be used for those affected by DVA and the term 'perpetrator' for the person who has instigated DVA.
- 4.4 Throughout this document survivors and perpetrators can be female or male, however women are disproportionately survivors of DVA. Male survivors may need a different type of support from specialist services. (A list of specialist services can be found in Appendix 2)

## **5. DVA in the workplace**

- 5.1 DVA can impact greatly on an individual's working life affecting their emotional, mental and physical health which interferes with productivity and performance. There are many ways perpetrators can abuse their partner in the workplace including but not limited to constant phone calls, unannounced visits, following to and from work, abusive emails, making false accusations to line managers. However for some survivors the workplace is a safe haven.
- 5.2 DVA can also have an impact on a survivor's mental health. In addition some survivors misuse drugs and/or alcohol as a coping strategy if they are living with DVA. These factors are also likely to impact on an individual's ability to function normally at work; lateness, absenteeism, poor performance, poor concentration and exhaustion.
- 5.3 DVA also affects people close to the survivor and this can include work colleagues. Some effects may include:
- Being followed to or from work
  - Being subjected to questioning about the survivor's contact details or location
  - Covering for other workers during absence from work
  - Trying to deal with the abuse and fear for their own safety
  - Being unaware of the abuse or not knowing how to help

## **6. Evidence for taking action in the workplace**

- 6.1 Each year in the UK at least 3 million women experience violence
- 6.2 DVA costs UK business over £1.9 billion each year in lost economic outputs
- 6.3 In the UK in any one year, more than 20% of employed women take time off work because of DVA and 2% lose their job as a direct result of the abuse
- 6.4 75% of those experienced DVA are targeted at work
- 6.5 Statistically 25% of female employees and 16% of males in Oxford City Council will have experienced DVA and 10% of the females are currently experiencing

it.<sup>1</sup>

6.6 53% of victims of DVA are absent from work at least three days per month<sup>2</sup>

6.7 56% of abused women arrive late for work at least 5 times per month<sup>3</sup>

## **7. Additional needs**

7.1 Members of staff may have different needs and experience and these should be taken into account, for example:

- Older women are less likely to report their experiences of domestic abuse
- Disabled women are more likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual violence than non-disabled women
- Ethnic minority women face additional barriers to accessing support
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual women and men can be vulnerable to abusers who undermine their sexuality and threaten to 'out' them to colleagues, employers and family members
- Transgender women and men may have fewer services available to them
- Men experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence may find it more difficult to disclose abuse and may find more barriers to accessing support<sup>4</sup>

## **8. Guidelines for Managers**

8.1 Whilst the majority of violent and abusive incidents take place in the home they can occur in the workplace as well as the impact spilling into the work environment. Employers have an important part to play in referring survivors and perpetrators to specialist organisations, assisting them to access support and putting measures in place to increase their safety. Managers are able to:

- Recognise the problem – look for signs and ask
- Respond appropriately
- Refer on to appropriate help
- Record the details

### **8.2 Recognising domestic abuse**

Survivors of domestic abuse may not confide in anyone in their place of work

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<sup>1</sup> 1-5 statistics from [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence; [www.safelives.org.uk](http://www.safelives.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> The Proposed Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Duty, p7; Equality and Human Rights Commission

for a wide variety of reason. It is more likely the Manager will become aware of the situation through associated issues. The signs that an employee may be experiencing violence and abuse at home can include:

#### **Work Productivity signs**

- Persistently late without explanation or with unusual explanation, or needing to leave work early on a very regular basis
- High absenteeism without explanation or with unusual explanation
- Changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons
- Increased time being spent at work for no apparent reason i.e. arriving early and leaving late
- Upset at work due to receipt of upsetting emails, texts, phone calls

#### **Psychological signs**

- May cry frequently or be anxious at work
- Uncharacteristic depression, anxiety, distraction, problems with concentrating
- Changes in behaviour; may become quiet and withdrawn and avoid interacting with others
- Fear of partner or references to anger
- Expresses fear at leaving children home alone with their partner

#### **Physical signs**

- Repeated injuries such as bruises; the explanation for injuries that seem implausible
- Frequent and/or sudden/unexpected medical problems/sickness absence
- Fatigue
- Change in the way an employee dresses i.e. excessive clothing in summer; unkempt or dishevelled appearance
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up worn

#### **Other signs**

- Receives constant phone calls or texts from their partner or ex/partner
- Partner regularly meets the staff member outside work
- Employee appears anxious about going home
- Employee is anxious about leaving work on time

### **8.3 Managing performance and/or attendance**

Managers should be aware of the possibility of DVA when implementing either the Performance Improvement Policy and Procedure or Attendance Management Policy. If the manager suspects DVA could be the cause of poor performance or absence they should create a safe environment in which the employee is free to disclose the abuse if they wish to do so. The focus should be on supporting the employee rather than penalising. (See Appendix 3 for further information on creating a safe environment)

## **8.4 Asking the question**

Survivors of abuse may find it difficult to disclose in the absence of direct questioning because they are not sure what to say and how to start the conversation, fear of being judged or not being believed. They may also not recognise they are being abused. It is possible they are fearful about what will happen if they do disclose. There may also be cultural barriers to speaking out. Asking about DVA can generate anxiety in managers as they can be concerned about causing offence, are not sure what to do if they do disclose or may get it wrong.

If a manager suspects the employee may be suffering violence and abuse at home they should have a conversation with them in a private and safe setting. The manager can ask non-threatening questions to gently encourage the employee to open up, for example 'I have noticed recently that you are not yourself, is anything the matter?' (For a more comprehensive list of possible questions please see Appendix 3)

## **8.5 Responsibility of the Manager**

If the employee is in immediate danger the manager should call the police on 999.

The manager's role is to provide practical work related support for the employee and signpost them to specialist services (see Appendix 2 for a list of services) which can provide appropriate risk assessment, safety planning and support. If the employee does not wish to engage with a support service the manager could suggest they speak to one of the Domestic Abuse Champions within the City Council (a list of Champions can be found in Appendix 7). The manager is not responsible for stopping the abuse or assisting the employee to leave the relationship; the most dangerous time for a survivor is just before and up to 18 months following a separation.

## **8.6 Responding to a disclosure**

It is important the manager provides a supportive environment to talk. They must be non-judgemental and validate the experience of the employee with statements such as 'you do not deserve to be treated that way' (see Appendix 3 for further guidance). When a survivor discloses they are experiencing DVA it is vital that they are believed without passing judgement on the perpetrator and the employee's response. Boundaries and privacy should be respected.

## **8.7 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be maintained at all times and information can only be shared with the permission of the employee. Confidentiality can be broken only if the employee, a child or vulnerable adult is at significant risk of harm. If a child or vulnerable adult is at risk the manager should follow the procedures outlined in the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adult Policy. If the

employee is at significant risk the police should be contacted.

## **8.8 Work place safety**

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) employers have a duty to ensure, as far as possible, the health, safety and welfare of employees at work. The management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992) requires employers to assess the risk of violence to employees and make necessary arrangements for their health and safety. Once the manager is aware of domestic abuse they must discuss with the employee what measures could be put in place to keep them safe at work (see Appendix 5 for possible safety measures).

## **8.9 Time off**

If the victim needs to attend appointments for example with support services, GP, police, solicitor or housing, the manager may use their discretionary powers to allow reasonable time off. Unpaid leave should be considered if paid leave options have been exhausted.

## **8.10 Recording information**

It is essential to record concerns or disclosures of DVA. The manager should inform the victim they will be doing this but they do not need their permission to do so. All records should be kept confidential (for further guidance see Appendix 6)

## **8.11 Employees who perpetrate DVA:**

A manager may be concerned an employee is a perpetrator of DVA if:

1. If an employee directly discloses perpetrating DVA
2. An employee raises concerns about a colleague's possible abusive behaviour
3. An employee discloses being a victim of DVA and the perpetrator is also an employee

If an employee suspects a colleague is perpetrating DVA they should inform their manager in confidence. The safety of the victim and any dependents is the priority. The Whistle Blowing Policy provides protection for an employee who raises a concern in good faith.

## **8.12 Response**

If an employee is perpetrating DVA the priority for the manager is to increase safety and promote help seeking. The manager should speak to the employee in a positive, respectful manner without excusing the abuse (see Appendix 4). They may also signpost the employee to specialist support (see Appendix 2 for support services). If the manager is concerned a child or vulnerable adult is at significant risk of harm they should discuss with their safeguarding lead or the

Domestic & Sexual Abuse Coordinator and follow the Council's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy.

### **8.13 Taking disciplinary action**

DVA is a serious matter and could lead to disciplinary action in work and/or a criminal conviction. Employees may be subject to investigation under the Disciplinary Policy in the following circumstances:

- If they have committed a criminal offence, or serious evidence of assault/harassment
- If they are involved in DVA related incidents that occur in the workplace or during work time, including making threatening telephone calls or misuse of computer network
- If an employee's activities outside work have an impact on their ability to perform the role for which they are employed, or are likely to bring the Council into disrepute. This is particularly relevant for those who work with the public, with children or vulnerable adults
- If a colleague is found to be assisting an abuser in perpetrating the abuse, for example, by giving them access to facilities such as telephones or email then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence
- If an employee discloses confidential information about another employee or service user
- If it becomes evident that an employee has made a malicious allegation that another employee is perpetrating abuse, perhaps in relation to a custody battle, then this will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence and action will be taken

### **8.14 When both the victim and perpetrator are employees of the Council**

The main priority is the safety of the victim and ensuring that any actions do not increase the risk to them. Any decisions should be agreed with the victim before being actioned. Disciplinary action may be considered against the employee who is perpetrating abuse. Action may also be taken to minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or Oxford City Council's resources to further abuse or to locate the victim. Where suspension or termination of employment is being considered the manager should speak to local support services to ensure safety plans are put in place with the victim.

Mediation or couple counselling is never a recommended course of action where DVA is present.

### **8.15 Recording information**

Any disclosure of abuse or allegation of abusive behaviour should be recorded in full and kept in a secure folder (see Appendix 6 for guidance on recording information). In the event of criminal proceedings the records may be used by the police.

## 8.16 Training

Training on awareness of domestic abuse and stalking can be provided by the Domestic & Sexual Abuse Coordinator. Domestic Abuse Champions training is available free of charge and can be accessed through [www.reducingtherisk.org.uk](http://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk)

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1	List of different abuses
Appendix 2	Support Services
Appendix 3	Asking about DVA
Appendix 4	Dealing with suspected perpetrators of DVA
Appendix 5	Safety in the workplace
Appendix 6	Recording Information
Appendix 7	Domestic Abuse Champions

## Appendix 1

### List of different abuses<sup>5</sup>

There are 3 categories of risk;

1. Standard – there are no indicators of serious harm
2. Medium – there are identifiable indicators of serious harm. The offender has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances
3. High – there are identifiable indicators of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious

Risk of Serious Harm (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006):

‘A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’

<b>Physical abuse</b>			
No	Standard	Moderate	High
Never, or not currently	Slapping, pushing; no injuries.	Slapping, pushing; lasting pain or mild, light bruising or shallow cuts.	Noticeable bruising, lacerations, pain, severe contusions, burns, broken bones; threats and attempts to kill partner, children, relatives or pets; Strangulation or holding under water; loss of consciousness; use of (or threats to use) weapons; head injury, internal injury, permanent injury, miscarriage.
<b>Sexual abuse</b>			
No	Standard	Moderate	High
Never, or not currently	Use of sexual insults.	Uses pressure to obtain sex; unwanted touching; nonviolent acts that make victim feel uncomfortable about sex, their gender identity or sexual orientation.	Uses threats or force to obtain sex, rape, serious sexual assault; deliberately inflicts pain during sex, combines sex and violence including weapons; sexually abuses children and forces partner to watch; enforced prostitution; intentional transmission of STIs/HIV/AIDS.
<b>Harassment or stalking</b>			
No	Standard	Moderate	High
Never or not currently	Occasional phone calls, texts and emails.	Frequent phone calls, texts, emails.	Constant/obsessive phone calls, texts or emails; uninvited visits to home, workplace etc or loitering; destroys or vandalises property; pursues victim after separation, stalking; threats of suicide/homicide to victim and other family members; threats of sexual violence; involvement of others in the stalking behaviour.
<b>Jealous or controlling behaviour/emotional abuse</b>			

<sup>5</sup> CAADA-DASH MARAC Risk Indicator Checklist for the identification of high risk domestic abuse, stalking and ‘honour’ based violence

No	Standard	Moderate	High
Never or not currently	Made to account for victim's time; some isolation from family/friends or support network; put down in public.	Increased control over victim's time; significant isolation from family and friends; intercepting mail or phone calls; controls access to money; irrational accusations of infidelity; constant criticism of role as partner/wife/mother.	Controls most or all of victim's daily activities; prevention from taking medication or accessing care needs (especially relevant for survivors with disabilities); extreme dominance, e.g. believes absolutely entitled to partner, partner's services, obedience, loyalty - no matter what; extreme jealousy, e.g. "If I can't have you, no one can" - with belief that the abuser will act on this; locks person up or severely restricts their movements; threatens to take the children; suicide/homicide/familiacide threats; involvement of wider family members; crimes in the name of 'honour'; threats to expose sexual activity to family members, religious or local community via photos, online (e.g. Facebook) or in public places.

## Appendix 2

### Support Services for Victims

Local	Website	Telephone
Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service	<a href="http://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk">www.reducingtherisk.org.uk</a>	0800 731 0055
Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC)	<a href="http://www.osarcc.org.uk">www.osarcc.org.uk</a>	0800 783 6294
SAFE! (for young people)	<a href="http://www.safeproject.org.uk">www.safeproject.org.uk</a>	0800 133 7938
<b>National</b>		
National 24hr Helpline	<a href="http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk">www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk</a>	0808 200 0247
Men's Advice Line	<a href="http://www.mensadvice.org.uk">www.mensadvice.org.uk</a>	0808 801 0327
Galop (LGBT)	<a href="http://www.galop.org.uk">www.galop.org.uk</a>	0300 999 5428
Karma Nirvana (HBV)	<a href="http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk">www.karmanirvana.org.uk</a>	0800 599 9247
Stalking Helpline	<a href="http://www.stalkinghelpline.org">www.stalkinghelpline.org</a>	0808 802 0300

### Support Services for Perpetrators

National	Website	Telephone
Respect Helpline	<a href="http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk">www.respectphoneline.org.uk</a>	0808 802 4040

## **Appendix 3**

### **Asking about Domestic Violence and Abuse<sup>6</sup>**

Victims living with DVA say they are glad when someone asks them about their relationship, so be brave: ask the question, open the dialogue.

#### **Top 10 things to remember:**

1. Victim's safety: always be guided by the need to keep the victim and their children safe. This includes making sure you have privacy for the conversation, and know where you can refer for immediate help. Always put the victim's and children's safety first. Leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for a victim; if they are considering leaving encourage them to talk to the local domestic abuse service for support and safety planning.
2. Difficult to talk: the victim might not want to talk right now, or even acknowledge what is happening to them. They might be ashamed or embarrassed. Give them space and time to talk – if you have not got time now arrange a convenient time where you can.
3. Do not push: this conversation is the start of a process – victims take time to feel comfortable and open up. Do not push them to reveal what they are not comfortable with.
4. Culture/religion: this is never an excuse for domestic abuse. Do not let cultural concerns stand in the way of supporting a victim of abuse.
5. Interpreting: never use children or family members as interpreters. Try Language Line, or a professional interpreter, but make sure the victim is happy with the interpreter.
6. Children: make sure you know your child protection/safeguarding procedures, and make them clear to the victim – do not promise to keep a secret if you will have to disclose under child protection.
7. Rapport: domestic violence and abuse is hard for victims to talk about. Take time to put the victim at ease and build up a rapport – this applies to everyone in your setting; people are more likely to disclose if they feel they can trust you.
8. On-going support: whether the victim discloses or not, be prepared to ask them again in future if they are all right. Make sure they know they can always talk to you.
9. Referring on: give the victim the contact details of the local domestic abuse helpline. Check it is safe to have this. The local helpline will give them access to a range of services for example face to face outreach worker and help with safety

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Bristol City Council – Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy and Guidelines 2012

planning and options available to them.

10. Immediate risk of serious harm: if the victim says they are worried for their own or their children's immediate safety, refer on to the police. Do not ever try to resolve the abuse yourself.

### **What can I say to start the conversation?**

- I am concerned about how you are; would you like to come and have a chat?
- How are things with your partner?
- How are things at home?
- Does your partner treat you well?
- Has your partner ever hit you?
- Are you ever afraid at home?
- Is someone hurting you?
- Have you ever been forced to do anything you didn't want to do?
- I see you have a bruise on your face/body, has someone hit you?

### **Essential things you can say:**

- It is not your fault and you don't deserve it. No one deserves to be hurt, scared or controlled by their partner or anyone else.
- You are not alone – it has happened to lots of other people and lots of them go on to make new safer lives for themselves and their children. There are people who can help and want to help.
- You, your neighbours, family or friends can always call the police in an emergency. You can call 999 – it is their job to protect us and to prevent crime and that includes domestic violence and abuse.
- If you want to leave your partner now, even just for a break to get some rest and some time to think, I can help you make contact with someone who can support you to safely do that.
- Whatever you decide to do, you can always come back to see me again; I care what happens to you.
- Is there someone else you would prefer to talk to? I don't mind if you don't feel able to talk to me.

### **What not to do?**

- Pressurise the victim into a specific course of action
- Promise confidentiality. Do explain the limits of confidentiality and safeguarding duties
- Attempt to discuss the issue with the perpetrator
- Send anything home informing individuals of a disclosure of DVA
- Attempt to provide mediation between partners
- Recommend couple counselling, mediation or anger management as suitable solutions
- Be judgemental of the individual's choices and actions
- Stop supporting the individual once you have referred to another agency
- Encourage them to leave their partner unless they have specialist support to do so safely

## Appendix 4

### Dealing with suspected perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse<sup>7</sup>

Managers and colleagues are not expected to attempt to identify perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse. However, if you have concerns about an employee's behaviour, the following guidance may be of use.

*Although they do not always imply that an individual is a perpetrator, the following signs may be indicative that an employee is perpetrating DVA:*

- Uncharacteristic lateness or absence with no explanation
- Repeated injuries/scratches/bite marks/bruised knuckles/injuries to wrists or forearms
- Constant text messaging or telephoning a partner
- Jealousy or possessiveness
- Negative comments about the employee's partner or women in general

*If an individual discloses abuse behaviour, these are useful questions to ask:*

- What worries you most about your behaviour?
- Your behaviour towards your partner does sound worrying, would you like to talk to a specialist who can help you?
- It sounds like your behaviour can be frightening; does your partner ever say that they are frightened of you?
- How are your children affected?
- If you are made aware of concerns that an employee may be perpetrating domestic violence and abuse by another employee, it is important that you do not take any actions that may lead to repercussions for that individual.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Bristol City Council – Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy and Guidelines 2012

## **Appendix 5**

### **Safety in the workplace**

The following steps should be considered when assessing the safety of an employee. The list is not exhaustive and the victim should be consulted on what they believe would keep them safe in the workplace:

- Identifying an emergency contact person in case the manager is unable to contact the employee
- Identify a code word or words known to the manager or support colleague which indicates help is needed
- Screen, track and record telephone calls where necessary
- Change email address and telephone number if applicable
- Provide a meeting room away from public areas for the victim to meet with domestic abuse support workers or domestic abuse champion
- Instruct and train staff on how not to reveal information to others such as location and movements of the victim
- Have an emergency plan in place
- The manager can keep the originals or copies of important documents such as birth certificate and driving licence in a secure place for the victim
- Ascertain if the victim has a protection order and if the conditions include 'not to enter, remain or access any premises the protected person occupies or works in' and 'not to contact'.
- Provide evidence of abusive communications to the police and to the abuser's employee if emanating from their workplace (CAUTION – only if the victim and abuser have separated)
- With permission of the victim provide reception and security staff a photo of the abuser
- Look into alternative working hours or work location

## Appendix 6

### Recording Information

This offers general guidance to recording a disclosure of domestic violence and abuse.

1. You should record all disclosures of DVA, for your own safety and the victim's, and should tell the victim that you will do this, including explaining who will have access to the record. You do not need the victim's consent.
2. Record the date, time and setting in which the abuse happened.
3. Record non-judgementally, using the words that the victim used (e.g. "John hit me with a hammer" not "client has experienced physical violence.") Use words like "stated" and "said", not "alleged" or "claimed."
4. Record your observations: how the victim appears, physical, emotional and behavioural signs that they are experiencing DVA.
5. Make it clear if you are recording interpretation or conclusions that you have drawn, which are not what the victim has stated (e.g. "I think that Jane is being denied access to food because she has lost a lot of weight recently and cannot give a reason for it.")
6. If the victim minimises or tries to excuse the abuse, make it clear in any record that this is minimising or excusing, and that this is not a reason for abuse to happen.
7. Always keep notes confidential and under no circumstances allow abusers to see these. This may include having a separate file for the victim e.g. if they live together and have a shared housing record.
8. Never write anything about disclosure on something that the victim will take home. If you work to rules that give clients rights to copies of their own records, make sure disclosure notes are in the "exempt" part of the notes, which will not be copied.
9. If there are previous notes for the victim, review these to see if there have been previous disclosures or evidence of abuse, and if so, what happened as a result.
10. Discuss all disclosures with supervising manager e.g. line manager or safeguarding lead, according to local protocols for information sharing.
11. Sign and date any record

Adapted from guidance by South Ayrshire Council and Mid-Cheshire NHS Trust

## Appendix 7

### Domestic Abuse Champions

There are a number of domestic abuse champions within the Council. They have received additional training on domestic abuse, risk assessment and management. The Champions will be able to provide support and advice if you have had a disclosure and are unsure what to do next. If the victim is willing, following disclosure, they can be assessed for the risk posed to them. The Champions able to do this are highlighted in red. The Designated MARAC Officers (DMO) will make the referral to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for high risk victims. The Champions are:

Name	Post
Liz Jones	Domestic & Sexual Abuse Lead and ASBIT Manager
Jan Robinson (DMO)	Sanctuary Scheme Coordinator
Nick Prior	Community Response Officer
Sara Malyon	Principal Lead Officer
Dee Gabbidon	Housing Officer
Mel Armstrong	Housing Officer
Louise Gallagher	Housing Officer
Kate Warrington (DMO)	Housing Officer
Jackie Mogridge	Tenancy Relations Officer
Alison Cassidy	ASBIT Officer
Jubeen Ashraf	Housing Officer
Linda Campbell	Customer Services Officer
Karima Ward	Housing Officer
Eunice Mubi	Housing Officer
Beata Patok	Customer Services Officer
Leanne Cooper	Customer Services Officer