

# Harmful Practices Strategy **Cheshire** 2018-20







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## Foreword

**I am proud to present our new Harmful Practices Strategy on behalf of Cheshire Police, our local health partners and the Councils across Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Halton and Warrington.**

The sad reality is that Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation are not problems of the past - nor are they problems which are only happening elsewhere. These issues have been, and continue to be, brought to light within our own communities. We need to ensure that victims and community members have the confidence to speak out, and are effectively protected and supported when they do.

The purpose of this document is to set out our strategic approach in how we intend to address Harmful Practices across our boroughs. Aligning with our Police and Crime Plan 2016-21, it will

help us to work collectively and collaboratively to eradicate Harmful Practices in all forms, and will result in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington being even safer and happier places to live.



**David Parr**  
Chair of the Protecting  
Vulnerable People Board

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## What are Harmful Practices

**Harmful Practices are broadly considered to incorporate Honour-Based Abuse (HBA), Forced Marriage (FM) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).**

These are by their nature largely hidden crimes, and it is important for all of us to appreciate the uniquely difficult position of victims regarding their relationships with perpetrators. Many victims do not want to criminalise their parents, families or culture, many are told that speaking out or going against the perpetrators' wishes will result in them being ostracised - and a significant proportion of victims are led to believe that they are the perpetrators, bringing shame on those around them.

Consequently, it is entirely possible that professionals will only have one chance to deal effectively with a disclosure of HBA, FM or FGM, making an appropriate response all the more crucial.

Another reason for harmful practices being hidden is that a significant proportion of both victims and perpetrators do not recognise harmful practices as illegal, but as either a 'normal' feature of a particular culture or an acceptable response to the circumstances present at the time. This Strategy and the work that follows must therefore serve to raise collective awareness and understanding of the issues - both among professionals and the communities affected. This is reflected within Priority 2 on page 10.



**Honour-Based Abuse** incorporates a variety of practices used to control the victim's behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs, or honour. Such abuse can occur when perpetrators believe that a relative has shamed their family and/or community by breaking their honour code, code of behaviour or way of life. Honour-Based Abuse can be distinguished from other forms of abuse which demonstrate similar characteristics as it is often committed with some degree of approval or collusion from family and community members

There is no specific offence of Honour-Based Abuse. It is an umbrella term which encompasses various offences covered by existing legislation - but, along with Forced Marriage and FGM, constitutes a clear violation of internationally-recognised human rights, most notably

- Article 2: The right to life, liberty and protection from unlawful violence
- Article 3: The prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Article 12: The right to marry and to start a family

**Forced Marriage** is defined as 'a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor. Duress includes emotional pressure as well as criminal actions such as assault, imprisonment and abduction.' It is distinct from an arranged marriage, where the choice to accept or refuse the arrangement remains with the individuals - and consent is sought, not overlooked

Forced Marriage is a specific criminal offence in England, Scotland and Wales under sections 121 and 122 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014

**Female Genital Mutilation**, Female Genital Mutilation, sometimes referred to as female circumcision or cutting, relates to 'all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs, whether for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons.' The age at which girls undergo FGM varies enormously according to the community; ranging from newborn, childhood, adolescence, just before marriage or during the pregnancy

Despite the severe consequences, perpetrators - often family members - genuinely believe that it is in the girl's best interests to conform with their prevailing custom, considering FGM a normal aspect of their cultural identity; not intended as an act of abuse

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (as amended by the Serious Crime Act 2015) made it illegal to carry out FGM or aid and abet its execution, either at home or abroad - and placed a duty on professionals across health, social care and education to report concerns

## Prevalence

### Harmful Practices

#### Honour-based Abuse

Between 2010 and 2014

- More than 11,000 cases of Honour-Based Abuse were recorded by UK police forces
- There were 18 recorded cases of honour killings; more than four a year

However, the Halo Project - a FM and HBA charity - estimate that closer to 15 honour killings take place across the UK every year

#### Female Genital Mutilation

**427,800** women and girls born in FGM-practicing countries have permanent residency in England

**134,645** women and girls with FGM are estimated to have permanent residency in England - 6% of whom (8,141) are thought to live in the North West

An analysis of the 2011 Census indicated that around **190** women and girls living across our boroughs have undergone FGM. 1,026 women born in FGM-practicing countries resident in Cheshire, including:

- 231 in Warrington
- 41 in Halton
- 290 in Cheshire West & Chester
- 426 in Cheshire East

#### Forced Marriage

In 2016, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gave advice or support in relation to a possible forced marriage in **1,428** cases; a 14% increase on 2015

of those, **180** (13%) related to victims or potential victims residing in the North West

**80%** of the cases involved female victims - **20%** were male

and **11%** involved no overseas element; that is, the forced marriage activity took place, and was planned to continue, entirely in the UK

and more than a **quarter** of all cases related to victims under 18 years of age

## Signs of Harmful practice

There is no definitive list of indicators that will bring Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage or FGM to light. Every person is different, their personal experiences and circumstances are different, and so the signs of abuse in each individual are likely to be different - and may not always be obvious.

However, it is worth reiterating that victims may only come into contact with professionals once or twice, if at all. Our collective ability to recognise them and deal effectively with the challenges that their situations present is therefore crucial, and so it is worth noting some of the signs which may be present:

- Evidence of self-harm or attempted suicide
- Signs of domestic abuse
- Detachment, withdrawal, fear and/or depression in interactions with others
- Signs of a lack of control over personal life - eg finances, mobile phone access
- Decline in school performance, motivation or general demeanour
- Apparent restrictions on extra-curricular activity, or withdrawal from school altogether
- Increasing medical issues - in particular gynaecological

All of the above must be considered against the circumstances that a person might reasonably expect of the situation at that time. Some or none of the above may be present, but suspicions should be reported - and local safeguarding procedures should be considered from the outset.

It should also be noted that regulated healthcare professionals have a mandatory duty to report any concerns they have about a female under 18 years of age and record when FGM is disclosed or identified as part of NHS healthcare





## What is already happening across Cheshire

A number of victims have already been identified across our boroughs, reinforcing the sad reality that harmful practices exist here, today, just as they do in others parts of the UK and abroad. It is commonly accepted that a majority of crimes are unreported, but the following cases provide examples of those which have been identified and dealt with locally.

### Honour-Based Abuse and Forced Marriage

H is a female in her early twenties who lives in Cheshire with her two young children. Her siblings live with her mother, also in Cheshire. H's parents had an arranged marriage prior to moving to the UK, later divorced - but her father continues to visit on a regular basis.

Both of H's children were born out of wedlock and have also been the subject of social care involvement, both of which were considered to bring shame on her and the wider family. H herself is an extremely vulnerable person, suffering with mental health problems and previously subjected to domestic abuse by various partners.

She travelled to visit family abroad and was told by her grandfather that they wanted her to marry her cousin to 'restore her honour.' H met her cousin, but did not want to marry him. As a result, she was ostracised by her family for several weeks until she reluctantly agreed and the marriage went ahead.

H became pregnant soon afterwards, but miscarried on her way back to the UK. Her mother confiscated her passport and marriage certificate and her extended family started to exert pressure on her to return abroad, which she didn't want to, fearing that she may be killed. She also feared that her mother might gain custody of her children, whether she left or stayed.

Following a domestic incident outside H's mother's address, H was arrested by Cheshire Police. Whilst in custody, she disclosed to officers that she was forced to marry her cousin abroad and had been subject to threats on her return. She was witnessed as having physical injuries, but it was unclear how they had occurred.

A Karma Nirvana (national charity which supports victims of HBA and FM) risk assessment was completed, which graded H as 'medium risk,' and she was issued with an emergency mobile phone. A Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) was also discussed, which H was supportive of, and ongoing liaison was made between Cheshire Police and Children's Social Care in relation to the risks posed to H's children. In the intervening period, H was subjected to further domestic abuse by her current partner; she agreed to pursue a prosecution and her partner was arrested and convicted. A professionals meeting was held between the police, children's social care, adult social care, the community mental health team and legal advisers to discuss the case and the application for a FMPO, which was granted by the courts and served on H's mother. Following the issue of the FMPO, H changed her story in relation to the ongoing issues and disengaged with all professionals, resulting in the FMPO being withdrawn. The reason(s) why H suddenly withdrew from support services remains unclear.



## Forced Marriage

M is a 19 year old male of Bangladeshi heritage who lives in Cheshire with his parents and younger siblings. M's parents have been trying to arrange a marriage for him for the last 7 years. When he was 12, his parents told him that they had arranged for him to marry his cousin, who was his mother's niece, and who he had met on a trip to Bangladesh when he was 6 or 7 years old. Initially, he didn't fully understand the situation - and thought it may have been a joke.

M told his parents on several occasions that he was opposed to the marriage, but he wasn't listened to; simply being told that it was his father's wish.

His mother told him that, if he refused, it might cause his father to have a heart attack, and that M himself would be cursed.

M started a relationship with another girl but his parents disapproved and continued to pressure him into the arranged marriage - buying him a car to get him to agree to it, booking him a flight to Bangladesh and asking him for a financial contribution towards the wedding itself.

M fled the family home on the morning that he was due to travel and contacted the police for advice. His parents still travelled to Bangladesh.

Police officers spoke to M and completed a Karma Nirvana risk assessment, which graded him as 'high risk.' Concerns for his siblings were also escalated and a strategy meeting was convened with children's social care to discuss the related risks.

A referral was made to the Forced Marriage Unit at the Home Office.

M agreed to the police and local authority seeking a Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO), a statement was taken from him and the FMPO was granted by Chester County Court.

The FMPO was served on M's parents, his passport was retrieved from them and retained by Cheshire Police.

**These cases not only illustrate that harmful practices exist, but reiterate our strong desire to make life better for all of those affected. A wide range of agencies have, and will continue to be, on hand to protect and support these extremely vulnerable individuals; and an operational plan will follow this Strategy to ensure that our response is as effective as possible.**





## Governance and Accountability

The pan-Cheshire Harmful Practices Group will assume strategic responsibility for Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation. In effect, it will own this Strategy; and will be accountable to the Protecting Vulnerable People Forum (PVP).

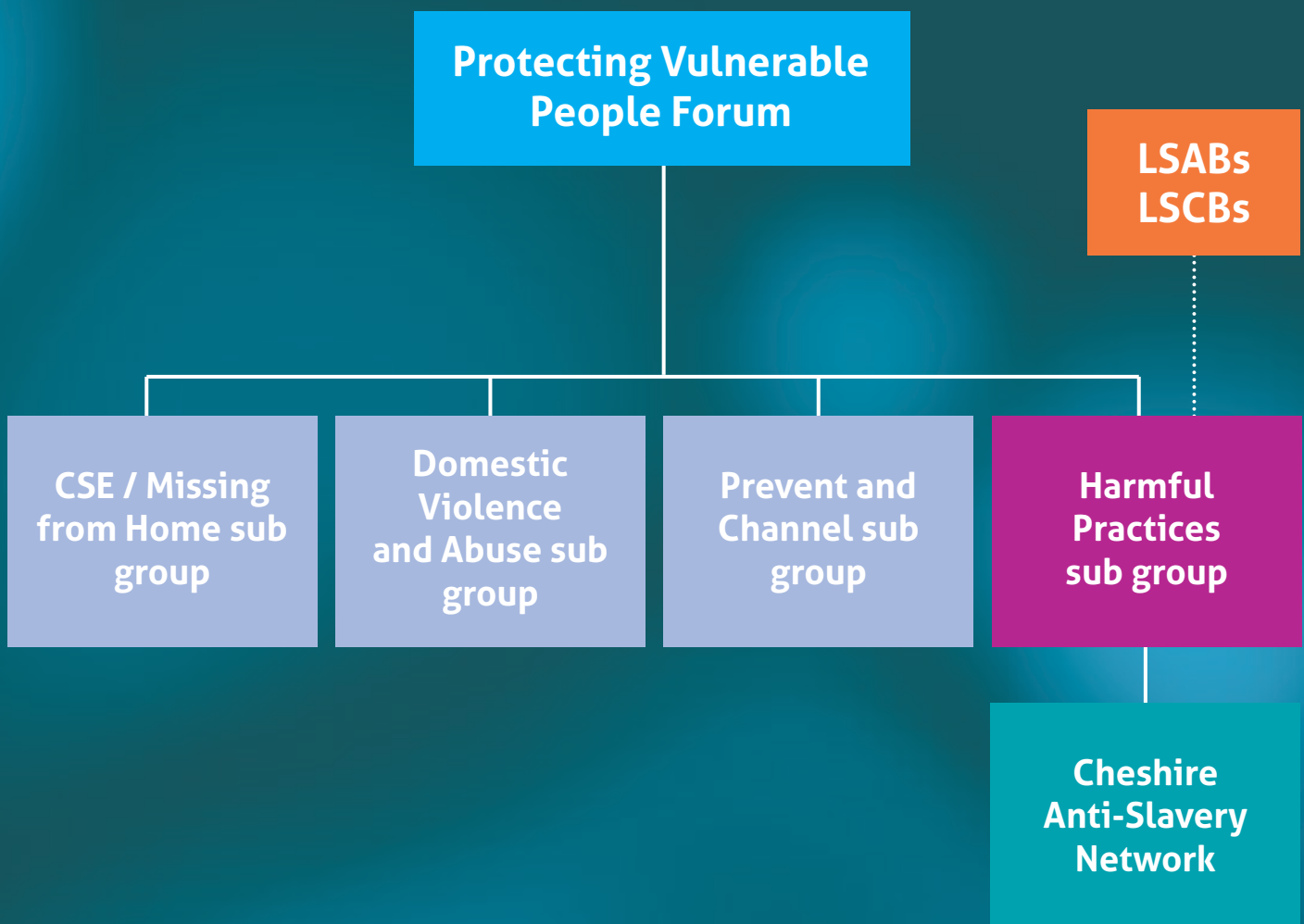
It will also ensure that progress is made against its priorities by developing and taking ownership of a pan-Cheshire, multi-agency Action Plan. Operational work will be shared across the Harmful Practices Group, with measurable actions and timescales clearly assigned to individuals - and working groups established on an ad-hoc basis where tasks are more complex.

### The Harmful Practices sub-group will

- Ensure that progress is made against each of the strategic priorities
- Use its influence to help overcome any issues escalated to it by its members
- Report highlights and exceptions to the Protecting Vulnerable People Forum (PVP)
- Provide quarterly updates to the Local

Safeguarding Adult Boards (LSABs) and Local and pan-Cheshire Domestic Abuse Strategy Board Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs), ensuring that the strategic leads of each locality are regularly sighted on progress, issues and trends associated with Harmful Practices

Relevant information will be shared between the Harmful Practices Group and other pan-Cheshire sub-groups as appropriate, given the potential of common themes and shared cohorts of people being discussed by each.



# Vision

Our Vision is: For everyone in Cheshire to live a safe and happy life free from harmful practices in all its forms.

## Strategic Priorities

Our vision will be delivered through three priorities:

Strong and effective leadership response to Harmful Practices

Improve awareness, understanding and identification

Positive protection and support system for victims

### Priority 1

#### Strong and effective leadership response to Harmful Practices

##### Why?

Harmful practices involve the abuse and coercion of vulnerable people. As such, they constitute safeguarding issues akin to modern slavery, domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and child abuse, which agencies across Cheshire are well placed to - and do - tackle effectively. However, they present a complex range of overlapping, often hidden, issues which require a strong, coherent partnership response. It is essential that all of us across the public sector recognise that protecting people from HBA, FM and FGM is everybody's business, and part of our day job as professionals who work continuously to safeguard and support those at risk

##### How?

Secure the strategic commitment of all relevant local agencies to protect victims

Maximise links between the policies and strategies that deal with exploitation, DVA and other relevant issues

Ensure that information is shared, both locally and nationally, for effective co-ordination and services

### Priority 2

#### Improve awareness, understanding and identification

##### Why?

Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and FGM are hidden and greatly under-reported crimes. The overwhelming majority, if not all, victims are extremely vulnerable, scared and feel powerless to speak out, so it is up to professionals and members of the community to identify and protect them. This is further compounded by the likelihood that victims will present, and certainly disclose, to those who could help them extremely infrequently - making the identification of harmful practices, and appropriate and effective response to them, all the more important

##### How?

Raise awareness across our communities, and faith and voluntary sectors, to help people fully understand and recognise harmful practices - and ensure that they know how to report

Train our staff to recognise the signs of harmful practices and know what to do and who to contact whenever they identify suspicions

Maintain an awareness of risks and put measures in place to mitigate them appropriately and effectively



## Priority 3

### Positive protection and support system for victims

#### Why?

Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation come to light far less frequently than other issues of a similar nature, such as DVA and child abuse. Those affected represent a cohort of victims among the most reluctant to report - and among those most at risk of further, serious harm if they do. It is therefore crucial that we create a system which not only enables the consistent identification of victims but provides strong, effective and sustainable support which takes into account the particular risks associated with victims of harmful practice.

#### How?

Ensure there are clear and robust safeguarding policies and practice guidelines in place to identify and support those affected

Establish a consistent and co-ordinated operational partnership approach to deal effectively with reports and disclosures as they arise, with consideration of the potential impact of public service intervention

Develop a comprehensive range of services and other options capable of effectively supporting people throughout their recovery effectively and sustainably

## What will success look like

Due to the nature of Honour-Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation, the initial primary of success will likely be an increased reporting of these issues across relevant agencies. Other tangible indicators will be evidence of improved awareness among professionals and communities, increased access to support services and community engagement events. However, to be assured that we are actively and effectively tackling harmful practices, we also expect to see an increased criminal response, both in relation to legal protection - the use of Forced Marriage Protection Orders, for example - and the prosecution and conviction of perpetrators.

This Strategy will be underpinned by a pan-Cheshire, multi-agency Action Plan, which will be refreshed annually to take account of progress and ongoing challenges.



