

Bath & North East Somerset multi-agency domestic abuse consensus statement

1. Introduction

It is estimated that least 30% of women and 17% of men in England and Wales have experienced domestic abuse at some time. These figures are likely to be an underestimate, because all types of domestic violence and abuse are under-reported (NICE, 2016).

The terms domestic violence and domestic abuse are often used interchangeably and for the purpose of this statement, domestic abuse will be used to describe a range of behaviours that include violence and other forms of abuse.

Domestic abuse happens in all cultures and social groups, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, disability and sexuality and can have a devastating effect on individuals, their families, workplaces and the communities where they live.

2. Consensus statement

- **Multi-agency working**

We recognise that we cannot work in isolation to tackle domestic abuse as the effects are so wide ranging and varied and it affects people in different ways. We will develop multi-agency initiatives aimed at prevention, early identification, advice and support for victims, and working with perpetrators, including awareness raising and provision of information.

- **Encourage disclosure and early help**

We commit to creating a culture within Bath and North East Somerset in which disclosure is encouraged through:

- Increased awareness of what types of behaviours are abusive
- Re-iteration that abuse in any form is unacceptable
- Creating safe opportunities and environments for disclosure
- Ensuring all relevant staff are trained to the minimum appropriate level

Many victims of domestic abuse will not approach agencies and it is vital that when help is sought it is offered in an appropriate and consistent manner. We are committed to ensuring that their services we deliver or commission are proactive at identifying domestic abuse early and can provide or refer to high quality care from a trained and competent workforce. We will raise awareness to ensure that all staff fully understand the role they play in tackling domestic abuse to develop a consistent approach across Bath and North East Somerset.

Our services should ensure that they can provide a safe and private environment in which people feel able to disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

- **Support for victims of domestic abuse**

It is important that people who disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse can access appropriate support. This should include support for any children who are affected. Specialist support services can help to address the emotional, psychological, physical and

sexual harms arising from domestic abuse. They can offer advice, help to develop plans for the future and increase the safety of those affected.

We will ensure there are clear referral pathways based on an understanding of local need and evidence of best practice. We will ensure cases are referred to specialist agencies, who will give advice on all aspects of dealing with domestic abuse and support people suffering from domestic abuse or the threat of domestic abuse.

All organisations should have their own staff policies to support staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse.

- **Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

We will ensure robust information sharing protocols in line with the Care Act and Data Protection Act.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 allows for the exchange of information where it is for the prevention or detection of crime or for the apprehension or the prosecution of offenders.

We will only share information with other agencies with written consent unless we are required to do so for safeguarding reasons.

We will explain to victims the importance of the processes in dealing with domestic abuse and that it may be necessary to disclose information to other agencies that may be able to offer help and support.

- **Training and guidance for Staff**

People experiencing domestic abuse should expect staff to respond consistently and appropriately. They should be questioned sensitively and responded to with empathy and understanding. Private discussion with trained staff should allow assessment of the person's immediate safety in order to prevent further incidents.

Frontline staff should be trained and able to respond to disclosures of domestic violence and abuse to a level appropriate to their role.

We will ensure staff receive appropriate training and guidance to ensure that they fully understand the role they play in tackling domestic abuse and to provide a consistent approach across services.

- **Work with perpetrators**

Providing support for perpetrators can reduce the incidence of domestic abuse. People who disclose that they are perpetrating domestic abuse should be referred to evidence-based specialist services. Health and social care practitioners should identify available local services and know how to access these.

3. Guiding principles

In line with the national Violence Against Women and Girls (VAGW) action plan, we will adopt the following principles:

- **Prevent** domestic abuse from happening in the first place by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it. Prevent abusive behaviour becoming entrenched and perpetrators moving from one victim to another.
- **Provide timely and adequate levels** of support where abuse occurs reducing the need for crisis intervention. A fully rounded approach which makes the links with wider vulnerabilities including child sexual exploitation, substance misuse and mental health. This should include addressing the immediate safety and longer-term therapeutic needs of children who live in or visit households where there is domestic abuse
- Work in **partnership** with the Domestic Abuse Partnership providing leadership to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families.
- Take action to prevent **perpetrators** from abusing in the future and ensuring the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes.

4. Purpose

The purpose of this consensus statement is to ensure that people experiencing domestic abuse or the threat of domestic abuse in Bath and North East Somerset receive accurate and consistent advice, guidance and support to enable them make informed decisions that help keep them and any children they are responsible for safe.

The aims of this consensus statement are to:

- Raise awareness of domestic abuse and ensure that a high profile is maintained across the organisations.
- Enable practitioners and managers to apply a consistent approach.
- Ensure that practitioners understand that best practice will involve empowering the non-abusive parent/carer/adult to make positive choices and increase their safety and that of any children, whilst working with other agencies to hold the abuser responsible and accountable for their actions.
- Identify, support and protect children and young people in Bath and North East Somerset who are affected by domestic abuse and to help them have happier, healthier, safer lives.
- Identify, support and protect adults who may be at risk or vulnerable to domestic abuse due to their age, social isolation or because they are disabled.
- Identify, support and protect adults who may be at risk of domestic abuse due to drug and/or alcohol dependency and/or mental health.
- Ensure that perpetrators can be referred to evidence-based support and intervention.
- Acknowledge and work to reduce the negative impact of domestic abuse within all communities across Bath and North East Somerset.

5. Scope

This statement covers domestic abuse in adults and young people aged 16 years and over. It covers adults and young people who are experiencing (or have experienced) domestic violence or abuse, as well as adults and young people perpetrating domestic violence or

abuse. It also covers children and young people under 16 years who are affected by domestic abuse that is not directly perpetrated against them.

This consensus statement applies in Bath and North East Somerset to:

- partner agencies who are either service providers or commissioners
- health and social care practitioners
- service users
- local Safeguarding Children Board
- local Safeguarding Adults Board

This statement applies equally across all staff and client groups regardless whether a person is disabled, or their age (for those 16 years or over), ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity and marriage/civil partnership status.

6. Policy context

NICE Review and Guidance

Detailed guidance resulting from their 2013 systematic review was published by NICE in February 2014. The NICE guidance provides very wide-ranging recommendations for everyone working in health and social care whose work brings them into contact with people who experience or perpetrate domestic violence and abuse. The recommendations include: effective strategies for commissioning and the development of integrated care pathways; how to create environments which support safe and appropriate disclosure; improving access to services which improves a comprehensive referral pathway; the provision of tailored services which take account of the needs of different population groups including those with existing mental health conditions.

Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

This is an important tool in delivering concerted action across government departments on the domestic abuse agenda. The focus on prevention and early intervention in the 2016 action plan is important.

7. Legal context

We recognise our legal duties and obligations under the following legislation.

- Family Law Act 1996
- Children's Act 1989
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Housing Act 1996
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Care Act 2014
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Equalities Act 2010
- Local Government Act 2000
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991.

8. Definition and measurement

Domestic abuse is defined by the Home Office (2013) 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.' (Home Office, 2013)

This definition includes so-called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. Victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

This definition recognises that past legal and cultural understanding of domestic abuse have been too narrowly focused on single physically violent incidents rather than complex and controlling patterns of behaviour.

It is recognised that the desire to exert power and control in family, domestic and intimate relationships underpins the majority of domestic abuse which takes place, and that abuse is usually inflicted to achieve this end.

Measurement of the prevalence of domestic abuse is difficult, and there are a range of sources of measurement, all of which have substantial weaknesses. However, the wide range of available sources all point in the same direction, indicating that domestic abuse is widespread.

9. Implementation

Partner agencies will sign-up to this consensus statement but will also have their own agency specific policies, procedures and/or guidance to fully implement this policy statement and deliver on the stated aims.

It is recognised that effective implementation of this is dependent on a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

To achieve the aims and objectives of this statement, partner agencies will:

- Publicise the consensus statement
- Enable staff to attend relevant induction and training
- Publicise contact details of local support agencies

10. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

This multi-agency consensus statement will be reviewed every three years by the Bath and North East Somerset Domestic Abuse Partnership, but may be reviewed sooner if this is warranted by a change in law or national policy.

We will review the effectiveness of this statement on an annual basis. To ensure continuous improvement we will make the necessary amendments to this policy to address any changes in legislation best practice and operational issues.

References

Home Office (2013) 'Information for Local Areas on the change to the Definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse' [online] Available from:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/142701/guide-on-definition-of-dv.pdf

Home Office (2016) Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016 – 2020 [online] Available from:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522166/VAWG_Strategy_FINAL_PUBLICATION_MASTER_vRB.PDF

NICE (2016) Domestic violence and abuse quality standards. [online] Available from:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs116/resources/domestic-violence-and-abuse-75545301469381>