

## Domestic Abuse Review Group

This scoping template is designed to assist councillors and officers in establishing the focus of a scrutiny Review Group. Specifically, the scoping template emphasises the need for scrutiny Review Groups to have a clear purpose, rationale and focus for their work, and to make the best use of the resources available within a given time frame. This document will act as a reference guide throughout the review process to ensure the review remains focused on its intended purpose.

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| <b>Review Topic</b>                        | Domestic Abuse Review Group   |
| <b>Chair / lead member</b>                 | Councillor Shaista Aziz (Chair)   |
| <b>Review Group Members</b>                | Six members: 3 Labour, 2 Lib Dem, 1 Green<br><br>Councillor Shaista Aziz (Chair)<br>Councillor Tom Landell Mills<br>Councillor Mark Lygo<br>Councillor Craig Simmons<br>Councillor Sian Taylor<br>Councillor Liz Wade   |
| <b>Officer support and allocated hours</b> | The Scrutiny Officer will support the Review Group around existing committee and panel commitments. Approximately 10 hours a week will be dedicated to producing meeting notes, agendas, organising guests, research and drafting reports. Council officers from Community Safety, Housing Services and Community Services will also provide technical advice, though their capacity to support the review may be limited among other commitments.  |
| <b>Background and rationale</b>            | <p>Definition: The government's domestic abuse bill, currently before parliament identifies the key characteristics of domestic abuse as being by individual aged 16 or over, that the perpetrator and victim are personally connected, and that the behaviour is abusive. Abusive behaviour can consist of: physical or sexual violence, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, or psychological abuse.</p> <p>Background: Though the stresses of Covid-19 have increased incidents of domestic abuse and lockdown policies have exacerbated the danger by removing the pressure valve of leaving the house, domestic abuse is not a new issue. Prior to its raised profile during Covid, it was estimated that just under 6% of adults aged 16 to 74 suffered domestic abuse in 2019,<sup>1</sup> with an estimated third of all women aged between 16 and 59 expected to experience it in their lifetimes, and two women a week being killed by current or former partners in that year.<sup>2</sup> Prevalent and deadly before Covid, the pandemic has led to vastly increased</p> |

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenlandandwalesoverview/november2019#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Crime%20Survey,last%20year%20\(Figure%201\).&text=The%20remaining%2057%25%20\(746%2C219\),as%20domestic%20abuse%2Drelated%20crimes.](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenlandandwalesoverview/november2019#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Crime%20Survey,last%20year%20(Figure%201).&text=The%20remaining%2057%25%20(746%2C219),as%20domestic%20abuse%2Drelated%20crimes.)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/forms-of-violence-and-abuse/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-the-facts/>

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|   | <p>incidences of domestic abuse, with the charity Refuge reporting in May increases of 957% for visits to its website.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>For victims of abuse, leaving their abuser often involves leaving their home. 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. One class of people fleeing abuse, however, face an even more acute challenge, those without recourse to public funds, for the government does not consider such people to be eligible for what refuge capacity is available. Eligibility criteria for recourse to public funds rely on whether a person is subject to immigration control, meaning having no recourse to public funds is an issue experienced by members of BAME communities (though not all BAME communities). As an ethnically diverse city, where even in 2011 almost 20% of residents were born in non-EU countries, the link between domestic abuse and homelessness, and the limited role the Council can play in addressing this in light of legislation around recourse to public funds is particularly pertinent.</p>   |
| <p><b>Purpose of Review / Objective</b></p> | <p>The Review Group recognises that domestic abuse is a broad topic, the management of which requires multiple interventions from multiple agencies, and that Oxford City Council does not have the same statutory duties in this area as other stakeholders. To ensure the greatest impact of the review, the Review Group seeks to focus on those areas relating to domestic abuse where Oxford is a lead: homelessness, working with BAME communities, and its own processes. The Review Group therefore seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Understand the scale and consequences of domestic abuse on victims and their families</li> <li>○ Understand the prevalence of domestic abuse as a cause of homelessness, and review the adequacy of support for those facing homelessness in this situation</li> <li>○ Weigh possible solutions for any gaps in provision</li> <li>○ Consider the particular issues faced by BAME community members, particularly those without recourse to public funds and/or uncertain immigration status</li> <li>○ Identify suggestions of how the acuity of BAME domestic abuse sufferers can be mitigated</li> <li>○ Review how the Council's own processes can be improved to support people at risk of or suffering from domestic abuse</li> </ul> <p>Through this work the Review Group ultimately seeks to have measures implemented to reduce the number of people facing homelessness by dint of being victims of domestic abuse, and to improve the support available to <i>all</i> members of the community facing domestic abuse and</p> |

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52755109> (It should be noted, however, that this was not replicated in police reports or reports to local domestic abuse services across the country.)

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|                              | the prospect of homelessness.  |
| <b>Indicators of Success</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A clear understanding is gained of the options available to the Council to prevent victims of domestic abuse from suffering homelessness</li> <li>2. Ideas are formulated to support BAME community members, particularly those with no recourse to public funds, with the particular challenges posed to them by domestic abuse</li> <li>3. The majority of recommendations are agreed and implemented</li> <li>4. A strong evidence base is produced to support the need and practicability of recommendations.</li> <li>5. Greater awareness of opportunities for joined up working amongst relevant stakeholders</li> <li>6. Council adopts measures to protect better those who are suffering domestic abuse.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Out of scope</b>          | Areas relating to domestic abuse where other bodies have primary responsibility.   |
| <b>Methodology/ Approach</b> | <p>Owing to sensitivities around the subject matter of the Review Group, where talking about experiences can require immense courage and identifying individuals can put them in danger, attendance at meetings of the Review Group will be by invitation-only. With Covid precautions, all meetings will be held via Zoom. Meetings will be recorded for the purpose of keeping a record, but will not be publicly accessible. A participation agreement to set out expectations of behaviour and how meetings will be run will be developed. A disclosure form for those sharing their experience of domestic abuse, detailing their choice over how their information is used will also be developed.</p> <p>The Review Group will consider evidence to inform the consideration of its key issues. Evidence gathering is expected to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inviting written and / or verbal evidence from Council officers, key stakeholders, those with lived experience of domestic abuse and expert witnesses</li> <li>- Considering what can be learnt from other local authorities</li> <li>- Desk research.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Witnesses/ Experts</b>    | <p>The following Oxford City Council members and officers are anticipated to be invited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing</li> <li>- Councillor Marie Tidball, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities</li> <li>- Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford</li> <li>- Liz Jones, Domestic Abuse Lead</li> <li>- Nerys Parry, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, or Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager</li> <li>- Managers of the Sanctuary Scheme</li> <li>- Steven Clarke, Head of Housing</li> <li>- OCC diversity lead</li> <li>- Representatives of the Communities Team</li> <li>- Officers responsible for management of the Council's grant</li> </ul>  |

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|   | funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OCC safeguarding lead</li> </ul> External invitees may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Those with lived experience of domestic abuse, and the Sanctuary Scheme in particular</li> <li>- Laura Clements – Family Solutions Plus (Oxfordshire County Council)</li> <li>- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service</li> <li>- Thames Valley Police domestic abuse specialists</li> <li>- St Mungo's</li> <li>- Community organisation representatives</li> <li>- Clerks to the Oxford magistrates court</li> <li>- Aspire</li> <li>- Oxfordshire Against Cutting</li> <li>- Representatives from Southwark and Barking and Dagenham Councils</li> </ul> |                                  |  |
| <b>Specify Evidence Sources for Documents</b> | Documents anticipated to be referenced include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- City Council report on BAME experience to Home Office</li> </ul>   |                                  |  |
| <b>Specify Site Visits</b>                    | None  |                                  |  |
| <b>Projected start date</b>                   | Week commencing 09 November 2020  | <b>Draft Report Deadline</b>     | 15 January 2021                                  |
| <b>Meeting Frequency</b>                      | As organised  | <b>Projected completion date</b> | 21 January 2021 for Scrutiny on 02 February 2021 |

### Draft outline of meetings

(All meetings to take place via Zoom)

#### **Meeting one: Scoping (20 October 2020)**

The Review Group will finesse its draft proposal having discussed it internally, with Council officers and relevant Cabinet members.

#### **Meeting two: Domestic Abuse Overview and Understanding the City Council's role (09 November 2020)**

The Review Group will consider a presentation/report from Liz Jones on:

- What is domestic abuse?
- The prevalence of domestic abuse, nationally and locally, with reference to the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown in particular
- Who is responsible for what in responding to domestic abuse, and specifically what is the City Council's role?
- What is domestic abuse like, and what are its effects on sufferers and their families?

- Testimony of those with lived experience of domestic abuse

### **Meeting three: Homelessness and Domestic Abuse (18 November 2020)**

The Review Group will hear from relevant officers and external witnesses to consider the following:

- Prevalence of homelessness arising from domestic abuse
- Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's response, particularly the Sanctuary Scheme
  - Service user feedback from users of the Sanctuary Scheme
- Opportunities to amend the Council's domestic tenancy agreements to mitigate the impacts of domestic abuse, particularly regarding homelessness
- Options to encourage domestic abusers to leave properties without ending tenancies for remaining occupants

### **Meeting four: BAME-specific issues, including No Recourse to Public Funds (08 December 2020)**

The Review Group will hear from relevant officers and external witnesses to consider the following:

- The particular issues and challenges facing BAME sufferers of domestic abuse, in particular those with no recourse to public funds and or uncertain immigration status. This will include consideration of a recent feedback report on BAME-specific issues written following a Home Office funded project and delivered by the Council.
  - Experience BAME community members (if possible to organise)
- The support required by BAME communities in recognising and supporting victims of domestic abuse and what good practice can be learnt from successful schemes elsewhere
- The Council's current work with community groups, including grant funding, and the opportunities for partnering in preventative activity

### **Meeting five: Additional Council Measures and Interventions (17 December 2020)**

The Review Group will hear from relevant officers and external witnesses to consider the following:

- The robustness of the Council's own processes in identifying and supporting victims of domestic abuse, including its support for its own staff who are experiencing domestic abuse
- Opportunities for training and awareness raising to prevent or reduce the impact of domestic abuse
- Consideration of the Safeguarding Families Plus approach, and broader measures to reduce the environmental factors in which domestic abuse might take place
- How can the Council work better with partners when it identifies domestic abuse?
- Reviewing the learning from Southwark and Barking and Dagenham Councils on domestic abuse

This meeting will also be an opportunity to catch up on with any issues/speakers delayed from previous meetings.

**Meeting six: Recommendation Forming (22 December 2020)**

Test initial draft recommendations with officers and relevant Cabinet members and form agreed draft recommendations

**Meeting seven: Agreement of Final Report (21 January 2021)**

The Review Group will review the draft report provided by the Scrutiny Officer, and identify changes needed prior to submission to Scrutiny on 02 February 2021, and Cabinet on 10 February 2021.