



# 7-minute briefing: summary of findings from multi-agency domestic abuse audits

For all those working with adults, children and families

Visit <https://bexleysafeguardingpartnership.co.uk/> for other useful resources and learning reviews

## I. THE CONTEXT FOR THIS AUDIT

- Each year, Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. agrees its priorities which are explored in the partnership's Learning Hub. Priority 6 – *Getting basic child protection right* – was led by the Local Authority and its first phase of activity ran from October 2020 until January 2021. Practice around domestic abuse has been spotlighted as a result of Covid-19 and was a chosen focus for this work.
- In November and December 2020, a deep dive multi-agency audit took place on 4 young peoples' cases where domestic abuse was the primary concern at the point of referral. The sample of cases were chosen from referrals into the MASH made between January and July 2020, included family situations from a range of backgrounds prior to and during the Covid-19 period, and considered younger and older siblings as part of the audit where relevant.
- The audit panel included Bexley's strategic lead for domestic abuse from the Local Authority, the S.H.I.E.L.D. Practice Review and Learning Manager, and representatives from the South East Basic Command Unit (Met Police), Bromley Healthcare, Solace Women's Aid, and London Borough of Bexley Children's Social Care.
- Any immediate actions required on individual young peoples' cases were fed back to allocated social workers, managers and any other relevant practitioners involved. A separate reflective discussion took place in January 2021 to feedback on practice challenges and other learning and to listen to practitioners' experiences.

## 2. FINDINGS: WHAT'S WORKING WELL?

- Information from health organisations was requested at relevant times during the assessment and at the point of referral
- Research/case preparation for MARAC meetings achieved and compliance with this part of process has seen improvement
- There was a timely response by Solace to the referrals in 3 out of the 4 cases audited
- There was evidence that Solace attempted to contact families a number of times as per their policy before closing a referred family's case
- Proactive follow-up contact was made with the referring agency in 1 case by Solace
- 1 social worker took the initiative to go and read the files from a neighbouring borough and a good quality thorough child and family assessment was completed which was timely and offered a proportionate response. Good safety planning was in place including the identification of protective adults
- A DASH assessment was completed and appropriate referrals to Solace were made
- Children were met with and spoken to as part of child and family assessments in all 4 cases
- Direct work with children was evident in all 4 of the cases audited
- Relevant agencies (including schools) were spoken to as part of the Children and Family assessment process.

## 7. USEFUL RESOURCES AND LINKS

<https://www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org.uk/> - this is the website for Bexley Domestic Abuse Services. It includes the following signposting information:

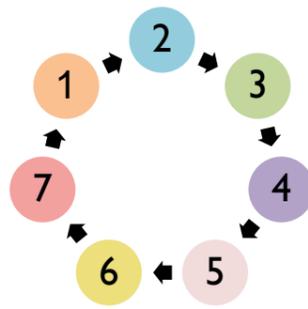
*If you are worried about domestic or sexual abuse call Solace on 0203 1984 659 for free and confidential advice and support for women and men in Bexley. Alternatively, you can contact Refuge's freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse helpline 0808 2000 247 or visit Refuge.*

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/news/solace-bexley> - this is website for Solace Women's Aid who provide vital domestic abuse services in the borough.

Multi-agency training on domestic abuse is run by Bexley Community Safety Partnership and advertised via Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. – you can contact [shield@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:shield@bexley.gov.uk) to be added to our mailing list and/or to request our latest training e-bulletin.

If you are worried about a child, you should report your concerns to Bexley MASH:

<https://www.bexley.gov.uk/services/health-and-social-care/social-care-for-children/reporting-concerns-about-child/worried-about-child>.



## 6. WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THE AUDIT TOOK PLACE?

- MARAC protocol and 7-minute briefing issued to multi-agency professional network on 1/4/21
- Email confirmation of mandatory requirements for all registered domestic abuse champions and LB Bexley social workers to attend DASH training sent to Partnership Board members on 9/4/21
- Introduction to MARAC 1-hour training session made mandatory for all staff in LB Bexley Children's Social Care as part of their induction
- Lanyards containing questions for routine enquiry purchased and dissemination plan and staff training underway
- LB Bexley domestic abuse lead has commenced work on scoping and producing a resource pack of direct work tools relating to domestic abuse practice
- The production of this 7-minute briefing on the findings from the Priority 6 multi-agency audits on domestic abuse
- MARAC markers are routinely added to case files in LB Bexley Children's Social Care.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MULTI-AGENCY PRACTICE

- DASH assessment training to be mandatory for all domestic abuse champions and LB Bexley social workers
- A resource pack to be produced for practitioners completing direct work with children who have been exposed to domestic abuse (Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. / Solace / LB Bexley)
- The referral process to MARAC to be included in all staff inductions and all social workers and their managers to undertake training so that they understand the MARAC process
- High risk cases could remain open until heard at MARAC allowing for consideration of any new information avoiding the need in some cases to re-refer
- All Police Merlins to be discussed in daily MASH meetings to ensure there are adequate checks / multi-agency discussions (Merlins need to include details of previous incidents, who was involved and the outcomes of enquiries so that repeat referrals have some context)
- Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D. to promote multi-agency training on routine enquiry and questions for routine enquiry to be added to lanyards for multi-agency workforce
- Staff to access engaging with perpetrators training once they have completed DA Dynamics Level 3 training
- A list of Children's Social Care staff to be provided setting out those who have attended DA Dynamics Level 3 training and those still needed to attend
- Resources from DAY for supporting children and families to be identified, adapted and disseminated across the partnership by Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D.
- The Signs of Safety practice framework to take into account the best approach to safety planning for potential victims and perpetrators
- A DVPO should be considered on every case where there is going to be No Further Action (NFA) and if not applied the officer should justify the reason
- Case closure guidance (being produced by Bexley S.H.I.E.L.D.) to include the importance of alerting all agencies when there has been a history of domestic abuse
- Before case closure, attempts should be made to see if protection orders have been granted (for example, non-molestation).

## 3. FINDINGS: AREAS WHERE WE CAN IMPROVE OUR PRACTICE

- In 2 of the young people's cases, there was no referral to Solace from the Police when this would have been expected
- Timely MARAC referrals were not made in 2 of the cases
- In 1 young person's case, there had been numerous Police Merlins which had not been brought to the attention of the MASH meeting
- In 1 case audited, there was a referral received by Solace but with no mention of the case being heard at Greenwich MARAC 5 times previously. In most circumstances, there should have been a MARAC to MARAC referral to Bexley from Greenwich. Solace would have kept the case open longer if they had known about the case being heard at Greenwich MARAC 5 times
- In 1 case audited, the Police had 2 call-outs in 2017, 2 call-outs in 2018, and 4 call-outs in 2020 – this should have triggered a MARAC referral from Police on escalation
- There was evidence of a delay in the meeting minutes being uploaded from MARAC. This can result in social workers and independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) being unaware of the actions set down, the risks noted, and the other professionals involved)
- Referral forms don't routinely record whether the young person's case has been referred to MARAC (if this was happening, this could potentially avoid the delay of having to re-refer after MARAC has taken place)
- MARAC markers were not being logged onto relevant databases in order to identify repeat instances of domestic abuse. This issue has been raised with senior managers.
- The audit identified that a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) was not considered in all cases when this was in fact relevant. The need was identified to adopt a Whole Family approach when completing Child and Family assessments, including considering the involvement of non-resident fathers and partners, when contact with the children is ongoing. In 1 case, the father was the victim of possible domestic abuse, but no DASH risk assessment was completed and no support offered. A referral to Solace would have been proportionate as the father had experienced abuse for many years
- There are some resources which perpetrators could have been signposted to such as 'RESPECT' which are accessible out of borough
- Reflective discussions flagged the importance of follow-up support for children and families. 1 case was without a clear safety plan. SMART plans need to set out who will do what by when and including dates for review
- Professionals who have referred a family to MASH are not always aware of the support offered to the family and the outcome of referral
- When carers and parents decide not to engage with recommended support services, it is important that professionals consider the impact of this on the children, and discuss with relevant agencies if necessary (staff in pre-schools and primary schools should be aware if the family are not being monitored and or the family have decided not to access support). This will ensure that staff can remain vigilant.
- Ahead of the closure of a young person's case, there is a need to ensure multi-agency input into Child in Need and Child Protection meetings and for all professionals involved to be consulted to make sure all information is up-to-date and considers any ongoing worries.

## 4. KEY LEARNING THEMES

- Clarity around the role of MARAC including referral processes
- Confirmation of the induction and training requirements for all staff in relation to MARAC and DASH
- Improved record-keeping around how organisations make MARAC referrals and how MARAC meeting minutes are uploaded by the MASH in a timely way
- The review of all of Police Merlins by partners within MASH meetings
- Direct work tools and resources for the multi-agency professional network when working with children and families
- Improved understanding of the Whole Family approach in relation to domestic abuse cases.