

Equalities Monitoring – Services

C - Community Safety

Annual Report - 2020-21



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1. Introduction to Service Area

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act set up Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) throughout England and Wales to make key agencies work together to reduce crime and disorder. These partner agencies are the Local Authority, Police, Fire Service, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Probation.

The Bracknell Forest CSP has worked hard since then to make Bracknell Forest a safer place. The BFC Community Safety Service, which manages the business of the CSP and ensures compliance with its statutory obligations, has an impact in improving the wellbeing of the community by working with partners to reduce crime and disorder. This includes working to eliminate victimisation, discrimination and harassment for all people within the community.

The purpose of equalities monitoring is to ensure that BFC is providing a fair and equitable service to all residents. While the Community Safety Service works to eliminate inequalities in all work that it does, this report will consider four key areas of crime and disorder which can impact all residents, but which have relevance to residents with the following protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

These 4 key areas are:

Domestic Abuse (DA)
Prevent and Hate Crime
Modern Slavery and Exploitation (MSE)
Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

2. Equality Duty

2.1 Domestic Abuse

Whilst the government definition of domestic abuse applies to both men and women, domestic abuse remains a gendered issue with many domestic abuse victims being women and the majority of perpetrators men.

Domestic abuse remains a hidden crime with many victims not wanting to report the abuse to family, friends, or indeed agencies. Seeking help is difficult because initially victims may not recognise the abuse in the first place, often minimising what is going on. On recognising the abuse, many may think they will not be believed; or that family, friends or professionals will not take their experiences seriously; or they fear they will be 'blamed' or in some way be seen as responsible for the abusers behaviour.

Many people face discrimination in society for several reasons and this discrimination compounds the difficulties a victim of domestic abuse may encounter when seeking help. Victims from

marginalised groups face additional barriers to obtaining support and advice they need. They may experience prejudice, stereotyping and misunderstandings. The issues a victim of domestic abuse may face over and above the abuse may be different at different times. Belonging to more than one group compounds these issues.

We currently raise awareness which includes signposting for all victims of domestic abuse including signposting for male victims.

Introduction to Domestic Abuse training includes a section on 'marginalised groups' and 'intersectionality' to encourage delegates to identify and understand the additional issues faced by marginalised groups suffering domestic abuse.

Berkshire Women's Aid (local service provider) values include 'we believe in providing support to anyone who needs it, regardless of their sex, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability.'

The Bracknell Forest domestic abuse safe accommodation needs assessment (duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021) included survivor interviews and case studies covering females with children, males, male and female LGBT+, older people with dementia, those with learning disabilities and BAME/Ethnic survivors. This will inform our domestic abuse safe accommodation strategy which is currently being completed.

The Domestic Abuse Forum has representation from Army Welfare and survivor(s) of domestic abuse as well as all relevant service areas. Membership of both the Domestic Abuse Forum and the DA Executive Group are reviewed annually with gaps in membership identified and addressed as necessary. As part of the safe accommodation needs assessment, some additional members of the Forum have been identified and invited to future meetings, e.g. Support U – an LGBT+ organisation providing help and support across the Thames Valley.

Bracknell Forest Council were part of a two-year Thames Valley BAMER (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee) project 2018-20. The project was funded by the Home Office VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) Transformation Fund and supported by the local authorities across the Thames Valley and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). The project set out to identify barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities subjected to abuse or violence when needing to access support, and to identify lessons for improving service responses. An evaluation report was published late 2020, with 10 recommendations. This report has been shared with relevant local Boards, namely the Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group, Community Safety Partnership, Safeguarding Partnership and Community Cohesion and Engagement Partnership. A Thames Valley-wide BAME Community Partnership Board has been formed to continue the momentum of the BAMER project work and in July 2021 a Berkshire wide group (including North East Hants and Surrey Heath) was formed to drive forward local delivery of the recommendations from the report.

Data has been gathered (from Thames Valley Police, MARAC – Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference, Berkshire Women's Aid, Health, Housing and Homelessness, Social Care) as part of the safe accommodation needs assessment in relation to victims in Bracknell and this found:

Age:	The most common age group recorded is between 25 and 44 years old
Gender:	Over 90% were women; men were a small minority (higher among police and housing cases).
Sexual identity:	A large majority of referrals were heterosexual/ straight. The number of gay/lesbian and bisexual victims recorded was very low
Race:	90% were white, with under 5% from Asian groups and under 5% from black and black British groups.
Employment:	the greatest proportion were in part- or full-time employment with most of the remaining number shown as unemployed or looking after family/home.

Disability: 5-10% of people had a disability or long-term sickness.
Income and education: no data was available on this.

Priorities for the next year:

The DA Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021 includes the following priorities:

- Continue to develop our understanding of needs through improved data collection and ensuring survivors have an effective voice
- Ensure effective, multi-agency working and specialist support to meet a wide variety of needs

These are important priorities as they demonstrate our intention to improve our understanding of victim with protected characteristics who feel unable to access support and services and work to resolve the barriers that they may be experiencing.

We will also be developing closer working relationships with support services for male victims, those with a learning disability and those who are LGBTQ+. Better understanding of survivor needs will be incorporated into training and in DA awareness that we deliver. We will also continue to develop the needs of BAME survivors through the Thames Valley BAME Working Group.

2.2 Prevent and Hate Crime

Prevent is part of the government counter terrorism strategy CONTEST which incorporates Protect, Prepare, Pursue, and Prevent. The lead agency for Prevent is the local authority. Within Bracknell Forest Council, Prevent is delivered by the Community Safety Service. Prevent seeks to work with individuals in the pre-criminal justice environment and support those at risk of radicalisation.

The integration of the Prevent duty and hate crime agenda are now fully met with established groups reporting to Community Cohesion and Engagement Partnership and the CSP. Both work streams are standing agenda items at the Partnership Problem-Solving Group and Community Safety's fortnightly team meeting. This ensures unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation are identified and managed at the earliest opportunity. Proactive weekly interrogation and review of data allows the identification of developing and emerging trends to be expedited

Multiple information sources are now monitored to facilitate affective response and review:

- Thames Valley Police Niche database (crime recording)
- Thames Valley Police Hate Crime and Vulnerability toolkits
- CTLP (Counter Terrorism Local Profile): Delivered annually by Counter-Terrorism Policing of the South-East (CTPSE)
- Daily Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) bulletin

Referrals to Prevent continue to belong to and are managed by Counter-Terrorism Police South East and are only referred to Channel when the de-confliction process has been completed

Continued training and awareness raising is to be explored and developed across Council services to understand and appreciate how we are working with growing numbers of:

- Asylum seekers: someone fleeing war, or fearful of persecution (e.g. for religious or racial reasons). Note that persecution does not necessarily mean violence
- Refugees: someone who has been granted asylum - typically granted a 5-year stay in the UK
- Economic migrants: this can mean anyone moving to a different country for work, but the term is typically used to refer to unskilled or low-wage workers (professionals tend to be referred to

using the more positive term 'expat') Integrating community, cultural and faith groups is integral to delivering a robust and responsive service.

While the referrals to these work streams are managed from beyond Bracknell Forest Council, the LA is responsible for making sure the process meets its statutory requirement and standards

The Home Office requirement for an Annual Assurance Statement allows us to reflect and review our progress and processes while we continue to develop our links to a diverse group of statutory and community resources

The Prevent lead in Community Safety is an active participant, collaborator and member of the CCEP (Community Cohesion Engagement Partnership), Faith and Belief Forum, Independent Advisory Group and the Minority Ethnic Advisory Group (the latter being public groups who help steer the strategic work through their experiences of access to public services).

CPD (Continued Professional Development) roundtable events are also regularly held as part of the ongoing learning process so that good practice is updated.

Priorities for the next year:

Continued awareness raising and integration of this agenda into wider groups within the LA and the community will continue to be developed so that we are always considering equality and diversity in this service.

Prevent referrals are initially investigated and managed outside of our services and as such we don't have control over the diversity of referrals. This data is however reviewed centrally at the Home Office and we are active members of Regional and National groups, allowing us to be involved in the consultation and shaping of the existing and developing services.

We will continue to promote and educate Councillors, professionals and carers as well as using practitioner forums and colleague/partner networks.

We will continue to support local and national initiatives, review and evaluate the Prevent Action Plan and Hate Crime Action Plan as well as membership at our strategic groups.

2.3 Modern Slavery and Exploitation (MSE)

Modern slavery is the illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain. It covers a wide range of abuse and exploitation including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour, criminal exploitation and organ harvesting.

Victims of modern slavery can be any age, gender, nationality and ethnicity. They are tricked or threatened into work and may feel unable to leave or report the crime through fear or intimidation. They may not recognise themselves as a victim.

MSE is a hidden crime type that is often not understood by the public: public awareness began in 2019/20 to raise awareness of what MSE is, what the signs are and how to report

There may be language barriers to understanding key MSE messages: further work needs to be done to ensure messages are available in a variety of languages. There may also be further barriers to reporting or seeking support as a result of fear, guilt, shame and cultural and family pressures and beliefs.

MSE e-learning is now mandatory training for all new starters at BFC and Community Safety has developed a referral pathway for BFC public-facing professionals. All opportunities for further training and awareness are shared internally and externally.

Thames Valley Police produce a quarterly infographic for all local police areas including Bracknell Forest/Wokingham which summarises information about suspected victims based on the statutory returns to the Home Office as well as intelligence submissions to police. The infographic includes the type of exploitation, nationality, age range, gender and whether under 18 or over 18. The data is limited in that it only reflects known modern slavery cases involving consenting adults or children.

Priorities for the next year:

We will proactively identify and respond to suspected victims with protected characteristics who come into contact with council services and make best use of leads in hard-to-reach communities to ensure that MSE awareness reaches everyone.

All awareness should be accessible to all people with protected characteristics, and we will proactively promote accessible information through our communication networks.

We will continue to promote accessible MSE awareness and support services with community representatives including Councillors.

We will also encourage TVP and the Home Officer to collect and provide more detailed equality monitoring information in intelligence submissions, Duty to Notify submissions and National Referral Mechanism referrals.

4. Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

BFC Community Safety co-ordinates reports of ASB made to the council or to partners where a partnership response is appropriate, e.g. police, housing associations etc. Solutions to reports of ASB are identified and pursued through the two Partnership Problem Solving Groups which include a range of partners and individuals who can help to bring about solutions. Community Safety records all incidents of reported ASB involving Community Safety Service participation and these reports include protected characteristics where available.

Bracknell is a diverse, friendly and vibrant borough full of people living busy lives and helping to create supportive communities. We want to ensure that people from all our communities feel safe. Crime and safety are key priorities within the Community Safety Partnership Plan 2020-2023. Under the priority "Work with communities to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour hotspots (including drug related crime)" our aim is to consult with communities to identify crime and disorder hotspots and work to improve the safety in these areas using civil and criminal legislation.

ASB reports are received across most adult age-groups, predominantly from those in the middle to older age groups and from both genders. Exact proportions are not known. Data is not collected from those reporting who may have protected characteristics. ASB practitioners are aware that Bracknell Forest is a multi-ethnic community which is rapidly changing. The community also has a high proportion of service personnel connected with the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and a large Nepalese/Ghurkha population.

ASB in Bracknell Forest can incorporate hate crime which is monitored through a separate group. Hate crime does not feature highly in ASB reports.

We work in partnership to reduce ASB and through this multi-agency work, we strive to reduce ASB and help to make a difference. This is measured on a monthly basis through the number of resolved cases.

The Community Safety Team ASB webpages were updated in 2020 and these now provide detailed information on ASB and signpost our residents how and where to seek help. We created a new on-line form to help victims report ASB and we also have a 'Make an enquiry' function along with the option to email the Community Safety Team directly and a dedicated telephone number. For those who wish to remain anonymous we have provided information and a link to contact Crimestoppers.

We have also revised our process on Community Triggers and published information on what a trigger is, how to make an application, the appeals process and how to contact the team and we also created a new on-line form. This information is available and can reach the most vulnerable members of our communities, so they know what it is and how to invoke the application process. We have also included a section where a third party can make an application on behalf of a victim, and options for those who are unable to complete the online application making the process available to everyone.

The team work closely with our corporate communications team to share messages via social media, marketing, digital, engagement and internal (staff and councillor engagement). With the COVID-19 pandemic, the team were extremely proactive, and focused comms around the pandemic sharing government messages, highlighting changes in services and promoting messages to support vulnerable victims. The Community Safety Team has a communications network including the LVS, housing providers and town & parish councils to circulate messages to all sections of the community which includes hard to reach groups.

Priorities for the next year:

Reports of ASB have increased greatly over the last 18 months with many victims citing a high impact which highlights that resilience is lower and things that may not have caused much concern before are having a wider impact. We will continue to use the ASB Risk Assessment Matrix which was revised in 2020 and incorporated a 'harm-centred' approach to assess reports of ASB. This helps define the ASB, and categorise the severity of it, by way of looking at both the behaviour type and the impact that the behaviour is having. It promotes an approach where risk factors are identified, and appropriate action is taken accordingly to protect them from further harm. By adopting case management processes that are focussed on harm and risk we ensure that we are recognising vulnerable and high-risk people. We work to best support victims, lowering their risk of harm. We prioritise the most serious cases and target resources most effectively to make the most difference. We know that factors such as age, health, frequency of the behaviour, how close they live to the perpetrator, the motivation of the behaviour and how isolated the complainant is can all heavily affect how vulnerable someone is.

Conclusion

We will continue to use Equality Impact Assessments in any change in our business and introduction of a new strategy/policy and project. We are due to revise our CSP priorities in 2022 and will be consulting with the wider community on these. We intend to widen our equality questions in the consultation to check that we are reaching groups with protected characteristics.