

MILTON KEYNES DOMESTIC ABUSE NEEDS ASSESSMENT BRIEFING DOCUMENT - MARCH 2025

DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, for the first time, created a cross-governmental statutory definition of domestic abuse.

Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if:

- Both individuals are over 16 years of age and personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

Children are classed as victims of domestic abuse, if they:

- See or hear, or experience the effects of, the abuse, and are related to the victim or perpetrator.

Domestic abuse can be any of the following behaviours:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

Part 4 of the Act also introduced new legal duties on local authorities regarding safe accommodation for domestic abuse survivors:

- Requirement for local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation for victims and their children.
- Safe accommodation can include refuges, specialist housing, or any other form of emergency or long-term secure accommodation.
- Local authorities must assess the level of need in their area and develop strategies to ensure adequate support is available.
- Support in safe accommodation includes advocacy, counselling, children’s support, and housing-related advice.

DOMESTIC ABUSE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment (DANA) provides a comprehensive picture of domestic abuse in Milton Keynes.

The methodology used resulted in a wide-ranging set of Key Findings and Recommendations, drawing in multiple datasets, stakeholder engagement, and the literature review.

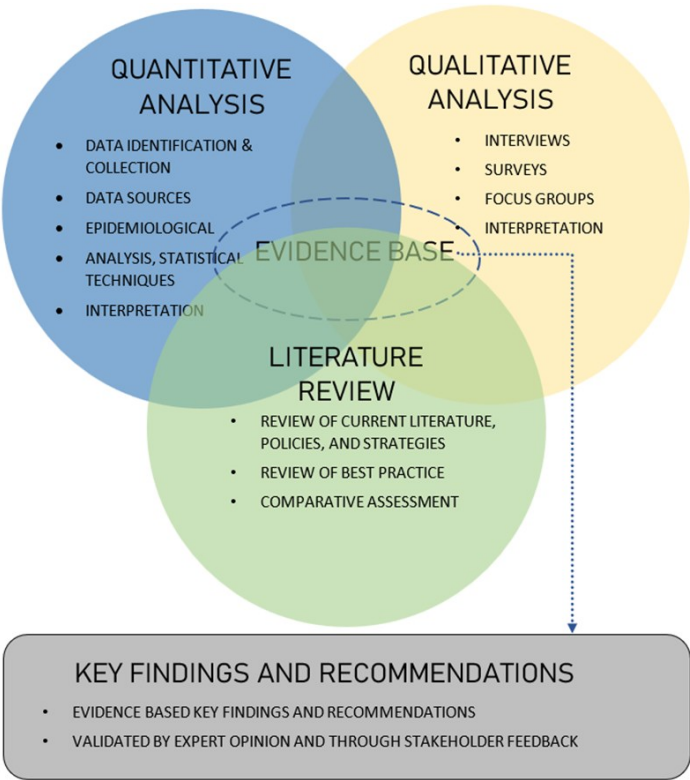
Due to the number of Key Findings and Recommendations, a separate document focusing these areas in more detail is embedded into the DANA in the Appendix.

This shorter Briefing Document provides an introduction to the Key Findings and Recommendations. For more detail please see the full DANA and the Summary Document.

METHODOLOGY

The Evidence Base, Key Findings, and Recommendations are formed from our robust methodology, triangulating:

- 1. Quantitative Analysis
- 2. Qualitative Analysis
- 3. Literature Review



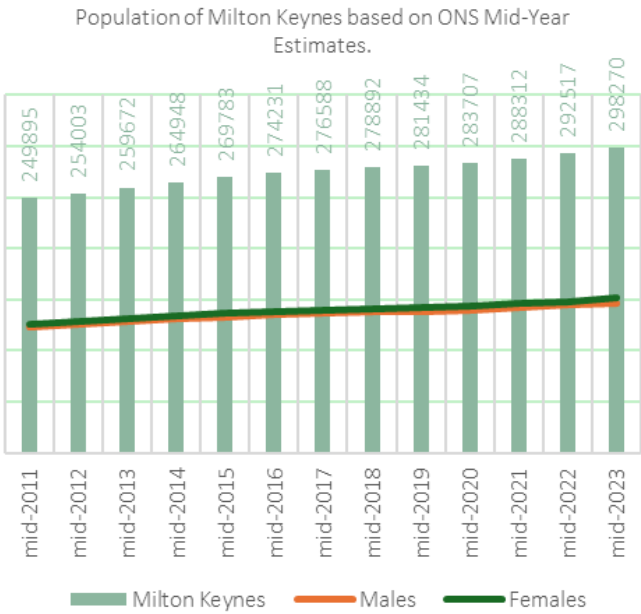
LOCAL CONTEXT

DEMOGRAPHICS

The population has seen increases significantly higher than the National and Regional average. However, the projected rate of increase is expected to slow down.

The population of Milton Keynes increased from 249,895 in 2011 to 298,270 in 2023 (+20%).

The projected population increase of only 1% over the next decade is lower than the 3-4% for the South-East Region and Nationally.



There has been an increase in the older population, and this trend is expected to continue.

The median age has increased from 35.8 in 2011 to 38.0 in 2023. This is a result of an increase in the 50+ population.

The 50+ age group accounts for around a third of the population, with population projections expecting this to grow to 40% in the next decade.

72% of people in Milton Keynes identified their ethnic group within the "White" category (compared with 80.0% in 2011) .

12% of the population are of Asian ethnicity. Those of Black ethnicity account for 10%, followed by Mixed ethnicity (4%) and Other ethnicity (2%).

Housing

HOMELESSNESS

The MKCC Housing Service provides help for those approaching as homeless due to domestic abuse. 22.4% of households that were assessed had a duty owed due to domestic abuse.

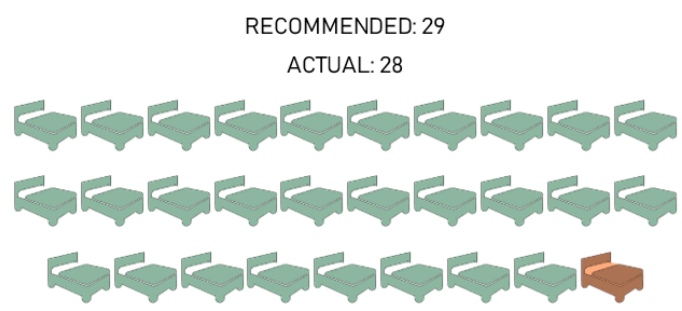
For the 12 months to September 2023, there were 438 households assessed as having domestic abuse as the reason. This equates to 22.4% of those with a duty owed, which is significantly higher than the 12.2% nationally, and is the highest rate among all the Nearest Statistical Neighbours (NSNs).

The practitioners interviewed were not certain why the rates were so high, however, various possible reasons were given, including effective domestic abuse campaigns, a housing IDVA, and good transport links to Milton Keynes within the region.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION

Nationally, the number of refuge bedspaces has increased. The number of refuge bedspaces in Milton Keynes is similar to the recommended number.

Using the Council of Europe's minimum recommendation of one space per 10,000 population, it is recommended that there are 29 specialist accommodation spaces in Milton Keynes. At the time of this DANA, there were 28.



A range of support is offered in the refuge.

Of the 38 clients who left during the analysed period, all had support around safety planning and emotional support. Nearly all required support around housing issues (95%), and finances and debt (97%). Mental health is prevalent, with 68% provided with support, and a quarter of those leaving had required support around immigration.

Clients are encouraged to attend programmes delivered with MK Act, including "Empowerment", "Freedom", IT Skills, Maths, and English.

On average, nine clients are presenting to the refuge each quarter.

However, this varies from between 5 to 14 for each quarter. Around 85% of those presenting are new clients, with 80% being Milton Keynes residents.

Most of the clients who stayed in the refuge had children.

During the analysed period, 82% (31/38) of the clients leaving the refuge had children. There were 260 children during this period, equating to an average of 52 per quarter.

71% of those leaving during the analysed period had stayed for over 6 months.

27 of the 38 clients who left during the analysed period had stayed for over 6 months; 20 had stayed for over a year. Nearly all the clients who had a long stay did so because of a housing shortage. Issues around immigration are also prevalent, accounting for 5 (19%) of the 27 stays over 6 months.

Trauma is the most prevalent need in the refuge.

Information about the needs of the clients is recorded, with trauma being the most prevalent. There is a counselling service run by Sexual Assault and Abuse Support Service Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes (SAASSBMK).

Refuge practitioners signpost residents to NHS services as required. All refuge practitioners are trained in trauma-informed care. Other needs with notable numbers include mental health, physical health, and immigration.

Very few of those using the refuge are in the older age groups.

Only two clients over 55 stayed in the refuge during the analysed period.

This cohort may not move into a refuge as they may have more alternative housing options, such as moving in with children or sheltered accommodation.

In addition, the communal aspects of refuge accommodation could be a big change for older people.

The analysis by ethnicity highlights groups that are over and underrepresented in the refuge.

There is an overrepresentation of those from a Black and those from an Asian background. 21% of the clients were from a black ethnicity compared to 10% of the population, whilst those from an Asian background account for 30% of those who stayed in the refuge compared to 12% in the general population. A detailed breakdown shows no clients from a Chinese ethnic group.

68% of Sanctuary Scheme referrals received resulted in a security package.

In 2023-24, 192 referrals were received, of which 130 received a security package. As a rate per 100,000 population, the number receiving a security package was 45. This is lower than the 108 for Sheffield and the 51 for Bolton (Milton Keynes' Statistical Neighbours)..

A Sanctuary Scheme Evaluation has been completed. Early findings suggest Sanctuary Scheme plays a valuable role in reducing the likelihood of reducing homelessness.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

INCIDENT NUMBERS

In the last year, domestic crimes have decreased, whilst domestic incidents show an increase.

For the 12 months to June 2024, there were 4,499 recorded domestic crimes in Milton Keynes. This is an decrease of 11.8% from the previous year (5,101).

In contrast, domestic non-crime occurrences increased for the 12 months to June 2024 compared to the previous year (3,834 to 4,018).

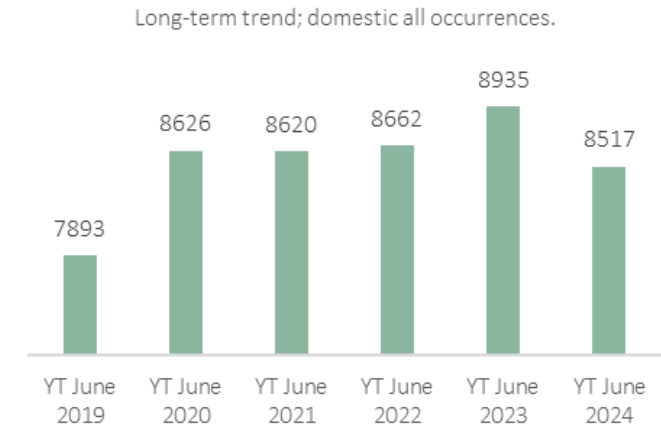
Combined, there were 8,517 calls to the police for the 12 months to June 2024 compared to 8,935 for the previous year.

69% of victims are females. 69% of the perpetrators are males.

Based on the available data, 69% of the victims during the analysed period were females. Of the perpetrators, 69% were male.

The analysis around ethnicity is limited due to poor data quality.

Half of the survivors for the year to September 2024 either did not have an ethnicity recorded or was not stated. This limited the analysis around ethnicity.



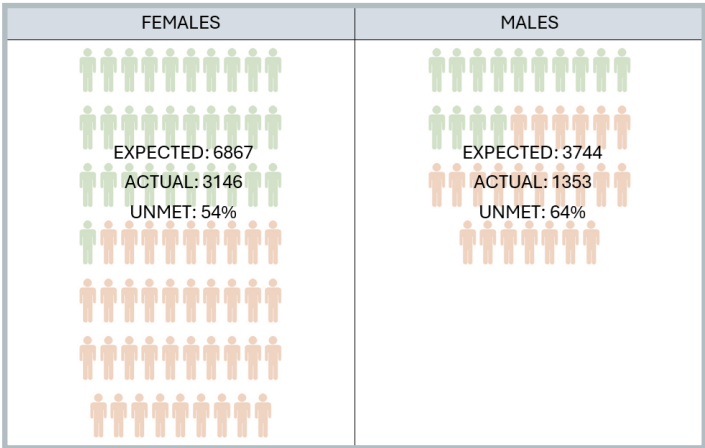
The analysis by age shows different trends for different age groups.

The 16-19 and the 55+ age groups have increased over the last 3 years in terms of the proportion of the total number of victims. These two age groups are the ones that generally have low rates of reporting in comparison to the expected prevalence.

PREVALENCE

It is estimated that less than half of domestic abuse incidents are reported to the police.

Reported rates against expected prevalence vary by age and gender. The 35 to 44 age group exhibit the highest expected prevalence for males and females. However, the second largest group for females is 25 to 34; for males, it is the 45 to 54 cohort.



DEPRIVATION

There are areas of significant deprivation in Milton Keynes.

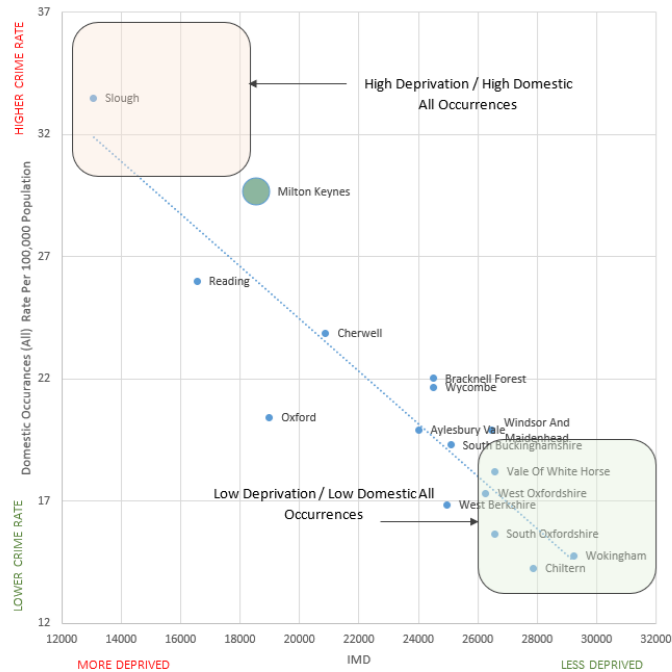
Milton Keynes ranks 107 out of 151 upper-tier and unitary authorities (1 is the most deprived). This overall ranking masks areas of significant deprivation in certain areas of MK and wider health inequalities.

The most deprived Lower Super Output Areas fall within Bletchley East and Woughton & Fishermead wards. Both are ranked in the 3% most deprived areas in England.

There is a strong correlation between deprivation and rates of domestic abuse.

A correlation analysis of domestic crime rates and deprivation of Milton Keynes and the wider Thames Valley Police area gives a score of 0.9, which is a strong correlation.

Given the strong correlation between deprivation and domestic abuse rates, comparing Milton Keynes against the Thames Valley Region is not ideal due to the region's high concentration of less deprived areas.



DAPN

The Domestic Abuse Act introduced a new civil Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN) to provide immediate protection following a domestic abuse incident and a Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO) to provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims.

Comparing April to September 2024 against the same period of the previous year, there has been an increase in both DAPNs (an increase from 18 to 23) and DAPOs (an increase from 16 to 21).

It is expected that these numbers will continue to increase as the Harm Reduction Unit has been supporting the training of staff and conducting reviews of potential cases and follow-up enforcement.

PROVISION

SPECIALIST PROVISION

Milton Keynes City Council commission MK Act as the main specialist domestic abuse service in Milton Keynes.

MK Act provides various specialist domestic abuse services, including a Crisis Intervention Service (CIS), refuge accommodation, group work courses, and the Fresh Start Perpetrator Programme.

MK Act holds National Standards in domestic abuse work.

MK Act holds the Leading Lights accreditation, which is the Women's Aid Federation of England highest level Quality Standard. The accreditation is for the information, advice and support service, and RESPECT quality standards for an innovative programme of work with perpetrators of domestic violence, which aims to change their behaviour, alongside support for their partners.

There are a range of support pathways for children who have witnessed domestic abuse.

The Healthy Relationship Project deliver group programmes for adults and children, which can also be delivered one-to-one when required. Additional support is pro-

vided as needed outside of the groups, but this does not constitute casework, and there is no crisis provision.

Safe! offers support to children and young people who have been victims of crime.

Within the MK Act-run refuge, children are offered tailored support by Children and Family Practitioners.

Perpetrator interventions covering a range of risk/harm factors are available in Milton Keynes.

Services are provided by MK Act (Fresh Start Perpetrator Programme, standard or medium risk), Probation, and Cranstoun (Thames Valley Drive, high-risk high-harm).

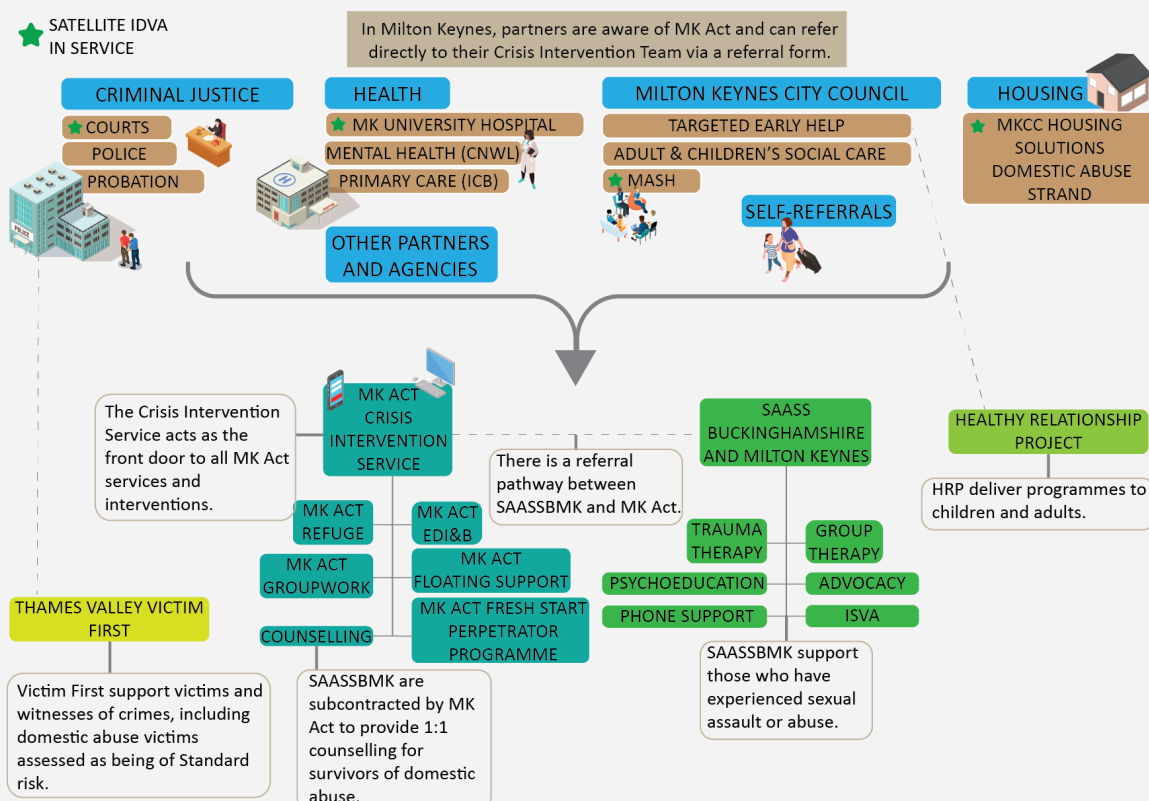
MARAC

The Milton Keynes MARAC runs every two weeks.

MARAC practitioners fed back that it had good attendance from all partners.

Between August 2008 and July 2024, the number of referrals per year varied from 156 to 239, with the average reported at 197.

SPECIALIST SERVICE REFERRAL PATHWAY IN MILTON KEYNES



COVID-19 impacted referrals to MARAC for those from an ethnic minority group.

Over the last two years, those from an ethnic minority group accounted for 22-24% of the total referrals to MARAC.

This rate varies by year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates decreased, indicating that those from an ethnic minority group faced proportionately greater barriers to access.

MARAC data shows low numbers of referrals from Children's Social Care.

In the year to July 2024, there were 3 MARAC referrals recorded as being from Children's Social Care. An increase of 1 from the previous 2 years.

No referrals were recorded as coming via the Children's Services MASH.

Children's Social Care referrals are likely to increase as

there is now a MASH IDVA in place.

PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

Domestic Abuse Champions are located in Partner Agencies across Milton Keynes.

MK Act receive funding to have a Domestic Abuse Champion who offers specialist training, strengthening partnership working arrangements.

MK Act offers Domestic Abuse Training courses to partner agencies.

The Domestic Abuse Champion offers bespoke training to organisations across Milton Keynes.

OTHER SERVICES

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Research shows that "80% of women experiencing domestic abuse will seek help from health services, and they are often a woman's first or only point of contact".

In Milton Keynes, several different agencies and organisations provide healthcare services, including Central North West London NHS Foundation Trust, Healthwatch Milton Keynes, and Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. It is worth noting that Health IDVAs are embedded in Milton Keynes University Hospital.

The IRIS (Identification and Referral to Improve Safety) Programme is an important pathway. This is not in place in Milton Keynes.

There is currently a Hospital Safeguarding Team at Milton Keynes University Hospital, and they are continuing to improve the services around domestic abuse.

The Safeguarding Team oversees patients who have safeguarding concerns raised around domestic abuse and works closely with MK Act.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A notable number of Children in Need Assessments had domestic abuse as a concern.

There were 3,358 Children in Need Episodes with a factor identified at the end of assessment in 2023-24. This is similar to the previous 3 years. Of all the assessments in 2023-24 there were:

- 310 (9%) where there were domestic abuse concerns around the child
- 996 (30%) where there were domestic abuse concerns around the parent
- 99 (3%) where there were domestic abuse concerns around other person

The 9% of assessments with concerns around the child is lower than the 11% for the NSN (13%). As a rate per 100,000 under 18 population, the reported 426 is also lower than the 569 for the NSN.

The 30% of assessments with concerns around the parent is the same as the NSN (13%). As a rate per 100,000 under 18 population, the reported 1,368 is slightly higher than the 1,326 for the NSN.

Changes in the approach (Family First to Child First Model) implemented at the beginning of this financial year will increase the numbers identified in Milton Keynes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below shows the full list of recommendations from the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment.

REC	RECOMMENDATION TITLE
1	Adapting services to meet the needs of the older population.
2	Planning services with a focus on ethnicity.
3	Increasing accessibility to services for the LGBTQI+ community.
4	Finding ways to increase reporting for particular age/gender groups.
5	Using population projections and changes in demographics to shape decisions.
6	To improve the response to those with learning disabilities and other neurodiverse conditions.
7	Raising awareness that domestic abuse is not restricted to intimate relationships and that more understanding around this area will help shape services and address unmet needs.
8	Integrating a Robust Data Collection and Information Framework.
9	DASPB to agree on a clear definition of prevention.
10	Exploring options for removing perpetrators from tenancies.
11	Improving access to secure and safe accommodation for all in Milton Keynes.
12	Evaluate the possibility of expanding the Sanctuary Scheme.
13	Referral pathways should be strengthened using existing solutions.
14	Developments to the Targeted Early Help Pathway should be monitored to ensure children and young people who witness domestic abuse are getting help at the right time and in the right way
15	Explore if there are unmet needs in more 'affluent' areas.
16	Detailed analysis of Police data was undertaken for this needs assessment. This could be adopted for future tasking.
17	The lived experience of domestic abuse survivors should form a key part of service and pathway development.

The following pages, show further detail on the recommendations. In anticipation of the Domestic Abuse Strategy, the recommendations have been grouped into four areas:

1. Prevention and Early Intervention
2. Fair Access to Services
3. Partnership and Governance
4. Strengthening Perpetrator Accountability

1. PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Recommendation 4—FINDING WAYS TO INCREASE REPORTING FOR PARTICULAR AGE/GENDER GROUPS

More needs to be done to address the underreporting of specific cohorts—for example, younger males. Additional work could include targeted awareness campaigns and outreach initiatives to encourage reporting.

Recommendation 5—USING POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND CHANGES IN DEMOGRAPHICS TO SHAPE DECISIONS

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board should incorporate population growth projections into its strategic planning for domestic abuse services. Given the significant population increase in Milton Keynes and the likelihood of increased demand for services, the Board should regularly review and update service capacity to align with current and future population trends, including an increase in the older population.

Recommendation 9—DASPB TO AGREE ON A CLEAR DEFINITION OF PREVENTION

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board should clarify its definition of 'prevention' to ensure a shared understanding among stakeholders and align partner strategies effectively.

Additionally, given the limited evidence regarding the success of primary prevention interventions in reducing the incidence and severity of domestic abuse, any preventative initiatives implemented must include robust review and evaluation mechanisms.

Recommendation 14—DEVELOPMENTS TO THE TARGETED EARLY HELP PATHWAY SHOULD BE MONITORED TO ENSURE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WITNESS DOMESTIC ABUSE ARE GETTING HELP AT THE RIGHT TIME AND IN THE RIGHT WAY

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board should monitor progress on the forthcoming changes to the Targeted Early Help pathway in relation to children and young people who have witnessed domestic abuse.

Recommendation 15—EXPLORE IF THERE ARE UNMET NEEDS IN MORE 'AFFLUENT' AREAS

The Board should consider developing targeted outreach and reporting campaigns in less deprived areas to address the potential underreporting of domestic abuse.

There should be a review of comparison methods to ensure accurate benchmarking of domestic abuse rates. For example, comparing Milton Keynes to its Nearest Statistical Neighbours rather than the Thames Valley region.

Recommendation 16—DETAILED ANALYSIS OF POLICE DATA WAS UNDERTAKEN FOR THIS NEEDS ASSESSMENT. THIS COULD BE ADOPTED FOR FUTURE TASKING

To explore the possibility of developing and distributing detailed police analysis for focused tasking.

2. FAIRER ACCESS TO SERVICES

Recommendation 1—ADAPTING SERVICES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE OLDER POPULATION

There are several findings arising from this DANA which suggest that future planning should have a focus on the older age groups.

The Board should consider expanding the range of targeted interventions for older individuals at risk of domestic abuse and explore how these initiatives are promoted within the local area. The IRIS Programme should be explored.

Recommendation 2—PLANNING SERVICES WITH A FOCUS ON ETHNICITY

Culturally sensitive support for minority ethnic groups should be enhanced.

The EDI&B Team should increase their efforts to engage minority ethnic groups, particularly those underrepresented in refuge use, such as Chinese women.

Thames Valley Police should improve their recording concerning ethnicity.

Recommendation 3—INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY TO SERVICES FOR THE LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY

LGBTQI+ individuals face unique barriers to accessing support due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and evidence suggests they do not access services at the same rate as the wider population.

Learning from the LGBTQI+ IDVA role should be consolidated and assessed to develop a new strategy to

enhance service accessibility for the LGBTQI+ community. Potential solutions include integrating the LGBTQI+ IDVA role into a grassroots organisation or enhancing staff skills within these organisations. MK Act are currently exploring this with Q:Alliance.

Recommendation 6—TO IMPROVE THE RESPONSE TO THOSE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND OTHER NEURODIVERSE CONDITIONS

An accessible version of the DASH risk assessment should be created and piloted.

This would help ensure correct categorisation when first reported.

Recommendation 7—RAISING AWARENESS THAT DOMESTIC ABUSE IS NOT RESTRICTED TO INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AND THAT MORE UNDERSTANDING AROUND THIS AREA WILL HELP SHAPE SERVICES AND ADDRESS UNMET NEEDS

The prevalence of non-intimate partner violence in the police data shows that there is a need for targeted training and awareness raising.

Thames Valley Police should improve their recording of victim and perpetrator relationships.

Recommendation 11—IMPROVING ACCESS TO SECURE AND SAFE ACCOMMODATION IN MILTON KEYNES

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board should assess how the identified needs for secure and safe accommodation are being met in Milton Keynes.

By addressing the lack of second-stage accommodation, the Board can facilitate smoother transitions for survivors leaving the refuge, ultimately improving outcomes for individuals and families affected by domestic abuse.

The needs of those without leave to remain in the UK, men and male children, must be considered.

3. PARTNERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

Recommendation 8—INTEGRATING A ROBUST DATA COLLECTION AND INFORMATION FRAMEWORK.

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board should establish a clear agreement on the specific datasets and data formats to be regularly supplied by partners. This agreement should include demographic, geographical, and service usage data for comprehensive analysis.

The 2024 Needs Assessment provides a comprehensive picture of Domestic Abuse in Milton Keynes. The document should be used as the foundation and baseline for future analysis.

Recommendation 12—EVALUATE THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPANDING THE SANCTUARY SCHEME

The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board is to consider expanding the use of the Sanctuary Scheme to allow survivors to remain in their own homes. This should be driven by the findings of the evaluation which is currently being undertaken.

Recommendation 13—REFERRAL PATHWAYS SHOULD BE STRENGTHED USING EXISTING SOLUTIONS

Partners should ensure robust pathways between services by actively using existing solutions, such as Domestic Abuse Champions and training programs.

Recommendation 17—THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE SURVIVORS SHOULD FORM A KEY PART OF SERVICE AND PATHWAY DEVELOPMENT.

Incorporating the voices of those with lived experience should be a foundational element of Milton Keynes' Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan.

A structured mechanism for ongoing consultation and survivor feedback should be established to guide domestic abuse services' design, implementation, and evaluation. This will foster a more empathetic, effective, and responsive system.

4. STRENGTHENING PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Recommendation 10—EXPLORING OPTIONS FOR REMOVING PERPETRATORS FROM TENANCIES

The Board should explore creating clear guidelines for the Neighbourhood Team concerning managing tenancies where domestic abuse has been identified. This guidance should consider other Registered Social Landlords, including Housing Associations.

There should be a further investigation into the number of joint tenancies where one tenant has been identified as perpetrating domestic abuse and the better recording of data.