

# BRACKNELL FOREST DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2022-24



## Accessing support

This is a strategy document about how we in Bracknell Forest want to develop and improve our local domestic abuse services.

If you need local support now this can be accessed by contacting Berkshire Women's Aid (supporting all genders) on 0808 801 0882 (24 hours) or visiting [www.berkshireromensaid.org.uk](http://www.berkshireromensaid.org.uk) or visiting our local authority webpages [www.itsneverok.co.uk](http://www.itsneverok.co.uk)

If you are in immediate danger, please call 999, or in a non-emergency contact Thames Valley Police on 101.

Alternatively, you can contact the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Violence helpline run by Refuge on 0808 2000 247, the Men's Advice Line on 0808 801 0327 or Galop's LGBT+ domestic abuse helpline on 0800 999 5428.

## Contents

Accessing support.....	2
Foreword.....	4
1. Introduction .....	5
2. What is domestic abuse? .....	5
3. Our strategy at a glance.....	6
4. What do we know?.....	7
5. National policy and legal context.....	9
6. Strategic priorities .....	10
7. Governance and accountability .....	11

## Foreword

We are delighted to present the Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-24. This strategy outlines our wider partnership response to tackle domestic abuse in Bracknell Forest.

Domestic abuse is about power and control and can happen to anyone regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Domestic abuse is widespread in our society with 2.3 million adults in England and Wales having experienced domestic abuse in the last year<sup>1</sup>. In the year ending March 2021 there were 114 domestic homicides. Of these, 67 (59%) were killed by a partner or ex-partner, 27 (24%) were killed by a parent, son or daughter and 20 (18%) were killed by another family member<sup>2</sup>. In many cases, domestic abuse can also result in a victim taking their own life.

The impact of domestic abuse can be devastating and long lasting for both individuals and families. It can have a detrimental effect on wellbeing and mental health; lead to physical and emotional harm; have negative employment, educational and financial impacts; lead to homelessness; have a negative impact on children and family. At its extreme, domestic abuse can result in death either through homicide or suicide. As well as the impact on individuals, the impact on society is huge with the total costs of domestic abuse in England and Wales for 2016-17 being over £66bn.<sup>3</sup>

Domestic abuse has long been a priority for the Bracknell Forest Community Safety Partnership (CSP) but there is more work to be done. Due to the complexities of domestic abuse, tackling it is the responsibility of all agencies and services working across Bracknell Forest who support families and individuals affected by domestic abuse. It is crucial that organisations work collaboratively and in a coordinated way, both between and within, in order to identify victims, survivors and perpetrators at the earliest opportunity and improve the support they receive.

No one should experience domestic abuse. This strategy brings together our existing work and sets out our joint vision, priorities and commitments in responding to domestic abuse in Bracknell Forest, how it will be tackled over the next two years and outlines four strategic priorities that will be the focus of delivery.

*Councillor John Harrison*

Lead Member: Public Protection

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<sup>1</sup> [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> [The economic and social costs of domestic abuse \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

## 1. Introduction

The Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-24 builds on the work done by our previous Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017-20 which was continued during the Covid-19 pandemic and renews our commitment to build on our achievements, maintain good practice and continue to work together to develop our services for anyone affected by domestic abuse.

This strategy has been developed alongside the [Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-24](#) which was published in December 2021.

This strategy is accompanied by a work plan which is updated regularly to reflect the work being done across the partnership which supports improvement and development of our domestic abuse services in Bracknell Forest.

The Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group works together to provide strategic oversight of the multi-agency responses to domestic abuse in Bracknell Forest and has accountability for delivery of this strategy.

It is a partnership group between:

- Bracknell Forest Council (BFC)
- Thames Valley Police (TVP)
- Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT)
- Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA)
- Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Kaleidoscopic UK
- National Probation Service (NPS)
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley (OPCC)
- Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS)
- Silva Homes
- South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS).

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on the Local Authority to appoint a multi-agency domestic abuse Local Partnership Board (LPB). The Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group has been reviewed and amended so that it complies with this statutory requirement.

## 2. What is domestic abuse?

This strategy adopts the Government's statutory definition of domestic abuse introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021<sup>4</sup>:

Behaviour of a person towards another person if they are aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following: physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological,

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<sup>4</sup> [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

“Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on the victim’s ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

“Personally connected” to each other includes if they are, or have been, married to each other; they are, or have been, civil partners of each other; they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated); they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated); they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other; they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child; they are relatives.

The Act also recognises that children can be victims of domestic abuse where they see or hear, or experience the effects of, the abuse, and are related to the perpetrator or victim.

### **3. Our strategy at a glance**

Bracknell Forest Council and its partners are committed to delivering an effective domestic abuse strategy for those living and working in and visiting Bracknell Forest. We want Bracknell Forest to be a place where everyone can live safe lives without the threat or experience of domestic abuse. For those who are experiencing domestic abuse, we want to ensure they can get help to end the abuse and live safer lives.

The key priority groups intended to benefit from this strategy are:

- Adults, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse
- Children, young people and adults at risk exposed to or witnessing domestic abuse
- Those who perpetrate domestic abuse

This strategy responds to domestic abuse in the context of abuse (predominantly) within intimate relationships, but also taking into account familial domestic abuse.

The Government’s [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan](#), published in March 2022, sets out national priorities. To deliver our vision in Bracknell Forest, we will work in line with the national framework with clear objectives that reflect the local need in Bracknell Forest. Through this domestic abuse strategy and our work plan, we commit to work together to tackle domestic abuse through these four main strategic priorities:

#### **1. Prevention and early intervention**

Effective preventive educational programmes, a skilled and resourced workforce, promotion of a culture of prevention and earlier intervention, and challenging attitudes and behaviours which foster domestic abuse.

#### **2. Provision of services**

Responsive, effective, joined up support for victims at risk of, or subjected to domestic abuse and its reoccurrence.

#### **3. Enforcement and management of perpetrators**

Reducing the risk to victims by holding perpetrators to account and supporting them to change their behaviour.

#### **4. Working in partnership**

Recognising the adverse impact of domestic abuse and the need to promote change through joint commitment, leadership and partnership working.

These strategic priorities are for all people, regardless of gender, sex, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion.

## **4. What do we know?**

### **National picture**

Domestic abuse remains a largely under reported crime. Data from agencies can be helpful in giving us an indication of what is known, but it must be acknowledged that reported domestic abuse will be much lower than the true picture. We also know that victims of domestic abuse will often live with abuse for a significant amount of time before seeking help so their first disclosure (whether that be to agencies or friends/family/colleagues) is rarely the first time they have suffered abuse. It is important that we work together to improve confidence for individuals to seek help, strengthen and improve our data collection to ensure we gain a fuller picture of the true extent of domestic abuse in Bracknell Forest.

National research shows:

- An estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year (1.6 million women and 757,000 men)<sup>5</sup>.
- In the year ending March 2021, police recorded crime data showed that almost half (49%) of adult female homicide victims in England and Wales (75 women) were killed in a domestic homicide<sup>6</sup>.
- On average, high risk victims live with domestic abuse for 2.3 years and medium risk victims for 3 years before getting help<sup>7</sup>.
- One in 6-7 men and one in 4 women will be a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime<sup>8</sup>.
- Victims aged 60+ are much more likely to experience abuse from an adult family member or current intimate partners than those 60 and under<sup>9</sup>.
- LGBT+ victims/survivors present with higher levels of risk and complex needs by the time they access support<sup>10</sup>.
- Disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as non-disabled women, and typically experience abuse for a longer period before accessing support<sup>11</sup>.
- Nationally, 7.4% of white women report being victims of domestic abuse compared with 4.4% of ethnic minority women<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> SafeLives (2015), Insights IDVA National Dataset 2013-14, Bristol: SafeLives

<sup>8</sup> [Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse - \(mankind.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [SafeLives \(2016\) Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse](#)

<sup>10</sup> [SafeLives \(2018\) Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse](#)

<sup>11</sup> [SafeLives \(2017\) Disabled survivors too: Disabled people and domestic abuse](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Race Report Statistics](#)

- Over half (52%) of domestic abuse victims need support to help them stay in their own home or move to new accommodation<sup>13</sup>.

## Bracknell Forest picture

Under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act, Bracknell Forest Council have carried out a domestic abuse needs assessment to gain a greater understanding of the incidence of domestic abuse and the people affected by domestic abuse in Bracknell Forest.

Data was collected from a number of sources including Thames Valley Police, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), Berkshire Women's Aid, Early Help, Housing, Adult and Children's Services. The assessment looked at the number of recorded incidents, cases and referrals in the local area, demographics and socio-economic characteristics of survivors and victims, and the number and details of victims referred to and placed in accommodation.

In addition to this, qualitative research was undertaken by a third-party organisation with victims, professionals and frontline staff and case files and records were also analysed.

Findings from the needs assessment helped inform the [Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024](#) which outlines how safe accommodation and support for victim-survivors will be provided in the local area in future.

Findings from the needs assessment shows:

- Thames Valley Police recorded 2,434 domestic abuse related incidents of domestic abuse in 2020-21, representing a 6% increase from the previous year when 2,300 cases were recorded.
- The Bracknell Forest MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) reviewed 206 high risk cases in 2020-21. This was a 41% increase in comparison to the previous year when 146 cases were discussed.
- Berkshire Women's Aid (commissioned domestic abuse service) dealt with 293 cases in 2020-21, representing a 14% increase in comparison to the previous year. This increase came despite a significant period of closure to professional referrals during the year and capacity.
- The most common age of victims reporting to services is between 25 and 44 years old.
- Partial data revealed 95% of BWA's services are used by women and about 90% of housing cases were female. Police recorded a higher proportion of male victims (25%).
- A large majority of referrals are heterosexual/straight. Only a small number of organisations collected data on sexual identity (MARAC, BWA) and these recorded 2% of victims as gay/lesbian and/or bisexual; however, all of these organisations recorded large numbers of unknowns.
- 90% of victims are white, with under 5% from Asian groups and under 5% from black and black British groups, reflecting the make-up of the population locally
- 5-10% of victims have a disability or long-term sickness, similar to estimates of disability in the population as a whole.
- Over 50% are in part- or full-time employment with most of the remaining number shown as unemployed or looking after family/home.

<sup>13</sup> [SafeLives \(2018\) Safe at Home: Homelessness and domestic abuse](#)



## 5. National policy and legal context

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. The key objectives of the Act are to:

- **Promote awareness** – to put domestic abuse at the top of everybody’s agenda, including introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognising children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right
- **Protect and support victims** – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive, including establishing in law the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, introducing a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Domestic Abuse Protection Order, and placing a new duty on local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation
- **Tackle perpetrators** – to provide an effective response to perpetrators to end the cycle of abuse, including extending existing offences such as the coercive controlling behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse, and creating new offences including such as non-fatal strangulation or suffocation
- **Transform the justice response** – to provide support to victims throughout the justice process, including helping victims give evidence in court
- **Improve performance** – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse

Commitments relating to the Government’s response to domestic abuse and the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 were published in the [National Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan](#) in March 2022 which is closely aligned to the Government’s [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#), published in July 2021. The Plan has an overall ambition to have ‘a system which drives down domestic abuse and domestic homicide cases, while ensuring that victims and survivors get the support they need’<sup>14</sup> and includes four main areas of focus:

1. **Prioritising Prevention:** Reduce the amount of domestic abuse, domestic homicide, and suicides linked to domestic abuse, by stopping people from becoming perpetrators and victims to begin with.
2. **Supporting Victims:** Help all victims and survivors who have escaped from domestic abuse feel that they can get back to life as normal, with support for their health, emotional, economic, and social needs.
3. **Pursuing Perpetrators:** Reduce the amount of people who are repeat offenders and make sure that those who commit this crime feel the full force of the law.
4. **A Stronger System:** Improve the systems and processes that underpin the response to domestic abuse across society.

The responsibility to respond to domestic abuse is held by all statutory agencies with a responsibility for safeguarding and protecting both adults and children. Wider legislation includes:

- The [Children Act 2004](#) which reinforces that all people and organisations working with children have a responsibility to help safeguard children and promote their welfare. This includes cases of domestic abuse. Children and young people are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- The [Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004](#) which extends provisions to combat domestic abuse and creates a new offence of ‘causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult’.

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<sup>14</sup> [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

- The [Forced Marriage \(Civil Protection\) Act 2007](#) which aims to protect victims of forced marriage including empowering the courts to make Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs).
- The [Protection of Freedoms Act 2012](#) which makes stalking a criminal offence.
- The [Care Act 2014](#) which sets out how the Health and Social Care system should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. Within the Act it specifies that freedom from abuse (and neglect) is key to a person’s wellbeing.
- The [Housing Act 1996](#) which outlines duties for the local authority where a person is threatened with homelessness as a result of domestic abuse or is homeless after fleeing domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has amended the Housing Act to say that a person who is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse will automatically be in “priority need”.
- The [Serious Crime Act 2015](#) which introduced the offence of coercive or controlling behaviour against an intimate partner or family member and holds a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

## Local

This strategy links to other key local and regional strategies and action plans relevant to the domestic abuse agenda:

- [Thames Valley Police & Criminal Justice Plan 2021-2025](#) (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner - OPCC)
- Thames Valley Police Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2022-2023
- [Bracknell Forest Community Safety Plan 2020-2023](#)
- [Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#)
- [Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024](#)
- [Thames Valley Police Strategic Plan 2021-2022](#)
- Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021-2026

The Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board publishes [Safeguarding Reviews \(SARs & CSPRs\) and Rapid Reviews](#) from across the region which provides access to details of learning.

## 6. Strategic priorities

***Aim:** To prevent and reduce the impact of domestic abuse across our communities in Bracknell Forest and ensure that when people do experience abuse, they can access the help and services they need.*

This strategy is based on four key strategic priorities which are designed to contribute to the overall vision of the Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group. These priorities will form our key area of work over the next two years.

Strategic Priority	We will:
1. <b>Prevention and early intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider ways we can work with schools and youth settings to raise awareness of domestic abuse and educate children and young people about safe relationships.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop skills, knowledge and awareness within the workplace to support early identification and effective responses.</li> <li>• Ensure schools are aware where children and young people may have witnessed domestic abuse</li> <li>• Deliver internal and external communications which will include challenging negative attitudes around domestic abuse and encouraging confidence in seeking support.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Provision of services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure responsive services which meet need quickly for victims and their children.</li> <li>• Work to understand the experience of victims of domestic abuse from all social groups to ensure their voices are heard.</li> <li>• Continue to review service provision, highlight good practice, identify gaps and share lessons learnt from Domestic Homicide Reviews, Serious Case Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews.</li> <li>• Strengthen our safe accommodation support.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Enforcement and management of perpetrators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to identify domestic abuse offending at the earliest opportunity, providing interventions to bring individuals to justice or divert their offending.</li> <li>• Prioritise the safety of victims and children by making best use of powers available (both criminal and civil) to protect victims of domestic abuse and manage and disrupt perpetrators.</li> <li>• Offer help to perpetrators to help change their behaviour through effective interventions.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Working in partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote change by working together.</li> <li>• Ensure joint commitment, leadership and partnership working.</li> </ul>

## 7. Governance and accountability

The Domestic Abuse Executive Group is accountable to the Bracknell Forest Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and reports annually to the CSP, Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board (BFSB) and other relevant Boards when requested. Accountability for delivery of this strategy sits with the Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group. This group will also oversee work related to the duties within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

This strategy is supported by a work plan which will be updated quarterly and be reviewed by the Domestic Abuse Executive Group.

Feedback from those who use our domestic abuse services and interventions in Bracknell Forest is key in commissioning of services as well as monitoring procedures. We will work to ensure that lived experience of abuse informs and improves our local provision.