

Barnsley Domestic Abuse Strategic Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

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Introduction

[Imogen Blood & Associates](#) (IBA) was asked by Barnsley Council to provide an independent strategic needs assessment in relation to domestic abuse. Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the council has a duty to assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for victims. The review was funded using a government grant to support the implementation of the Act.

Between July 2021 and January 2022, IBA:

- Interviewed 20 professionals working for the council, health, police, housing and specialist services, and domestic abuse leads for other South Yorkshire authorities
- Ran an online survey open to the public, to which 90 responses were received
- Reviewed statistical data, case studies, research evidence and key documents

Domestic abuse: incidence, needs and demand for services

There are challenges using data to build an accurate picture of domestic abuse: much goes unreported, and where domestic abuse is reported, it is not always possible to identify repeat reports coming from the same household to different services or sometimes even to the same service.

Despite these caveats, the following headlines emerged from our review of local and national data:

- There were an increasing number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police during the pandemic; these have reduced somewhat but the overall trend may be one of increasing demand for services.
- Domestic abuse is a common cause of homelessness
- Increasing numbers of children may be at risk in households where there is domestic abuse
- There is a relationship between domestic abuse and poverty, though it is complex
- Stakeholders interviewed reported that 'domestic abuse' has become much more diverse than the traditional view of a female victim fleeing violence from a male perpetrator. Although victims of domestic abuse are predominantly female and heterosexual, there are significant numbers of male, and LGBT victims in Barnsley
- Services are also seeing more cases of mutual partner conflict, older/ adult children abusing parents or grandparents, and people who do not want to leave the relationship.
- The ethnic profile of survivors broadly reflects that of the borough
- The incidence of mental health conditions and complexity is high amongst victims/ survivors
- There is considerable diversity in the ages of victims/ survivors

Lived experience of domestic abuse support

Barnsley Council does not currently have a formal structure for engagement and coproduction with people with lived experience; though there is a desire to establish one; views about how this might be delivered were gathered via the online survey.

National research from survivors' perspectives is scant; key themes include:

- The importance of empathy and being taken seriously, which can be a particular challenge for women with complex needs and male victims/ survivors.
- Lack of access to services and housing options
- Re-traumatisation by systems, especially in relation to child protection
- Additional barriers for victims/ survivors from minority groups, resulting from institutionalised discrimination, assumptions, stereotypes, invisibility and multiple disadvantage ('intersectionality').

Many of these themes were also reflected in the survey responses and case studies of people with lived experience in Barnsley.

Headlines from the Barnsley survey

90 people responded to the online survey which IBA conducted on behalf of Barnsley Council during December 2021 and January 2022.

Profile of respondents

- 61% were members of the public; with the remainder being professionals working in the public sector.
- 86% of those completing the survey identified themselves as female.
- Three-quarters said they have experienced, are or may be experiencing domestic abuse
- Around 90% know someone else who has experienced, is or may be currently experiencing domestic abuse.
- A quarter of respondents with lived experience were also professionals working in the public sector

Awareness

- Just over half (56%) of respondents said they had been aware of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 prior to completing the survey; 23% of professionals had not.
- 31% of respondents said that, prior to answering this survey, they would not have known which services they could turn to for help if they or someone they know is affected by domestic abuse.
- In addition to IDAS, over 30 different agencies, departments or job roles were mentioned as possible sources of support. This highlights the breadth of the domestic abuse 'system' and the challenge of ensuring a coordinated approach.

Access to and experience of services

Two-thirds of respondents said that they or someone they knew had accessed or tried to access domestic abuse services in Barnsley. When asked to identify barriers in accessing support, common themes included:

- Fear (of perpetrator, of impact on family, and/or of the service response);
- Lack of resources limiting the service offer, or uncertainty around the availability or accessibility of support;
- Lack of education, information or knowledge – both by services and victims' own lack of awareness that they are experiencing 'domestic abuse';
- Stigma, shame and embarrassment; and
- Challenges in relation to the legal and criminal justice systems.

Those who had accessed services particularly valued:

- Professionals who are understanding and non-judgemental with good respect for confidentiality;
- Accurate and knowledgeable advice in relation to legal and other options;
- Clear and consistent communication from services; workers who come back when they say they will;
- Advocacy and coordination;
- Being able to either self-refer or be referred by a range of professionals;
- Peer support, for example through groups;
- Education and improved awareness for victims; and
- Practical support.

Those who had accessed services found the following particularly unhelpful:

- Slow/ lack of response
- Inaccessibility, e.g. in relation to times or online access only
- Lack of empathy/ attitude of staff
- Eligibility criteria or a lack of specialist services, for example, support for men, for abusers, or alternative accommodation for violent under 18s living at home or for pets; or for historical rather than current abuse
- Lack of housing options

Future priorities

When asked which services should be available in Barnsley to help people who are affected by domestic abuse, the following were the most frequently selected:

- Therapeutic support for children affected by domestic abuse
- Mental health support
- Increased support for parents and their children/ families
- Confidential/ incognito support for those who continue to live with the perpetrator

The proposed priorities of the draft strategy were shared and most of those who commented confirmed that these were the right priorities, i.e.

- **Providing victims of domestic abuse with the right support, including safe accommodation:** the needs of children and young people, the importance of mental health support, the need for suitable accommodation options, and the needs of male victims/ survivors were highlighted as key considerations under this heading
- **Preventing domestic abuse:** especially through education and early intervention with children, young people and families
- **Ensuring a strong cooperation between social housing, social care, police, health in response to domestic abuse:** with respondents calling for multi-agency consultation and accountability and 'better coordination within the council itself'
- **Holding perpetrators to account and supporting them to change their behaviour:** respondents highlighted the need to improve the criminal justice system, professionals' awareness training on how perpetrators may manipulate, and covering impact on children within perpetrator programmes.

Recommendations

Our recommendations contain a mixture of relative 'quick wins'; others which could be achieved if additional funding is available, or resources can be pooled; and some which require some system re-design, ideally achieved through a process of co-design involving multi-agency and lived experience voices. They are summarised here under the proposed priorities of Barnsley's draft Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Providing victims of Domestic Abuse with the right support

Our overall observations are that there is a clear route into the system (although not all agencies seem to agree). However, the system is not complete, but rather an administrative hub with all pathways leading into [IDAS](#). A full range of support is needed; risk management is clearly a high priority, and practical support is being offered, but the focus on trauma, mental health aspects and on children is lacking. The total amount of resource may be too small (especially in view of the increased levels of demand); however, defining the offer more coherently, and specifying housing and support elements could help to focus delivery.

Agencies providing support tend to operate in pockets, focusing only on the most urgent cases in their part of the system ('what's on top'). There is insufficient focus on creating, providing and evaluating routes out of crisis provision: move on accommodation is lacking and ongoing or follow-up support is limited.

Review the current specialist domestic abuse contract

We recommend a review of the current contract. Despite evident hard work on the part of IDAS in the face of high demand, some elements of the original vision have not yet been delivered and it will be important for both commissioner and provider to consider the barriers and opportunities to this. Specifically, this review should include a consideration of how:

- A stronger pathway can be developed
- More specialist provision, especially in relation to mental health, work with children and cross-tenure housing advocacy might be levered into the current provision. This might include some relatively 'quick wins', e.g. :
 - Reconfiguring the staff team to recruit, train or second specialist staff, particularly in the areas of mental health (counselling) and children's workers.
 - Bringing in additional partners to the contract who can provide further capacity in the specialist areas: mental health, children's but also connecting with local BAME and LGBT communities.
 - Collocating the teams with specialist providers to build capacity within the IDAS team and vice versa. Co-location with Housing Options could have a number of benefits, including: improving access to [DASH](#) risk assessments, searching for refuge space if required, referring into MARAC and advocating with housing options staff for access to accommodation.
- Explore the potential – within the existing resource, or with additional resources – to develop the mobile advocacy offer outlined in the [WHA toolkit](#). This might involve

reconfiguring the current Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) team as a flexible outreach service with small caseloads operating under Housing First principles to provide a more flexible and intensive support offer as part of a more housing-led approach.

- The review should also look at performance monitoring within the contract and consider:
 - How best to capture some of the ‘softer’ outcomes, perhaps using the Women’s Aid/ Imkaan outcome framework¹ as a starting point for discussion
 - How to better track the flows of people into and out of the refuge in terms of their housing tenure, and how – in partnership with Housing Options, to track the profiles, barriers and destinations for those who are not successful in accessing a refuge place.

Ensure join-up between domestic abuse and homelessness/ supported housing

- Continue with plans to develop a women’s pathway within the Multiple and Complex Needs commissioned service, and ensure that specialist support in relation to domestic and other forms of gendered abuse are available to women and those supporting them.
- Ensure that there is training for staff in commissioned and non-commissioned supported housing on trauma-informed approaches to supporting victims/ survivors of domestic and/or sexual abuse (including the issues for male survivors)
- Strengthen coordination between Housing Options and IDAS so that, when victims/ survivors of domestic abuse are placed in Temporary Accommodation, specialist domestic abuse support can be provided rapidly by IDVAs outreaching.

Bolster housing options as move-on from/ alternative to refuge

A number of actions should be considered to improve access to housing, including for those needing to move-on from the refuge. These measures should also be seen as resources to support a more ‘housing-led’ approach in which people are re-housed directly wherever possible and desirable, drawing in a range of supports as necessary. These might include:

- A flexible funding pot which could be used to offer loans to cover PRS deposits and requirements for 6 months’ rent upfront (which would be re-paid when UC payments are received), and to cover other expenses – household items, storage, costs of moving, etc
- A specialist Housing Advocacy post, working between Housing Options and IDAS who can provide cross-tenure housing advice to victims/ survivors and/or perpetrators. In addition to their expertise, the Housing Advocate could administer the flexible funding pot.
- A review of the provision of Sanctuary/ target hardening using the information in the [WHA toolkit](#), and set some criteria if these are not already in place.
- Regular case management of move-on progress of current refuge residents could help to focus, problem-solve and unblock, perhaps using a RAG-rated framework.

¹ See p.10 of https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10650/4_-wha-refuge-services.pdf

- A stronger Private Rented Sector (PRS) procurement/ lease offer for survivors and their families, linking into the existing expertise and relationships within Housing Options.
- Acquisition of dispersed properties, perhaps making use of the government's Move On fund
- Building relationships with other social landlords, as well as Berneslai Homes to open up additional sources of properties, perhaps in different areas, since many of the other Registered Providers operating in Barnsley have stock across South Yorkshire.

Review the offer to children affected by domestic abuse

A clear message from our engagement is that a therapeutic offer for children and young people affected by current and past domestic abuse should be developed.

- Map what is currently provided and by whom in relation to both safety planning and recovery support (including processing feelings and experiences) for children and young people; and in relation to support for parents (whether for victim or perpetrator who has access to his/her children).
- Consider appointing children's IDVAs (ChIDVA) and/ or children and young people's IDVAs (CYPIDVA) to provide high-risk children and young people with specialist domestic abuse support and better coordinate resources across the IDAS contract and Children's Services.

Preventing Domestic Abuse/ Holding perpetrators to account and supporting them to change their behaviour

The draft strategy makes some sensible actions in relation to strengthening education in schools around healthy relationships, and there may be opportunities to pool resources or jointly commission programmes or materials in partnership with the other South Yorkshire local authorities, and use the existing Encompass structure of school representatives to cascade these. [Barnsley Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Services \(BSARCS\)](#) should be a key partner in this.

We believe there is great potential for at least elements of the [Dutch 'Orange House' model](#) in Barnsley, offering a suite of voluntary, community based, non-stigmatising education programmes, support and counselling. This model could potentially include a range of other programmes which relate to inter-family dynamics, for example:

- [Break4Change](#): a programme designed to help parents/carers and children who are involved in Child-to-Parent Abuse;
- Models to support couples living with dementia, e.g. Innovations in Dementia's [Getting Along](#). <https://vimeo.com/129230156>
- Family Group Conferencing
- Whole family approaches, such as the **Safe & Together™** model²

² Research in Practice (2021) Working with people who perpetrate domestic violence and abuse in families Strategic briefing.

This could and should link to the council's plans for communications and public awareness raising around domestic abuse, both practically and in terms of the ethos and messaging.

If additional funding is available, the Local Authority may wish to consider the provision of a 'crashpad' style offer which could be included in safety planning, for victims and/or perpetrators and which could act as an earlier intervention.

Ensure that perpetrators can also access housing advocacy, and a therapeutic offer since this is likely to be a key part of tertiary prevention, alongside the Criminal Justice pathway.

Ensuring a strong multi-agency response to Domestic Abuse

Whilst there is a high level of multi-agency commitment to the [Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences \(MARAC\)](#), there is also evidence of disconnect within parts of the system. The current system is somewhat precarious in that the impetus to integrate across agencies and departments rests solely with IDAS. Each agency is under huge pressure and there is a risk that this results in defensiveness.

Moving forwards, it will be key to ensure an effective structure for multi-agency governance, involving the right people. Whatever form this strategic governance takes, its functions should include:

- Holding the overarching vision for an integrated system (of which the IDAS contract is a part)
- Bringing together the key stakeholders in the overarching system
- Monitoring the performance of the whole system by:
 - Providing some analysis of the 'flows' of people coming into and out of the system. This may also include monitoring those coming into the area and being housed out of area.
 - Monitoring the effectiveness of the whole package of interventions. This may include reviewing whether the number of perpetrators being referred into the system matches the number of survivors, or even the number of housing interventions.
- Monitoring the relationship between this work and other elements, such as appropriate provision for women elsewhere in the homelessness system with multiple needs which cannot be met by the domestic abuse service (or the supported housing sector) alone.
- Making recommendations about the ongoing relevance of the current provision and flexing resources to meet emerging need/ demand.
- Bringing in additional funding commitments from, for example, health or social care, to enhance the offer where there are gaps
- Monitoring the overall costs, risk levels and impact of the whole system response.