

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	20 th April 2026
Subject:	Harmful Practices Strategy
Lead Member:	Cllr Ejaz Ahmed - Lead Member for Communities, Sport, Leisure and Public Protection
Chief Officer:	Tessa Lindfield- Director of Public Health
Contact Officer:	Bethanie Axtell - Community Safety • Public Protection
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Strategy Appendix 2: Toolkit

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Harmful Practices Strategy and accompanying toolkit, to support a coordinated response to harmful practices across Slough. This will positively impact all wards by raising awareness of harmful practices, addressing misconceptions through community engagement, and preventing abuse through proactive safeguarding and legal protections.

1.2 Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to approve the Harmful Practices Strategy and Toolkit for the period 2026–2029, enabling partners to respond effectively to identified risks and provide appropriate support to affected individuals.

1.3 Reason:

Harmful practices are a hidden and under-reported form of abuse, often perpetrated by family members and supported by trusted, influential figures within communities, making disclosure and detection particularly challenging.

- 1.3.1 There is benefit to Slough having a clear strategy to safeguard individuals at risk because of the cultural diversity and global connections of Slough's communities. This includes communities originating from regions where harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and so called 'honour-based' abuse are known to occur globally. The Authority has a responsibility to safeguard individuals at risk, educate communities about relevant UK legislation, and support those affected.
- 1.3.2 Under multi-agency statutory guidance on Female Genital Mutilation (2020) and the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), local authorities have a statutory duty to make arrangements that safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. This strategy provides a framework to meet that duty through prevention, protection, and partnership.

1.4 Commissioner Review

This report is outside the scope for pre-publication commissioner review; please check the [Commissioners' instruction 5 to CLT to sign off papers](#) for further details.

2. Report - Introductory paragraph

The Council plays a fundamental lead role under the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) response to Domestic Abuse, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and Harmful Practices. This includes the protection of victims and holding perpetrators to account. This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval for a borough-wide partnership strategy to sit alongside the Domestic Abuse Strategy (2023 – 2026). This strategy will fall under the Slough Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, reporting back to the Safer Slough Partnership.

- 2.1 The implementation of the Harmful Practices Strategy will contribute towards the delivery of the Council's **Vision and Corporate Priorities 2023 to 2027**.
- i. A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives,
 - ii. A borough for children and young people to thrive,
 - iii. Enabling residents and communities,
 - iv. Strengthening partnerships,
 - v. Resident focused,
 - vi. Building trust.

2.2 Options considered

Option	Pros	Cons (including key risks)	Reasons why/why not recommended
Option 1: 'Do Nothing': Existing system is good enough and the business will not make any changes or improvements to the current platform.	No additional cost is required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There would be limited coordination across services and partners. Victims may remain hidden, unsupported, or at greater risk due to lack of awareness and proactive intervention. The council may fail to meet statutory duties under safeguarding legislation and national guidance. 	There is a risk of reputational damage and community trust erosion if the council is perceived as not taking these issues seriously.
Option 2: 'Do Something': Improve and retain current system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Engagement Multi-Agency Coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs associated with awareness raising, including resources creation, dissemination, as well as information session delivery 	<p>Recommended to improve resident and professional's understanding of what Harmful Practices are and how they are legislated against in the UK.</p> <p>Not recommended because it does not go far enough to establish a ratified framework that all care professionals and partner agencies are required to actively work towards, limiting its potential to drive consistent and coordinated action.</p>
Option 3: Recommended option: -To adopt the Harmful Practices Strategy and Toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved Safeguarding Community Engagement Multi-Agency Coordination Policy Alignment Data and Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs associated with resources printing and dissemination, training delivered and strategy launch event 	Recommended to ensure the Council and Police have a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of Harmful Practices in Slough and to enable unified partnership approach whereby all services work in alignment.

2.3. Background

2.3.1 The Harmful Practices Strategy is underpinned by a legal framework that mandates action to protect individuals, particularly children and women, from practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003), as amended by the Serious Crime Act (2015), criminalises FGM across the UK, introduces FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs), and makes it a criminal offence to fail to protect a child from FGM. Under the Children Acts (1989) and (2004), FGM is recognised as a form of child abuse, empowering authorities to intervene and safeguard children at risk. The Serious Crime Act (2015) also places a mandatory reporting duty on professionals, including teachers, social workers, and healthcare staff, to report known cases of FGM in children to the police. Furthermore, the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) identifies FGM as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG), thereby extending protections and support for victims of gender-based violence. These legislative provisions highlight the statutory imperative for a coordinated strategy to prevent harmful practices and protect vulnerable individuals.

- 2.3.2 Slough Borough Council has not endorsed a formal strategy to combat Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) since the conclusion of the former Local Safeguarding Children Board's strategy in 2016.
- 2.3.3 Local Data: According to Thames Valley Police, there have been 11 recorded crime and non-crime occurrences related to FGM in Slough since 2020. In addition, the police report an average of 3.5 cases of so-called 'honour-based' abuse per month.
- 2.3.4 Forced Marriage concerns are also on the increase, with a number of cases being reported and actively pursued through the court process by obtaining FMPO's (Forced Marriage Protection Orders). A FMPO is a civil law measure which can be sought under section 63 of the Family Law Act 1996. The aim of a FMPO is to protect and safeguard a person who has been, or is being, forced into marriage.
- 2.3.5 The launch will take place prior to the school summer break because it has been identified as a high-risk period for Forced Marriage, HBA and FGM due to the long holiday providing time for trips abroad and for wounds to 'heal' before girls return to school. There is also a risk of little to no oversight from school safeguarding professionals due to the school being closed.
- 2.3.6 Section 121 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 sets out the offence of forced marriage. It states that a person commits an offence under the law in England and Wales if he or she "uses violence, threats or any other form of coercion for the purpose of causing another person to enter into a marriage and believes, or ought reasonably to believe, that the conduct may cause the other person to enter into the marriage without free and full consent.

2.4 Why change is needed?

- 2.4.1 Currently, there are unclear shared aims, referral procedures, and uncoordinated safeguarding protocols agreed across partner agencies in Slough, which limits the borough's ability to respond effectively and consistently. A unified partnership approach would ensure that all services are aligned in protecting vulnerable individuals.
- 2.4.2 Previously, Ofsted has queried our strategic approach to harmful practices given Slough's multicultural demographic. This highlights a gap and an opportunity to meet legislative expectations.

2.5 Consultation:

- 2.5.1 The strategy was developed collaboratively, drawing on the expertise of local partners including Slough Borough Council, HCRG, NHS Foundation Trust, Frimley ICB, Slough Children First, and Slough Integration Service. By working closely with these organisations, we have ensured the Strategy reflects a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in protecting vulnerable individuals across our borough.

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The strategy will continue to be supported by the Public Protection Domestic Abuse Team. An allocation of £2,000 has been earmarked within the Domestic Abuse

budget 2026/27 to launch and publicise the strategy and train practitioners, along with the publication and dissemination of the toolkit.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 Under the multi-agency statutory guidance on Female Genital Mutilation (2020) and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, local authorities have a statutory duty to make arrangements that safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults, ensuring coordinated prevention and protection across agencies. The Children Act 1989 also requires councils to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and to take action where they are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, making a structured approach to harmful practices essential for fulfilling these obligations. In parallel, the Care Act 2014 mandates local authorities to prevent abuse and neglect, undertake safeguarding enquiries, and lead multi-agency systems to protect adults at risk, reinforcing the need for a coherent, preventative and coordinated response to harmful practices. This strategy therefore provides a unified framework through which the council can meet these statutory duties by embedding effective prevention, early identification, protection, and partnership working across children's and adults' safeguarding.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 The strategy helps mitigate risks by:

- Establishing clear governance and accountability structures
- Enhancing multi-agency coordination and information sharing
- Promoting proactive best practice across the partnership
- Providing assurance that safeguarding responsibilities are being met effectively

Failure to implement the strategy could result in increased exposure to safeguarding incidents, public criticism, and scrutiny from regulatory bodies. It may also undermine the council's ability to demonstrate compliance with statutory duties and good governance practices.

3.3.2 Failure to implement a coordinated strategy to address harmful practices may result in the council being unable to demonstrate compliance with its safeguarding duties. This could expose the authority to legal challenge. It may also lead to complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or scrutiny by external auditors.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The Harmful Practices Strategy supports the council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and so called 'honour-based' abuse, disproportionately affect individuals with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to gender, ethnicity, religion and age. People with disability and/or mental illness are further at risk.

4. Background Papers

None