

BURY DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2015-18

Building stronger, safer communities

Foreword

Domestic violence is a national scandal. Across the country, one in four women and one in six men will be affected by domestic abuse at some point in their lives whilst two people lose their lives each and every week.

Living with violence – as a victim or as a family member – makes an everlasting impression. Repeat victims pay an even heavier price in terms of their health and well being, their sense of self worth and relationships with others. The cost to society is also high. Support from statutory agencies for each high risk victim and their families is put at £20,000 per case, mainly on crisis intervention rather than work to break the cycle or prevent future occurrences.

Only responding to problems when they are serious enough to warrant criminal intervention is not acceptable to us in Bury. We want to put an end to domestic abuse and create a society where every family is safe. This means focussing our activities on early identification, prevention and victim support as well as prosecution.

With this in mind, we have identified four key objectives to help us achieve our goal:

- 1.Improving prevention and early intervention
- 2.Changing behaviours and attitudes
- 3.Strong leadership and management
- 4.Reducing repeat victimisation



Chief Supt Chris Sykes
Greater Manchester
Police and Chair of the
Bury Community Safety
Partnership

Achieving these objectives will be challenging. It will require work across agencies to identify people at risk at a much earlier stage. We also need to respond better to the problem – particularly repeat incidences – if we are to make inroads into the numbers. In relation to high numbers of repeat incidents we need to continue to improve our local response. Raising awareness and improving local intelligence is essential to improving prevention and understanding what works, whilst ensuring perpetrators are held to account.

Building on work that has already been undertaken in Bury, this Strategy sets out a robust framework for real change. We believe it captures the elements necessary to successfully challenge abuse and help our residents lead safe, happy and healthy lives.



Cllr Mike Connolly,
Leader of Bury Council
and Police and Crime
Lead for Greater
Manchester

Introduction and Context

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone at any stage in their life, regardless of age, gender, social status, religion, sexuality or ethnicity. It is defined broadly and encompasses:

'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 definition includes 'honour based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage)'.

In 2014/15, the Bury division of GM Police recorded 3,960 incidents of domestic abuse. However national prevalence figures suggest that a district of Bury's size and composition should expect to have in the region of 6,200 incidents. This is a sizeable gap. As there is no evidence that Bury is significantly different from comparator localities, the most likely cause is significant under reporting of incidents; a view supported by anecdotal evidence that many victims, particularly those suffering emotional, financial and sexual abuse are reluctant to come forward.

Of those that do report abuse, approximately 10% are assessed to be high risk. These victims are monitored by a multi agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) which affords access to a greater range of support services to protect victims and manage the risks. Resources preclude the same level of support being provided to standard or lower risk cases although it is from the lower risk categories where all domestic homicides over the past few years have occurred.

Whilst recognising that under reporting is an issue, the statistics we do have challenge common preconceptions of domestic violence. Females remain the single highest category of victim but the number of males suffering abuse is growing. There are also increasing incidents among same sex couples. Given this position, it is difficult to adopt a 'one size fits all' approach. People's needs and circumstances are different. Achieving the right balance between consistency of practice, meeting individual needs and recognising the interests of the wider community will be fundamental to improving outcomes for local people.

Bury's Community Safety Plan and the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Plan make domestic violence a priority. This strategy supports that ambition by seeking to reduce repeat incidents and working towards breaking cycles of abuse. Emphasis has to be given to prevention – tackling the issue at an early stage to divert more people away from the risk of harm and high cost, statutory interventions. To do this we have to get a better understanding of the nature and scale of the problem and tailor advice and support to individual needs. Otherwise it is unlikely that we will be able to stop people with lower level needs becoming priority cases or repeat victims.

Improving prevention and early intervention

Identifying and protecting those at risk of, and/or experiencing, domestic abuse.



Gathering the evidence

It is recognised that Bury's approach to understanding the needs of victims requires further improvement. Gaps in reporting means that we have been unable to build up a true picture of the problem. This will be addressed by promoting a better co-ordinated approach. Victims should have confidence to report incidents and employees should have the knowledge, skills and professional curiosity to recognise the signs of abuse and report those concerns. Data accurately recorded and readily available is essential in identifying high risk victims, trends, hotspots/disparities and other themes which should inform our decision making.

Knowing what is available

The long-term effects of domestic abuse are devastating. Many victims find it difficult to function in their daily lives, making them less able to leave the abusive relationship. They frequently suffer from a range of illnesses including mental health problems and can become isolated from friends and family. Having access to advice and information is an important first step.

Communication



The cycle of abuse

At least 950,000 children a year in Britain witness some form of domestic abuse. In Bury, 65% of reported incidents involve families with children and witnessing these events could be having a long term impact upon their emotional and physical development. Children growing up in violent households often suffer from behavioural and emotional problems and are more likely to use illegal substances, break the law, drop out of school and become offenders themselves – perpetuating a cycle of abuse for generations.

We will:

- Identify key contacts within each agency/department to lead on domestic abuse issues and act as a channel into services for other agencies.
- Train staff to recognise potential signs, assess risk and know where to get help.
- Develop a common approach to identifying risks & making referrals, with tools to help practitioners intervene early.
- Make it easier for people who are (or feel) subjected to abuse to access information and advice.
- Build our understanding and awareness of honour based violence and Female Genital Mutilation and the support services available.
- Work to break the cycle of abuse by engaging with individuals, families and communities to raise awareness, promote self help and increase capacity for effective early intervention.

Changing behaviours and attitudes

Working with victims and perpetrators to reduce the risks of re-offending.

Knowing what works

There has been a long standing focus on tackling the symptoms of domestic abuse and a range of services are already in place for victims and survivors. We need to understand how effective these services are, whether individuals feel protected as a result and how we can intervene effectively to stop the abuse happening in the first place. Requiring victims to leave a relationship may not be feasible. It may not be what the victim wants. Accordingly, we need to better understand behaviours to help promote safe and sustainable relationships. We need to develop services that are sufficiently flexible even where victims wish to remain in a relationship with their abusive partner.



Increasing victim resilience

Domestic abuse seriously undermines the confidence and self esteem of the victims. We therefore need information, advice and training that improves the mental as well as physical well being of individuals. We need to better understand the evidence base for the programmes currently in use. Future commissioning must ensure that advice or training is less rigid, encourages people to take ownership of their situation and reflects the complexities of modern relationships.

Tackling the other half

Breaking the cycle of abuse can only happen if we engage properly with perpetrators. Awareness raising and/or disapproving of their actions is not enough. We need to understand what triggers the behaviour and help perpetrators develop coping strategies which will stop the violence and other forms of abuse. Such a programme will be vital to attaining a more sustainable approach to reducing offending behaviour and the demand it puts on public services.



We will:

- Review existing provision in terms of quality and effectiveness, identifying any gaps/duplication in services.
- Work with agencies to build a collaborative approach towards addressing domestic abuse.
- Support campaigns (such as White Ribbon) to raise awareness and promote zero tolerance.
- Review existing training and support programmes for victims and perpetrators to improve their impact on future behaviours.
- Work with agencies in the criminal justice system to establish voluntary perpetrator programmes which challenge offending behaviour and reduce the incidence of repeated domestic abuse.

Strong leadership and management

Targeting resources to improve outcomes for individuals and families.

Building safer communities

Whist Team Bury is developing a good track record for translating local ambitions into actions, domestic violence is not the domain of a single agency and is seldom an isolated event. Only by working together can agencies tackle the wider household circumstances (such as housing, debt, addiction and unemployment) that frequently accelerate breakdowns in relationships.

Partnership working in Bury is strong, mechanisms are in place to coordinate intelligence. The adoption of domestic abuse as a shared priority by the Community Safety Partnership provides the necessary leadership. From this positive starting position, services can work together to maximise capacity, present a coherent approach to the problem and align resources to make a difference to local people. Agencies working together means better, more timely help for those at risk.



Resources

As pressure on funding mounts, we have to maximise the use of resources to deliver our ambitions. With each high risk case costing around £20,000, the rationale for developing preventative measures is strong and we will seek out opportunities to attract new money into the system from Government and other sources to try out new methods of working.

We will also continue to look at how we can do things better, share responsibilities and harness existing resources to drive efficiencies and reduce demand on public services. This strategy outlines the areas to be reviewed. A more detailed action plan will follow to ensure that better outcomes at reduced cost are delivered.

We will:

- Establish a common data collection and recording system for all risk categories to facilitate monitoring, tracking and future decision making.
- Develop the customer pathway to streamline referral methods and access to support.
- Map the funding allocated to domestic abuse services from all agencies to identify ways of improving the application of resources to achieve better outcomes for victims and their families.
- Coordinate agency activities to focus on reducing domestic abuse, particularly repeat offending.
- Work together at Greater Manchester level to identify opportunities to resource a consistent, coherent programme of support to victims.

Reducing repeat victimisation

Assisting people to avoid becoming frequent targets of abuse.

Changing the local picture

Of the 300+ incidents of domestic abuse reported to the Police every month, 80% will have been from people who have reported abuse in the previous twelve month period. Case studies indicate however that the victim will have suffered violence or abuse on numerous occasions perhaps over an extended period of time before it gets reported.

This is not acceptable. Everybody deserves to live in peace with dignity and respect. This strategy therefore sets out actions to promote early identification and reporting of incidents, tackle offending behaviour and support those victims at the earliest opportunity to prevent escalation and further demand on public resources.



Sustainable communities

We aspire to a place where people who are subject to abuse (in whatever form) do not suffer in silence. Learning from domestic homicide reviews tells us that whilst victims may not be known to the Police or care agencies, they all visit GPs, hospitals and other public services. We need to work with these bodies to ensure that any signs of abuse are captured and reported – and training is provided on the support that can be given.

The same goes for our localities. Communities have an important role to play in supporting families through difficult periods – preventing situations turning to crisis and thereby reducing the risk of escalation into violence or other forms of abuse.

We will:

- Consider perpetrator risk assessments when dealing with high risk victims at MARAC to aid safety planning.
- Monitor the number of repeat incidents and MARAC referrals over a 12 month rolling period to track progress.
- Develop clear protocols and methods for sharing information about people at risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse to mitigate risk.
- Further develop the 'STRIVE' initiative supporting early intervention for standard risk victims to prevent repeats. This will include work to develop a 'victims' champion network' to support these victims and their families to help prevent escalation to medium or high risk.
- Work with agencies, front line workers and voluntary organisations to build capacity within communities to identify and reduce the prevalence of repeat offending.