

Divisions Affected – N/A

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD – 17 June 2021

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and implications for Oxfordshire

Report by Corporate Director for Public Health

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Board is RECOMMENDED to note the report.**

Executive Summary

2. This report is to inform members of the Health and Wellbeing Board of the new duties for Local Authorities enacted by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the current context for the implementation of these.
3. It updates the Board on funding awarded to Oxfordshire for 2021-22 to meet local need in connection with the new statutory duties.
4. The report shares progress in Oxfordshire so far and sets out next steps in fulfilling these new duties.

Background

5. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 enacts new duties for Local Authorities in respect of understanding and meeting needs of victims of domestic abuse in their area and following on from that a duty to report on local need to central government. Primary duties under the new Act sit with tier 1 authorities but there is also a duty on tier 2 Authorities to co-operate with their tier 1 partners in delivery of these new responsibilities. Specifically, the Act requires tier 1 Local Authorities to form a strategic board consisting of membership from a range of organisations from the system. We are also required to monitor delivery of the strategy and provide an annual report to the Secretary of State.
6. A further duty falling to tier 1 authorities is to organise a local needs assessment with the following scope: “comprehensive assessment of need for support in safe accommodation in your area”. This will inform an updated strategy on domestic abuse, required under the MHCLG’s Memorandum of Understanding, by August 2021. Alongside this duty the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government has applied a formula to allocate a new

£125m Safe Accommodation budget to individual Councils to be spent on meeting the needs of victims and their families.

7. The most recent needs assessment for domestic abuse in Oxfordshire was completed in 2016^[1]. This informed the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 2024 with annual delivery plans ^[2]. Existing services are in place to deliver the recommendations of this strategy. The current Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board usually meets quarterly, and is responsible for the overall strategy, governance of multi-agency arrangements and includes membership from most organisations required under the new Act.
8. In Oxfordshire, in addition to the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board, we also hold a monthly operational board (Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership - OxDAP). This operational partnership evolved to its current form due to the specific needs of a more engaged and focused multi-agency response to domestic abuse under Covid-19 lockdown and the impacts for victims under these very unusual circumstances. Meeting initially weekly then fortnightly and now monthly these meetings provide an effective joint working approach based on a “gold standard” response to domestic abuse referred to as a Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR) as set out in our local strategy. The Strategic Board oversees OxDAP and its role in delivery of Oxfordshire’s Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Funding awards for Oxfordshire

9. A grant of £1.14 million has been awarded by Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to Oxfordshire County Council for delivery of services to meet the safe accommodation needs of victims and their families in Oxfordshire. This is in year funding for 2021-22 and as yet the funding allocation for future years is unconfirmed. In addition, small grants have been awarded to tier 2 local authorities (approximately £30k per District / City Council) to help them with their duty to co-operate with their tier 1 local authority partners.

Oxfordshire’s progress with new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

New Terms of Reference for the Strategic Board

10. Changes to our existing Strategic Board were required to meet the requirements of the new statutory board. We have now reviewed our Terms of Reference and agreed these with existing Board members (which includes all tier 2 local authorities). Both membership and purpose have been reviewed to align with the Act. The enhanced membership includes the voice of victim - survivors of domestic abuse and representatives from providers of

^[1] [Strategic Review of Domestic Abuse Oxfordshire 2016](#)

^[2] [Microsoft Word - Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019-24 FINAL](#)

specialist domestic abuse services. We are developing a survivor forum to ensure diversity in the voice of victim – survivors. We will also hold meetings in two parts with selective attendance for one part to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Commissioning a Housing Needs Assessment

11. Guidance for the required Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) was issued by MHCLG in March making it clear that the Needs assessment was to be limited to the safe accommodation needs (including pathways to such) of victims and families affected by domestic abuse. The Strategic Board took the view that it would be more helpful to broaden this remit to include perpetrators and other specialist support services that would ensure we were taking a “whole system approach”. We developed a specification to reflect this and having followed a competitive process have identified a provider to deliver this Needs Assessment. We intend that the Needs Assessment and updated Strategy will be completed towards the end of August or early September 2021.

Rapid review gap analysis and initial spend plan

12. There is already a significant evidence base provided by specific pieces of work highlighting gaps in support for victims and families, for example the Thames Valley Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAMER) Report published in Autumn 2020. To ensure we make best use of our allocation of funding for 2021-22 meeting known needs straight away rather than wait for the outcome of the Needs Analysis we have undertaken a rapid review gap analysis and used that to inform the development of an initial spending plan. This will be finalised at our first statutory board meeting on 16 June 2021.

Next Steps

Updating our local domestic abuse strategy

13. We have included this in our specification for our Needs Assessment provider to be completed once the Strategic Board has had an opportunity to feed back on the Needs Assessment.

Reporting to central government

14. Both the Needs Assessment and the updated strategy are required to be shared with the Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office within MHCLG. We will also need to monitor delivery of the strategy and provide an annual report to the Secretary of State. It has been indicated by MHCLG that there will be a reporting framework for regular reporting by the Strategic Board on service delivery thereafter.

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