

MILTON KEYNES INTER-AGENCY CODE OF PRACTICE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the Milton Keynes Inter-Agency Code of Practice on Domestic Violence.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Code of Practice (attached as an **Annex**) will enable all the key agencies in Milton Keynes to adopt and promote an integrated approach to addressing domestic violence. Such an approach will enhance the Working Group partnership, and, more importantly, lessen the longer term impact of domestic violence on children and young people as well as the adult victims.

3. Background

- 3.1 Domestic Violence includes all kinds of physical, sexual and emotional abuse within all kinds of intimate relationships. Most incidents of domestic violence abuse are carried out by men against female partners, but it can also occur by women against men and within same-sex relationships.
- 3.2 People experience domestic violence regardless of their social group, class, age, race, disability, sexuality and lifestyle. The abuse can also begin at any time - in new relationships or after many years spent together.
- 3.3 Domestic violence can take many forms such as physical assault, sexual abuse, rape and threats. It may include destructive criticism, pressure tactics, disrespect, humiliation, breaking trust, isolation and harassment. Some abusers offer 'rewards' on certain conditions, or in an attempt to persuade their partners that the abuse will not happen again. However persuasive they seem, the violence usually gets worse.
- 3.4 The impact of domestic violence on children is significant and far-reaching. Children can be the direct victims of the violence or witnesses. They are also often traumatised as a result. The harm suffered by these children and young people may be long-term, affecting their physical and psychological well-being, impairing later development.
- 3.5 Recorded in the Review and Update 1999-2001 of the Milton Keynes Community Children and Young People's Plan Thames, Valley Police reported 956 incidents of

domestic violence in 1997. In 1998 1,124 incidents were logged; in 714 of those 2,961 children or young people were present in the house.

- 3.6 In 1986, Milton Keynes Borough Council recognised the importance of agencies working together to combat violence and established the Milton Keynes Violence Against Women and Children Working Party (Minute CL61/86 refers).
- 3.7 Since then the Working Party has been addressing many issues. Some of its successes relating to domestic violence have been: inter-agency training; two major Seminars on Domestic Violence, one of which focused on children and young people's needs; the establishment of a week-day morning solicitors' rota for emergency court appearances; a theatre presentation and workshop for young people on promoting positive attitudes towards violence in relationships; and the Milton Keynes Inter-Agency Code of Practice.
- 3.8 Currently, the Working Party is working on a Domestic Violence Referral Service, which will focus on getting the abusers to the right agencies to help them address the issues that lead to violence, whilst also supporting the victims and their families.
- 3.9 The Working Party has now become a lead group for addressing one of the key aims of the Milton Keynes Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy - 'Reducing Violence'. A sub-group of the Working Party has been established to set out effectiveness performance outcomes relating to integrated domestic violence initiatives that will implement the broad vision of the Code of Practice.

4. **Issues and Choices**

- 4.1 The Working Party felt that a set of values within a unified strategy, adopted by all the key agencies in this complex field, would improve services for the victims and their children. The Milton Keynes Inter-agency Code of Practice is the result of deliberations that have taken considerable time, effort, negotiation and some compromise. Such negotiations have enriched the partnership.
- 4.2 Most of the key agencies have signed the document. Two major ones are outstanding - Buckinghamshire Health Authority and MK NHS Trust. The informal responses have been positive; the formal processes will take a little longer. The next stage will be to engage the MK Primary Care Group.
- 4.3 The document makes demands of the agencies that sign up to it, in terms of service provision and monitoring, through a change in culture in recognition of the ramifications of domestic violence and the damage done to the individuals involved.
- 4.4 A major publicity campaign is envisaged for the early Autumn, targeting both victims and staff who work with and for them. The finances involved in such a campaign have yet to be found.

5. **Implications**

5.1 Environmental

None.

5.2 Equalities

Domestic violence is a major equalities issue. Displacement from home for families suffering domestic violence, together with disruption from school and friends for children and young people, are significant and painful experiences, having long term impact on the quality of life and educational achievement. Agencies must work together to make services as efficient and effective as possible.

5.3 Financial

Raising awareness and improving service provision, particularly for front-line staff will have an impact on training budgets. A new, inter-agency training course is now being planned. At present colleagues in other agencies, together with Council staff, are giving their time to act as tutors from within current resources.

Small profits from running the two seminars, mentioned in 3.7 above, will underwrite some printing and lamination costs of the Code of Practice and its distribution. Sponsorship must be sought for the campaign.

5.4 Legal

Legal aspects of domestic violence will be covered in the training course.

5.5 Staff and Accommodation

The Learning and Development Directorate's Strategic Plan has a Key Success Aim related to the implementation of effective staff development policies in recognition of the crucial importance of staff in achieving the Community Learning Committee's objectives. The Code of Practice will contribute to staff development policies.

5.6 Culture

The Working Group, as already mentioned in 3.7 above, funded a professional theatre presentation and inter-active workshop, entitled 'Behind Closed Doors',

which addressed factors in the lives of young people that can lead to violence and abusive relationships.

Three young people and one adult were invited from each of the eight secondary schools, the Pupil Referral Unit and the MK Christian Foundation employment project.

It was an extremely successful occasion. The young people participated fully and were astonishingly open and honest about their own experiences.

6. **Conclusions**

6.1 There is a growing public awareness of domestic violence. More victims are prepared to seek help and confront the situation. However, statistics indicate that some victims, particularly women, experience thirty four incidents on average of domestic violence before reporting them to the Police. This indicates that recorded incidents are only a fraction of what is occurring but hidden. If agencies can help victims to act at an early stage of the development of domestic violence, this will prevent more serious and harmful experiences for children and young people. The Code of Practice will underpin these endeavours.

Background Papers: Milton Keynes Community Children and Young People's Services Plan 1998-2001

Learning and Development's Strategic Plan 1999/2000: The Learning Vision

Milton Keynes Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy