

Forced marriage, family cohesion and community engagement: national learning through a case study of Luton

Dr Nazia Khanum OBE

March 2008



Equality in Diversity

Independent management, research and training

Forced marriage, family cohesion and community engagement: national learning through a case study of Luton

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Acknowledgements

As soon as I started conducting this piece of research in 2006, it became clear to me that I was dealing with one of the most sensitive subjects, the actual scale and complexity of which will probably never be known.

The paucity of available data and the inconsistency of recording incidents across agencies were clear from the start. Since the lack of data was anticipated, this research project took a qualitative and not a quantitative approach, and so no attempt has been made to indulge in a number crunching exercise. Full advantage has been taken of the opportunity to delve into the interviewees' personal views, perceptions and experiences. During the research, I came across all kinds of emotions and value judgments including mistrust, fear, denial, scepticism, prejudice, powerlessness, hopelessness, anger and also remarkable determination and hope from individuals - men and women.

I am grateful to Margaret Moran MP (for Luton South) and her office, especially Ushrat Sultana, Jim Blair of the Metropolitan Police Service and Deborah Jamieson (then at the Home Office) for commissioning my consultancy, Equality in Diversity, for this important piece of work and Councillor Hazel Simmons, Leader of Luton Borough Council for funding the publication of this report. Extensive support was received from Peter Abbott of the Forced Marriage Unit, Ushrat Sultana of Margaret Moran's Office, Fazal Bi of e-Quality Networks and all those I interviewed. They freely gave me their time, views, experiences and information about forced marriages. I owe them a great deal. My debt to them will only be repaid if my recommendations for action are implemented and the victims and potential victims of forced marriages and so-called "honour"-based violence, their families, public spirited individuals and the support agencies across all sectors are empowered to tackle one of the most heinous breaches of human rights.



Dr Nazia Khanum OBE

Foreword

This project is one of three national pilots funded by the Home Office, and is the outcome of a partnership involving the Metropolitan Police Service and the office of Margaret Moran MP (for Luton South). It is the first time that comprehensive qualitative research has been carried out on forced marriage in Luton. It provides the national context, the local picture and a set of recommendations which should be implemented in the short, medium and long term to support victims and eradicate forced marriage. We hope that these recommendations will be reviewed by all statutory and voluntary agencies, nationally and locally.

The report by Dr Nazia Khanum OBE highlights the important role played by local community support groups. Victims and their friends and supporters are reluctant to approach statutory agencies and the larger, national charities which in their eyes have semi-official status. Instead, they go to local community support groups which they believe will understand their cultural perspective. The true extent of forced marriage will never be known, because so few cases are reported to and recorded by statutory agencies, but local community organisations receive several hundred enquiries about forced marriage each year. Unfortunately, they do not have the counselling services and dedicated advice workers they need to offer support themselves rather than signposting them to other agencies. Consequently, many victims do not in practice have access to services they trust. Community groups involved with forced marriage therefore need core funding so that they can operate effectively.

Some of the recent cases of honour-based violence have tragically confirmed Dr Khanum's finding that national guidelines are not followed as effectively as they should be. This highlights the importance of raising the awareness of forced marriage issues in the relevant statutory and community agencies. We welcome the Action Plan presented by the Government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), which sets out the work to be taken forward both in the UK and overseas, and the development of the national Survivors' Network, funded by the FMU. We also welcome the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 which places this guidance on a statutory footing. However, as Dr Khanum emphasises, despite the excellent work of the FMU and others, support services still lack awareness of these national initiatives and guidance. She recommends extensive training across all sectors, especially in multi-agency settings, not only to raise awareness, but to share good practice in dealing with forced marriage and so called honour-based

violence. She also recommends a wider definition of forced marriage to include “false marriage”.

Dr Khanum stresses the need for all support services to become engaged, so that there is a consistent approach to the handling of current cases. At the same time, a robust campaign of preventative measures must be developed, including good parenting, women’s education and the involvement communities and faith leaders, to make forced marriage a thing of the past.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Moran". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear underline under the first 'M'.

Margaret Moran MP (for Luton South)

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Methodology

This was a qualitative study, using Luton as a case study to investigate the key issues relating to forced marriage and so called “honour”-based violence. It was based on the following methodology:

1. Extensive literature review of published national and local documents relating to forced marriages, domestic abuse and “honour” - killings. The bibliography at Annex 1 details these documents.
2. Collection and analysis of relevant information on population in Luton from the Census 2001 and other data available from the Office of National Statistics and from Luton Borough Council.
3. Interviews with 104 individuals representing specific agencies, community organisations and also those who have first hand knowledge and experience of forced marriage and domestic abuse.
4. Four group discussions.
5. Over fifteen case studies.

Background

1. There has been concern over forced marriage, in Britain and elsewhere, for many years. The debate has in the past been complicated by confusion over the difference between arranged and forced marriages and a serious reluctance by professionals to intervene in what they believed to be religious and cultural norms. In 1999, Mike O'Brien, the Minister for Community Relations, set up a working group to investigate the extent of forced marriage in England and Wales and present proposals for tackling it effectively. The working group, chaired jointly by Lord Ahmed of Rotherham and Baroness Uddin of Bethnal Green, reported in 2000. Its report, *A choice by right*, clarified the key issues and, seven years on, it is now possible to conclude that it succeeded in establishing a broad consensus on forced marriage within Britain.
2. The report made a number of recommendations for action, but perhaps its critical achievement was to change the terms of the debate by asserting fundamental principles which have set the tone for the discussion of forced marriage and underpinned the development of social policy subsequently. In particular, the report:
 - i. Stressed that forced marriage is not simply an Asian issue, but has to be tackled within the wider context of evolving relationships between men and women, and between parents and children, across all communities, to build 'a culture of common human rights;'
 - ii. Clearly distinguished between forced and arranged marriages, and this does now appear to be better understood by journalists, politicians and other commentators, with the terms less often used interchangeably than in the past;
 - iii. Stated unambiguously that no religion sanctions force in matrimony;
 - iv. Simplified the definition of forced marriage by recommending a victim-oriented approach - the report opens with the statement of a young woman from Leicester, that 'A person knows when they are being forced into a marriage against their will - that must be the starting point;'

- v. Emphasised that a forced marriage is not valid under English law, citing the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, which provides that a marriage may be declared void if ‘either party to the marriage did not validly consent to it, whether in consequence of duress, mistake, unsoundness of mind or otherwise,’ and pointed out that the process of forcing a marriage may involve the commission of several criminal offences including murder, threatening behaviour, assault and kidnap;
 - vi. Set out the principle that everyone living in Britain is entitled to a common set of human rights, which cannot be overridden by local culture or tradition, citing Mike O’Brien’s comment that, ‘Multi-cultural sensitivity is not an excuse for moral blindness.’
3. The last point is particularly significant for community cohesion and the debate which the government has initiated on the importance of establishing a set of common values of citizenship which provide a foundation for a sense of Britishness. Britain has no monopoly on human rights. The successful partnerships that have been established between the British, Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi governments to combat forced marriage confirm that repugnance for this practice is as strong outside the United Kingdom as within, and while Britain’s record on enforcing human rights may be better than many other countries, it is still patchy in practice. Nevertheless, a fundamental feature of the British way of life must continue to be based on a commitment to universal human rights and that no groups or individuals can opt out of this commitment on cultural, traditional or any other spurious grounds.
4. Following the publication of the report, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) established a Community Liaison Unit (CLU) to take forward the working group’s recommendations. The CLU was absorbed into a joint FCO-Home Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) in 2005. The main initiatives to date are:
- i. Ongoing support and advice provided to victims and potential victims of forced marriage. The FMU receives over 5,000 enquiries and handles 300 cases of forced marriage every year;
 - ii. Establishment of a Two Year Action Plan, to ensure a multi-agency approach to tackling forced marriage;

- iii. Programme of cooperation with South Asian governments and police services to assist/extricate British victims of forced marriage, building on the relatively recent UK policy of providing protection for all British passport-holders overseas, even if they have dual nationality;
 - iv. Good practice guidance for professionals, notably in education, social work and health and police services, through publications, seminars, training, etc;
 - v. Publicity and awareness-raising within communities.
5. Forced marriage does not take place in a vacuum and so these initiatives overlap with a wide range of other actions, for example relating to domestic violence, protection of children and vulnerable young people, etc. The crucial point is that professionals working on cases recognise the links.
6. The working group on forced marriage advised against creating a new criminal offence, nor did it recommend additional civil remedies, pointing out that current common and statutory law provided a wide range of powers relating to matrimony itself, the protection of children and young people, etc, while any criminal acts perpetrated in the course of forcing a marriage would in any case be subject to prosecution. There were concerns that a requirement to establish the motivation of someone forcing a marriage could hinder a prosecution which might be more straightforward under existing law, while victims normally wish to see the problem resolved and might be deterred from seeking help if they feared it would result in the conviction of their relations. However, the Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Lester, sought to extend the range of protection available by introducing the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Bill as a Private Member's Bill in November 2006. The bill was later supported by the government and has now been passed as the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007.
7. The Forced Marriage Act amends the Family Law Act 1996. It empowers courts to make forced marriage protection orders which limit the conduct of people who are attempting to coerce someone into marriage. It takes a straightforward definition of forced marriage:
- ‘A person (“A”) is forced into marriage if another person (“B”) forces A to enter into a marriage (whether with B or another person) without A’s free and full consent.’

This is in practice a victim-oriented definition since A is the only person who can state whether her/his consent is free and full. The Act sets out two important clarifications of the basic definition:

- i. The force does not have to be applied directly to the victim - 'it does not matter whether the conduct of B is directed against A, B or another person.' That is to say, indirect pressure on other friends or family members counts as force, not just direct pressure on the victim.
- ii. The definition of force is wide ranging - "'force" includes coerce by threats and other psychological means.' Consequently, there does not have to be a threat of violence.

Altogether, then, the Act takes a remarkably wide view of the use of force, allowing courts to take account of psychological pressure exerted upon third parties.

8. It remains to be seen how effectively these powers are interpreted in practice. The Act will not in itself change attitudes, but it does offer legal protection to potential victims and perpetrators who violate the terms of a forced marriage protection order may be arrested. It provides a formal, legal framework for state intervention into forced marriage.
9. There are two related issues which the current literature and policy frameworks do not address - the prevention of love marriages and sexuality:
 - i. **Prevention of love marriages:** forcing somebody not to marry is as great a violation of their human rights as forcing them to marry, especially if it is accompanied by violence. Some 'honour killings' are of men deemed unsuitable by the girl's family, while some marriages are forced in order to prevent a love-match. Preventing marriage should be considered a form of forced marriage.
 - ii. **Sexuality:** there are critical issues relating to the rights of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people within a number of minority communities, but in the present context it needs to be noted that in some cases marriage may be forced in order to 'straighten out,' as it were, young people who are not heterosexual. This is a violation of their own and their prospective spouses' human rights.

10. The current project has been commissioned to consider how the framework set up by these various initiatives are affecting the situation on the ground, taking Luton as a case study. It was also asked to address the question of 'honour killings.' A major objective is to examine effective interventions which pre-empt attempts to force marriages, rather than simply responding to the crises after they have developed. It is one of three national pilots funded by the Home Office, and is the outcome of a partnership involving the Metropolitan Police Service and the office of Margaret Moran, MP for Luton South, who has been at the forefront of national and local action on women's issues, especially forced marriage. It was locally managed by the office of Margaret Moran.

Forced marriage: the context

11. Forced marriage is a serious problem. The Government's Forced Marriage Unit deals with 250-300 cases per year. These are the most difficult cases, representing the tip of the iceberg. Many more - perhaps several thousand - are not reported. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the great majority of marriages in the UK - whether they turn out to be successful or not in the long run - are consensual. Only a small minority of marriages are forced. Since the scale of the problem is limited, it can be successfully tackled.
12. Historically, forced marriage was common among all communities. Although the expression 'shotgun wedding' is nowadays used jokingly among white British people, it testifies to the use of force in marriage in the past. Over the course of the twentieth century, the use of force in marriage has become less common within the white British community as a result of changes in relationships between parents and children, and between men and women - including greater readiness to accept lone parenthood. Since arranged marriages are now unusual, the option of positively forcing children into marriage seldom arises within the white British community except where a girl has become pregnant - but keeping people apart is another matter altogether. Parental disapproval of marriages can be forceful and even violent, especially if the spouse is from the 'wrong' ethnic or religious group or class, but when white people are involved such incidents are more likely to be classified as domestic violence rather than forced marriage. It should be borne in mind, though, that if publicity for forced marriage becomes more high profile, some white people may start to recognise that they too fall within the syndrome of forced marriage.
13. Where force is used in marriage, it is generally justified through an appeal to traditional values - the authority and wisdom of parents, children's duty of obedience, customary patterns of marriage within specific ethnic, religious, clan, caste or class groupings, the honour of the family, etc. The use of force itself is seldom justified. Forced marriage is universally condemned, even by the perpetrators. Few people openly support force in marriage. When it happens, the perpetrators do not say - or for the most part even believe - that they are forcing their children into an unpleasant situation. They say and usually believe that their greater age, wisdom and experience give them a better understanding of their children's long term

welfare than the children have themselves, and that their right to assert their authority to give their children a good start in life is sanctioned by custom, religion and common sense. The children's resistance only corroborates their immaturity.

14. In some cases, the perpetrators themselves are caught up in a cycle of family bullying and community pressures from which they feel there is no escape with honour. A statement by a victim of forced marriage in Luton illustrates the complexity and widespread pain of some forced marriage situations:

'The only reason my parents went ahead with this marriage was because my dad had given his word to my Grandmother who had arranged it when I was 1 year old. At one point a few years previous my dad had begged his mother to break this arrangement but she threatened to disown him if he dared. He felt compelled to do as his mother said. What hurt me was that my family didn't like the guy they were marrying me to yet they were ready to give me away to him. No one had the courage to fight for me and do the right thing. I was so alone. ... During the ceremony my dad burst into tears, he screamed at his mother in front of everyone saying that she had made him give his daughter away to his enemy. I couldn't believe that the parents who claimed to love me had thrown me away just like that. Words cannot explain how I felt. ... When I came back to England my parents kept apologising and asking for forgiveness but they said there was nothing I could do now and that I had to make my so-called marriage work. ... Sometimes I hate my parents for what they did to me but I feel guilty for feeling like that. But I know I will never ever stop loving my parents and I do forgive them for everything they have done because I know that had our community been different my parents would not have done what they were forced to do to me.'

15. In Britain, the largest communities which display such strong commitment to a sense of 'traditional' values are South Asian - Pakistanis, Bangladeshi and Indians - and so the majority of forced marriages take place among these communities. It happens among other minorities as well, especially from Africa, the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe, but the numbers are inevitably smaller. 65% of the cases handled by the Forced Marriage Unit are from families of Pakistani origin, 25% of Bangladeshi origin and the remaining 15% of other origins.
16. The overwhelming majority of victims are female - 85% of the Forced Marriage Unit's cases. According to the Unit:

‘A typical case concerns a young girl between the ages of 16-24, typically involving emotional abuse or pressure of some kind, and often involving physical abuse as well. Often the girl is being forced into marriage to correct some sort of “aberrant” behaviour - drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality - that is seen by the parents as evidence that their child has become too Westernised. There is often - though not always - an attempt to remove the girl overseas, often under the pretext of a family bereavement, sickness or wedding. If the marriage goes ahead, the new wife (or husband) returns to the UK and is expected to sponsor their spouse’s visa to come and join them.’

17. Because of the appeal to traditional values, attempts to force marriage often receive support from a wider circle of relatives, friends and acquaintances within the community. Again, this is not usually because they consciously support the use of force in marriage. Most people can sympathise with parents trying to persuade rebellious children to act in their own best interests and it can be difficult to draw the line between reasonable persuasion and unnecessary force. Moreover, people seldom know what goes on behind closed doors, even among their near relations. They do not see for themselves the beating and bullying. Consequently, it is the victims of forced marriage who tend to be blamed by the community at large rather than the perpetrators.
18. Convincing people that force in marriage is not sanctioned by religion, may not in itself solve the problem because most of them already know it. They just do not see themselves in the picture. They and the people around them must be made to recognise their behaviour as abusive and unacceptable.
19. Forced marriage is in practice mostly part of a cycle of abuse, domestic violence and bullying within families. Any society which makes an appeal to traditional values will find the use of force against women and children sanctioned by custom and precedent.
20. Before considering forced marriage, it is helpful to reflect upon the evolution of attitudes towards the wider question of domestic violence and abuse in Britain. Current attitudes are exceptionally recent. For most of human history, violence within the family has been tolerated and even encouraged. In Britain, corporal punishment was for centuries actively promoted as an essential aspect of childcare. ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’ was never intended as a metaphor. Throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, the beating of children was considered an

essential element of good British parenting and character-building for the children. There is still a strong lobby for restoring parents' right to smack their children. Similarly, it has traditionally been considered a husband's prerogative to assault his wife. Until the 1970s both the police and the social services were reluctant to intervene in violence against women so long as it remained within the family. Domestic violence was considered a private matter even if it spilled onto the streets, so long as it did not reach the extreme of murder - and considerable disquiet still remains about the leniency of some sentences awarded to men who have successfully pleaded provocation by their wives, such as persistent nagging, in mitigation of murder. Marital rape was not criminalised until 1991 in England, 1982 in Scotland. A great deal of credit for the change is due to the pioneering work of Erin Pizzey, who opened the world's first women's refuge in 1971.

21. Current sensitivity towards domestic abuse and violence within the white British community has therefore evolved over less than half a century, and the process is still being driven through campaigning and education. Forced marriage is a particular subset of abuse within the family which has only come to public attention relatively recently. Like the campaigns to combat violence against women within the white community, the issue of forced marriage has been raised by people from within the affected communities themselves. Southall Black Sisters in particular have taken a leading role over a long period in putting the topic onto the public agenda and keeping it there. As with the campaigns on the abuse of women which started in the white community, this gives hope that as the questions are aired, attitudes will begin to change.
22. Forced marriage should accordingly be regarded as a highly specific form of domestic bullying, which manifests itself within specific communities. As with other forms of bullying, it embraces a range of behaviour, encompassing low-level attrition and emotional blackmail at one extreme and the full spectrum of domestic violence at the other, culminating in murder in a tiny number of horrific cases. It is seldom an isolated episode, but forms part of a longer term pattern.
23. Once forced marriage is recognised as a specialised manifestation of the wider syndrome of bullying, rather than treated as a rational dispute between parents and children or, even worse, as some sort of cultural norm within certain communities, tackling it becomes more straightforward:
 - i. Professionals can apply their existing training and expertise on family dysfunction to cases where forced marriage is being attempted.

Following the principle set out by the Stephen Lawrence Murder Inquiry and by good practice guidance on bullying and harassment more generally, the working party on forced marriage established a victim-oriented definition, which could be summarised as: if someone feels they are being forced into marriage, then they are. The symptoms will vary for different people in different circumstances. Some will not feel they are under intolerable pressure until they are physically assaulted. For others, verbal pressure and an unpleasant atmosphere will be enough. Much will depend on their previous experience. A slap on the face will be shrugged off by someone brought up in an atmosphere of domestic violence, but could be devastating to someone accustomed to being treated with courtesy. Once professionals recognise the bullying that is taking place - possibly with a risk of domestic violence or worse depending on circumstances - then they will be better able to apply their conflict management and 'at risk' protection skills, without being distracted by the emotional and cultural undercurrents of forced marriage, and by the protestations of the parents that it is all for the children's own good.

- ii. Professionals and community workers may be able to identify and pre-empt the risk. Forced marriage is most likely to take place where there is a family culture of bullying, whether physical or moral. The pattern may be reinforced by parents' cultural values, such as anger at children's perceived lack of respect or fear that children are rejecting their heritage, but these attitudes would almost certainly apply in other circumstances apart from impending marriage. If one identifies families with a history of bullying and encourages them to deal with the problem, then the question of forced marriage might never arise.
24. Some men are victims of forced marriage but 85% of the cases handled by the Forced Marriage Unit involve women. The behaviour is therefore linked to attitudes towards gender equality. Families which attempt to bully their daughters into marriage will also bully them on other issues - notably in marrying young and attempting to prevent them from continuing their education. There is also likely to be aggression against other females in the household, and the perpetrators may not all be men. Victims often grow up to be perpetrators, and it is not uncommon for women to join in and even encourage the abuse of other women. This is partly due to lack of self-esteem, and may also be a strategy to deflect abuse away from themselves.

25. The Government has issued guidance to professionals on dealing with forced marriage. These are listed in the bibliography. They are targeted at education and health professionals, social workers and the police, but they can be used by self-help groups in the voluntary and community sectors as well. Their approach draws heavily on experience of dealing with domestic violence and abuse. For example, the guidance for education professionals identifies a number of warning signs which may indicate that a student is being threatened with forced marriage :

- ‘Anxious, depressed and emotionally withdrawn with low self-esteem;’
- ‘Mental health disorders and display behaviours such as self-harming, self-cutting or anorexia;’
- ‘May come to the attention of the Police having been discovered shoplifting or taking drugs or alcohol;’
- ‘Sudden decline in their performance, aspirations or motivation;’
- ‘Comes to school but then truants from lessons;’
- Stop attending school, decline in punctuality, homework incomplete or rushed;
- Signs of conflict with parents over continuing education.

All of these could equally stand as indicators of bullying, and will indeed be manifested by other pupils whose families are dysfunctional at some level, but who are not being threatened with forced marriage - or not yet.

26. It follows from this that professionals who are alert to the signs of bullying, domestic violence and family dysfunction will bring into their sights, among the other victims of bullying, people who are being forced into marriage. If the profile of the victim matches - for example, a girl from a traditional Asian or African family - then the risk assessment should recognise forced marriage as a possible outcome of the pattern of bullying to which she has been subjected. This will enable the professional to consider appropriate intervention, especially if the victim of bullying is at or near the critical age of 16 years, when compulsory education ends and marriage becomes legal. In dealing with bullying generally, then, professionals may start to deal with people before the pressure for marriage starts, or before the potential victims themselves realise that this is their parents’ plan. In that case, the social support infrastructure may already be in place by the time the crisis erupts.

27. Similarly, the Forced Marriage Unit’s guidance for social workers cites the Victoria Climbié case, confirming the relationship between forced marriage and other forms of abuse.

28. It is essential to note that, drawing on experience of domestic abuse, all of the guidance contains strong warnings of the risks of attempting to mediate between the victim and the family:

‘Mediation, reconciliation and family counselling as a response to forced marriage can be extremely dangerous. Social workers undertaking these activities may unwittingly increase the young person’s vulnerability and place them in danger. ... There have been cases of young people being murdered by their families whilst mediation was being undertaken. Never allow the young person to have unsupervised contact with their family even if they request it.’

Having recognised forced marriage as a form of bullying, one must appreciate that those being subjected to pressure should be assessed on the same basis as any other ‘at risk’ group, and the family should not be presumed to act as a rational unit.

29. While forced marriage is a specific manifestation of bullying, coming out of a broader bullying context, it has some unique characteristics:
- i. Because perpetrators normally justify their action in terms of their duty of welfare towards their children - often their religious duty - this pattern of behaviour is more readily disguised than other forms of bullying and may even be supported by others within and outside the family. This no longer applies to most other forms of abuse.
 - ii. Because they believe they have cultural or religious authority for their behaviour, the perpetrators may give the appearance of being more rational than they actually are, and this may reduce outsiders’ awareness of the risks to the victim - hence the warnings in the guidance for social workers.
 - iii. There is an urgency to cases of forced marriage which may not apply in other forms of bullying except where there is fear of murder or physical danger. This form of bullying leads to a specific event - the marriage. Preventing this event must take precedence over ending the cycle of bullying. Dealing with the behavioural problems may have to wait.
 - iv. There is the added complication that families may have the option of taking the victim out of the country and into an environment where it

will be exceptionally difficult to exercise free will, however strong their personality. This is why the Forced Marriage Unit provides assistance and protection to British victims of forced marriages overseas even if they hold dual nationality.

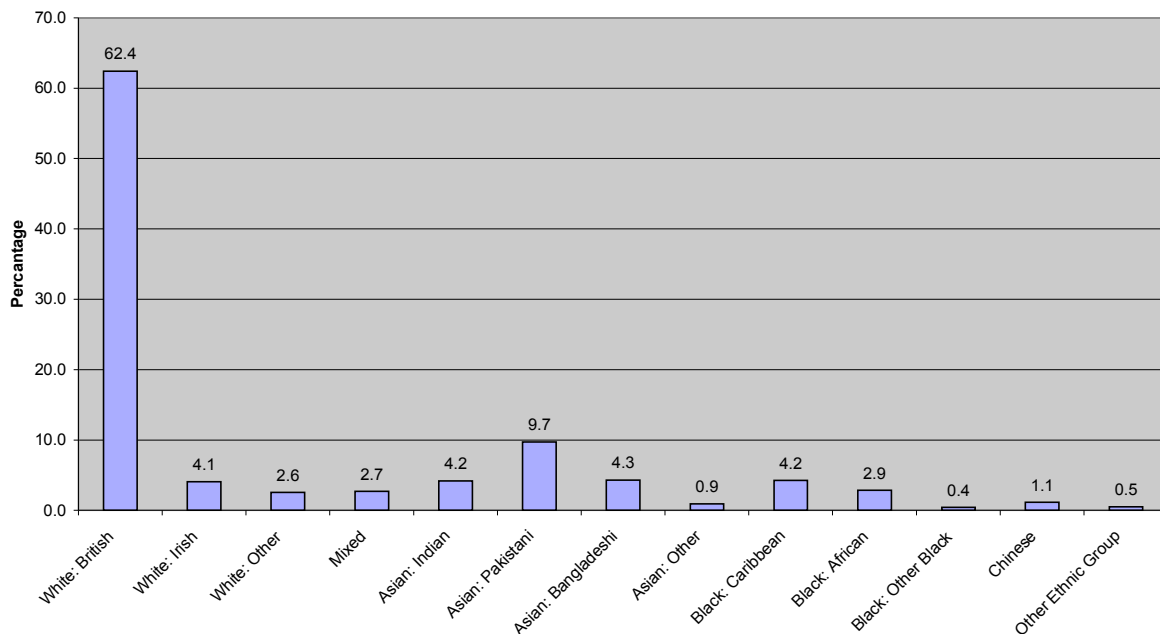
- v. Forced marriage is an institutionalised form of bullying. It is unusual to find a single perpetrator acting alone. An entire family may be involved, with a wider network of relatives and even non-relatives complicit in the action. This accentuates the isolation experienced by most victims of bullying, and means that, to achieve security, victims may have to move away from their families and perhaps their entire communities. Some families hire bounty hunters to track down and bring back or kill estranged children.
 - vi. Forced marriages also create a large network of victims. Apart from the person initially forced into marriage, the family itself may suffer from the trauma of the experience, but the most important collateral damage is inflicted upon the spouse who, if s/he consented willingly to a traditional arranged marriage, in which there is little or no contact between the two partners beforehand, may be unaware that there is a problem and is effectively tricked into marriage. S/he and the couple's children may have to live with the consequences for the rest of their lives.
 - vii. Finally, in a small minority of cases, resistance to forced marriage - or the prevention of a marriage considered unsuitable - can lead to murder, misleadingly called 'honour killing' since it is intended to preserve the family honour. 'Honour' almost always relates to the conduct of women rather than men. Female victims of honour killings tend to be murdered by their own families to purge their shame, either because they have refused the family's choice or are insisting on an 'unsuitable' match. Male victims tend also to be murdered by the girl's family, rather than their own, because they are seeking a relationship rejected by her parents. In some cases, the family may kill both parties.
30. Forced marriage, then, falls into a pattern of behaviour which has much in common with other forms of bullying, but it has wider implications because cultural and religious arguments used to justify the behaviour may distract attention, preventing the bullying from being recognised as such by relatives, friends and professionals. A large number of people can be drawn

into a forced marriage arrangement, and the impact is correspondingly wide - even affecting unborn children.

The local context

31. In Luton, as throughout the UK, forced marriages are associated most closely with the South Asian communities, especially Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. However, a smaller number of cases were also reported to agencies such as Women’s Aid from South African, other African and other South Asian communities.
32. Figure 1 presents the ethnic breakdown of Luton according to the 2004 estimates of population by the Office of National Statistics. Pakistanis are the largest minority community, estimated at 9.7%, more than six times the proportion of 1.6% across England as a whole. Most Pakistanis living in Luton are from Azad Kashmir and prefer to identify themselves as Kashmiris. Bangladeshis are the second largest minority, with 4.3% in 2004, more than seven times their representation across England as a whole.

Figure 1 - Luton: ethnic groups 2004

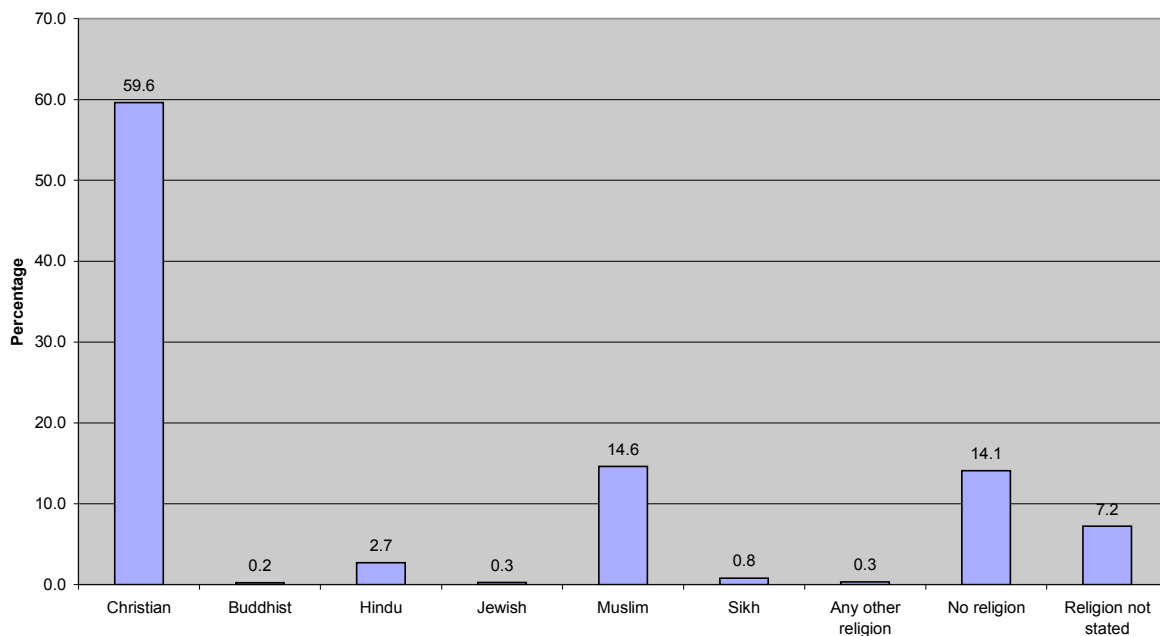


33. There is also a large black African community in Luton, at 2.9%. Black Africans represent the fastest growing community in England. Their number increased by 174% in England between 1991 and 2001, and by 491% in Luton. Nationally, 16% of the people born outside the UK were born in Sub-Saharan

Africa, and in Luton the figure is 13.2%. This is a young community which has recently arrived in the UK and it continues to grow fast. It is a diverse group. In 2001, the main countries from which black Africans in Luton were drawn were Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Like Asians, black Africans come from ‘traditional’ societies where parents may feel it is their right to exercise choice on behalf of their children. Whilst the Forced Marriage Unit has only dealt with a handful of cases involving African families, it is possible that in the future, more cases of forced marriage will arise in these communities, posing questions of culture, language and religion which have similarities as well as differences with those of the Asian communities.

34. Figure 2 shows the religions in Luton. As one would expect from the ethnic breakdown, Muslims form the largest minority religious community - at 14.6%, nearly three times the England average of 3.1%. Sikhs, at 0.8%, are virtually in line with the national average of 0.7%.

Figure 2 - Religions in Luton 2001



35. Table 1 shows the religious breakdown of the different communities. The great majority of black Africans (nearly 80%) are Christians, confirming that if their number increases, then forced marriage within Luton may start to become a Christian as well as a Muslim issue.

Table 1

Luton: religious affiliation of ethnic groups 2001

	Christian %	Buddhist %	Hindu %	Jewish %	Muslim %	Sikh %	Any other religion %	No religion %	Religion not stated %	Total %	No
White: British	72.7	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.3	18.6	7.6	100	119,793
White: Irish	90.8	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	2.6	6.1	100	8,569
White: Other	67.1	0.2	0.1	0.6	11.2	0.1	0.6	11.7	8.5	100	4,205
Mixed	49.8	0.4	1.3	1.0	11.4	0.3	0.7	24.2	10.8	100	4,729
Asian: Indian	4.1	0.0	61.4	0.1	8.8	18.4	2.2	1.1	3.7	100	7,538
Asian: Pakistani	0.6	0.0	0.1	0.0	93.9	0.0	0.0	0.3	5.0	100	17,012
Asian: Bangladeshi	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	95.3	0.0	0.0	0.3	4.3	100	7,639
Asian: Other	10.3	1.9	16.6	0.2	59.0	3.7	0.3	3.5	4.4	100	1,487
Black: Caribbean	75.6	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.8	0.0	0.6	10.9	11.5	100	7,653
Black: African	79.5	0.0	0.2	0.1	11.6	0.0	0.1	2.3	6.1	100	3,204
Black: Other	73.8	0.4	0.7	0.4	1.7	0.0	0.8	11.0	11.2	100	829
Chinese	14.7	18.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.5	55.9	10.6	100	1,095
Other	39.4	8.5	2.9	0.5	36.1	0.0	1.1	5.6	5.8	100	620
All People	59.6	0.2	2.7	0.3	14.6	0.8	0.3	14.1	7.2	100	184,373

Source - Neighbourhood Statistics - Crown copyright

36. Table 1 illustrates the importance of religion for the South Asian and black African communities. Only 0.3% of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis said they had no religion, 1.1% of Indians, and 2.3% of black Africans. By contrast, no less than 18.6% of white British people in Luton professed no religion. These are in line with the national figures. They are significant in the context of forced marriage, because they indicate the strength of religious feeling among more ‘traditional’ communities. In these communities, religious belief is taken for granted. The number of people who say they have no religion is negligible.

Table 2

Luton: population born outside the UK 2001

Area of birth:	Luton %	England %
Republic of Ireland	17.6	10.2
Western Europe	6.9	16.1
Eastern Europe	2.7	5.2
North Africa	0.5	1.5
Central/Western Africa	2.5	4.4
South/Eastern Africa	10.7	11.8
Middle East	1.5	4.7
Far East	3.7	8.0
South Asia: Bangladesh	11.6	3.3
South Asia: India	9.0	10.0
South Asia: Pakistan	20.5	6.8
South Asia: Other	0.6	1.9
Canada/USA	1.0	4.4
Caribbean: Jamaica	4.5	3.2
Caribbean: Other	4.4	2.4
Elsewhere	2.2	6.1
Total born outside UK	36,138	4,513,261
Population born outside UK as percentage of the total	20%	9%
Total population	184,372	49,138,831

Source - *Neighbourhood Statistics - Crown copyright*

37. White British people, accustomed to a secular culture, may under-estimate the power of religion for such communities. In 2007, 86% of Muslims in

Britain agreed with the statement that ‘My religion is the most important thing in my life,’ compared with 11% of the general population of Britain (Mirza et al 2007). Similar attitudes would be found among the Hindus, Sikhs and Christians of the Asian and African communities. Since all of the religions strongly condemn force in marriage, religious authority provides the most effective means of challenging the cultural attitudes which contradict their own religious teachings by underpinning forced marriage.

38. Table 2 shows that about one-fifth of Luton’s population was born outside the UK. This is significant because those born overseas are less likely to be familiar with the English language and British laws and customs. Between them, Bangladesh and Pakistan account for almost a third of all of those born overseas, but another large grouping, about 13%, were from Sub-Saharan Africa. Agencies tackling forced marriage and other domestic incidents in Luton need to be aware that some of the households they deal with may have little or no knowledge of the rights and obligations of family members under English law, or of the role of social services and other agencies. Ensuring that the conventions are fully understood could be a good first step towards resolving some problems when they arise.
39. Overall, then, the 2001 Census confirms:
- i. The strong representation in Luton of ‘traditional’ South Asian and black African communities in which forced marriage has been recognised as a problem;
 - ii. The importance of religion for these communities, indicating an effective means of communication with them;
 - iii. The high presence of people born outside the UK, a disproportionate number of whom may:
 - a) Not be fluent in English;
 - b) Not be familiar with English family law and the British social services and welfare systems, or of the role of the agencies involved.

These are facts which all agencies concerned with forced marriage should note in the policy development and training.

Dealing with forced marriage

40. The remainder of the report will consider the most effective ways of tackling forced marriage. It falls under two broad and closely related headings:
- i. Strategic development;
 - ii. Casework.

The development of strategies to pre-empt forced marriage will facilitate casework by building up a legal, administrative and social infrastructure of support. In turn, experience of casework will inform the development of strategy.

Strategic development

41. The most effective way of preventing force in marriage is to change attitudes so the issue does not arise in the first place. In the long term, this is the most effective method of eradicating the problem. In the short term as well, the process of fostering a more supportive environment will encourage those at risk to seek help, it will improve the awareness and effectiveness of those who are helping them, and it will put in place the support networks needed to provide practical assistance to victims.
42. Action should be taken to:
- i. Support the implementation of the Forced Marriage Unit's Action Plan;
 - ii. Improve parenting;
 - iii. Increase awareness of rights and duties;
 - iv. Promote a culture of condemnation of forced marriage;
 - v. Promote the education of women;

- vi. Encourage continued training for professionals and others involved in forced marriage;
 - vii. Develop partnerships between statutory, private and voluntary sector support agencies to tackle forced marriage;
 - viii. Empower women’s self-help groups who are more frequently approached by victims than other agencies.
43. These eight action points are discussed below.
- (i). Implementation of the Forced Marriage Unit’s Action Plan*
44. We are pleased that the Forced Marriage Unit’s two-year Action Plan has been launched and particularly welcome its focus on local, regional, national and international work, linked to and building on the Domestic Violence National Action Plan. We hope that, as the Action Plan is carried out, this report will help to inform and direct future work.
45. Given the complexity of forced marriage cases, and the necessity of involving so many statutory bodies, it is crucial that relevant laws and regulations are capable of providing victims and potential victims with effective protection and support. All laws and regulations and their interpretation relating to the legal status of individuals and their entitlement to benefits, etc have implications for victims of forced marriage - eg child benefit, housing, social security, legal aid, residence status, etc. Practitioners may find that, when making a case for victims and potential victims, it is useful to apply a combination of laws, including legislation relating to race relations, sex discrimination, human rights, child protection, etc.
- (ii). Improve parenting*
46. The unacceptability of forced marriage should be incorporated into the wider framework of initiatives to improve parenting skills across all communities within the UK. We would be more successful in addressing the issues of forced marriage and “honour”-based violence, if agencies such as On Track, the Government’s Parent Centre, the NSPCC and Positive Parenting, which support children and parents, worked more closely with community and religious groups to ensure that forced marriage is discussed in their resource material, handbooks, good practice guidance and

websites. Material could include information on the strictures of the various religions against force in marriage, and short leaflets could be prepared which directly address each of the major religions, so that they can be placed in places of worship and religious centres, where they will carry authority. Such leaflets should naturally be available in appropriate languages. The leaflets could also be used as a basis for discussion with priests and imams, to help them address the issue of forced marriage in their sermons, teaching and guidance. Short training courses or workshops could be developed for them to explore techniques and share experience on how best to raise these sensitive topics with their congregations.

47. The relationship between forced marriage and bullying more generally should be highlighted in the training material and courses offered to all professionals dealing with families and children so that they are alert to the issues and can spot the danger signals.

(iii). Increase awareness of rights and duties

48. Both parents and children need to be aware of their legal rights and duties - for example, that the use of violence and unnecessary force within the home could lead to charges of assault, cruelty to persons under 16 or false imprisonment, that seizing someone's passport could constitute theft, that relatives and friends who join in illegal activities to force someone into marriage might be charged with aiding and abetting a criminal offence, etc. These warnings could be incorporated into the guidance material on parenting discussed above.
49. Families originating from outside the United Kingdom may not know that the state can - and will if necessary - intervene in what they consider to be their private family business. In particular, families from traditional patriarchal societies are unlikely to be aware that violence - against both children and women - is unlawful even when it takes place within the home. Appropriate advice should be made available to people applying for residence status and/or citizenship.
50. Children should be aware that they can discuss any concerns about forced marriage with the various children's services such as ChildLine and There4Me, but the staff themselves may need training on how to deal sensitively with the subject. Many potential victims will feel guilty because they are disobeying their parents and may be subjected to emotional blackmail.

51. The NSPCC runs an Asian Helpline, providing advice in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu, which already deals with issues of forced marriage, and which is making a special effort to help Asian communities get over the stigma of reporting child abuse. The Asian Helpline's experience could be invaluable in helping other helplines and workers to deal sensitively with forced marriage issues, and to extend the service to other languages. On Track also has considerable experience in this area.

(iv). *Promote a culture of condemnation of forced marriage*

52. The initiatives discussed above should be taken as part of a wider campaign to generate a culture which recognises and condemns forced marriage as an abuse of human rights. A feature that distinguishes forced marriage from other forms of bullying is its widespread acceptance among wider family members and communities at large. The victim from Luton quoted above expressed bitterness at the pressures on her family from the community:

'My parents are so helpless in a situation where there are no right and wrong answers for them. I know they love me. I have seen the fear in their eyes at the thought of living as outcasts in a cruel and selfish community. I have to watch my parents cry and beg me daily not to kill them off amongst their family and in this society.'

In some cases, the pressures are so strong that victims have to leave their communities and even change their identities. As Jasvinder Sanghera put it in an article in the *Police Review*: 'We, the victims, have had to reinvent our identities and build completely new lives, having brought "shame" upon our families' (*Police Review*, 13 October 2006).

53. These attitudes need to be reversed, so that it is the families who force their children who feel shame, not the other way round. Newham Asian Women's Project quotes an incisive comment by one of its own clients:

'The abuse that was started by my father was carried on by my husband has now come a full circle with my son treating me the same way but at every point I have been told to keep quiet, that I should not bring dishonour to the family. I want to know why men who abuse aren't told that they are bringing disrepute and why women have to carry all the burdens.' (NAWP Annual Report, 2003-04).

54. It is important that forcing young people into marriage against their will is recognised as an abuse within communities, and that the perpetrators are

regarded as bringing shame upon themselves and their communities. In effect, the traditional notions of family honour must be redefined.

55. Because the perpetrators will invoke custom and religion to justify their behaviour, other relations, friends and prominent local figures may believe their intervention or mediation might help. It can become difficult to keep the case within bounds. All of the official guidance warns against being distracted by such external interference: victims who have left their homes for their own safety should not be left alone with their families, even if they themselves request it; members of the family or community leaders should not be approached unless the victim specifically requests it and even then they must be warned about the risks; information about the victim's whereabouts should not be divulged to third parties such as community leaders or politicians however well-meaning they appear to be, and however plausible their justification; care needs to be taken when talking to victims over the phone at home, since they may be acting under duress, or the speaker may even be impersonating the victim.
56. Such advice would be second nature to professionals in a straightforward case of bullying or abuse but in the past some have allowed their better judgment to be set aside because they have accepted the argument that this is a cultural or community phenomenon, not a domestic violence case. They have accordingly allowed victims to return to their families or have sought advice from respected members of local communities who, attempting mediation, have persuaded victims to return to their families. The risk is that, once the family takes the victim back, it may be impossible to break away again - the victim may be put under constant supervision, taken out of the country, beaten or even killed.
57. Unfortunately, the interviews conducted for the current research indicate that this critical advice from the Forced Marriage Unit may not have been consistently applied locally. We have been told of cases where community leaders or councillors have been invited by support agencies to mediate, and that these people have put pressure on the young people to do as their parents told them - not because they believed the parents to be right, but in order to hide the problem and avoid damaging the reputation of the community. We have no evidence that this has happened.
58. Whatever may have happened in the past, community leaders must recognise that more damage is done to the reputation of their community by attempting to suppress information about forced marriage, and pretending it does not exist, than by making a stand against it. Suppressing

the information leaves an impression that the problem is more widespread than it actually is. Combating forced marriage makes it clear this is a minority activity, disapproved of by the majority.

59. We wish to re-emphasise that the guidance from the Forced Marriage Unit is based on extensive and often painful experience. Forced marriage is as has been stated earlier a form of bullying. It is not an acceptable part of Asian or any other culture. Domestic violence and abuse exist in all communities and while it may be impossible to eradicate them altogether, that is no reason for tolerating them, still less for pandering to the perpetrators' fantasies that their behaviour is at any level justifiable. The national guidance must be applied strictly, and third parties must not be brought in to mediate, however respected or well intentioned they might be. We hope that placing the Forced Marriage Unit's guidance on a statutory footing through the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 will have this effect.

(v). *Promote the education of women*

60. Since 85% of the victims are women, this is largely a women's issue. In addition, women often marry younger than men, especially in traditional communities, so the time of greatest risk of forced marriage comes when they complete compulsory education at sixteen. Families which do not value women's education seek to marry off their daughters as soon as possible and will prevent them from continuing their education. In the context of forced marriage, there are two advantages to increasing the take-up of further and higher education by Asian and African young women:

- i. It buys time. During the interval, if there is any question of forced marriage, it might be possible to change the attitudes of the parents and other family members.

More important, being older and with the experience of further and if possible higher education, the young woman may have become more self-confident, more assertive, more articulate and more aware of her rights - including her rights within her own religion. It is not simply that this might give her the strength to defy her parents. Hopefully, she may be able to persuade them round to her point of view.

- ii. If the worst happens and she is forced into marriage, she will at least have a better chance of maintaining her self-respect and her independence if she has qualifications.
 - (vi). *Encourage continued training for professionals and others involved in forced marriage*
61. The Forced Marriage Unit, in association with appropriate Government departments and professional bodies, has issued guidance for education and health professionals, Police officers and social workers. The guidance is comprehensive and practical and the four volumes between them provide as much information as any professional involved in a case of forced marriage will require. In addition, the Forced Marriage Unit has a wealth of experience and extensive contacts both inside and outside the United Kingdom. Its details are:
- Forced Marriage Unit : 0207 008 0151
fm@fco.gov.uk
62. Locally, a consortium of agencies across all sectors, sponsored by Luton Borough Council, the Police and Safer Luton has produced *Silence hurts too*, two documents which set out good practice, a guide to religious attitudes towards marriage and advice on how to tackle cases.
63. All of the guidance builds upon the initial starting point of the victim-oriented approach to forced marriage. It is the victim's perceptions which should be accepted by external agencies, not the family's, and it is the victim's welfare which is paramount - not the family's. The same principles would apply in any other case of bullying or domestic violence. In practice, there is always a balance to be drawn. The ideal is to keep the family together and reconcile all parties, and that aspiration should be maintained throughout the case - but not at the expense of jeopardising the victim's safety.
64. As has been mentioned previously, professionals have in the past sometimes accepted, or even invited, advice from prominent local people, often with disastrous results. They would not do this in a case of conventional abuse. The main reason they may turn to third parties in cases of forced marriage is their fear that they may be out of their depth, unaware of the cultural sensitivities of unfamiliar communities. Involving people from the communities in live cases can be awkward and potentially dangerous for all concerned, especially if those consulted know the families concerned.

However, professionals do need to be aware of the cultural nuances. The most effective solution is training combined with a degree of professional specialisation:

- i. **Training and guidance:** Whilst the training sessions that the Forced Marriage Unit delivers are invaluable, training must be mainstreamed to be truly effective. Training relating to forced marriage should be included within all appropriate professional courses, to ensure that all professionals are not only aware of the issues, but are also aware of the available guidance and contact details of the Forced Marriage Unit and other local and national agencies. The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 creates a need for induction training for all relevant agencies, including the courts and the judiciary, and also provides an opportunity to revise and sharpen the existing guidance. Special courses should be provided for these agencies, to introduce them to the Act's provisions and discuss the implications for their own areas of activity.

The Act also creates an opportunity for the FMU to enhance the status of its own guidance, by developing it into a Code of Practice, issued by the Secretary of State as guidance under section 63Q(1) of the amended Family Law Act 1996.

- ii. **Specialisation:** Professionals in the police, social services, education, health and other services should be encouraged to undertake additional training on tackling forced marriage, so that they can include this as a specialist skill within their portfolio of expertise. The police restrict the handling of forced marriage cases to 'qualified officers,' who have relevant experience and specialist training, and there is a similar system within most social services departments. This model should be extended to all professional services, including teachers and youth services. 'Qualified officers' would not necessarily specialise in forced marriage cases, since the volume may not be sufficient to warrant the diversion of resources, but would be able to provide in-house advice to colleagues, reducing the need to take advice on specific cases from within the community.

65. Training should be undertaken in liaison with local and national agencies and community groups.

- (vii). *Develop partnerships between statutory, private and voluntary sector support agencies to tackle forced marriage*

66. All of the proposals for action set out above presuppose a partnership model of working. Forced marriage is not going to be eradicated by any one group of people. Coordinated action must be taken by different people at different levels. Local leaders, priests and imams must get the message across to their communities that forced marriage is unacceptable, and help agencies understand the cultural backgrounds of the families who may be involved. Professionals from all services must be alert to the danger signs and ready to intervene appropriately - and the ability to intervene appropriately requires training and an understanding of the issues. The Police and social services must be prepared to deal with individual cases. Women's self-help groups must be resourced to assist victims and potential victims, and refuges and housing services must be available.
67. Health professionals have a strong part to play. They may be among the first to notice signs of domestic violence. In addition, it may be possible to pick up advance hints of forced marriage through routine questions asked by GPs and nurses at doctors' surgeries and medical centres when young people come in for vaccinations before trips abroad.
68. All support services to be extremely sensitive towards the needs of each individual victim and their family. One size certainly does not fit all.
69. A critical issue is the imbalance of power between the victims and potential victims and the people who are controlling - or attempting to control - their lives. The relationships can be complex and work at many different levels. A victim is less powerful than those who perpetrate force on her/him. A victim is less powerful than the supporters of the perpetrators and silent members of the family who do not challenge the perpetrators. They are less powerful than their own supporters. Victims are also less powerful than their communities. The power imbalance makes it difficult for them to defy perpetrators, perpetrators' supporters and the community. Sometimes, marital breakdown after a forced marriage does not necessarily mean that the victims will sever relationship with parents. One victim said during the research that she still loved her parents, because they were not strong and needed her help with English to lead their lives in England. This also an example of power imbalance.
70. The arrival of children changes the perspective on forced marriage. Once children are born, it is practically impossible for the victim to walk away. Many women will put up with forced marriages and domestic violence for the sake of children until they are grown up and no longer depend entirely

on their mothers' support. Consequently, some older women may, after many years of enduring forced marriage, seek help from a community organisation. Such cases cannot be and should not be ignored, just because the drama of the initial period of forced marriage no longer exists and the children are no longer dependent.

71. Strategic development should continue to be coordinated nationally by the Forced Marriage Unit. Locally, partnerships should be developed, involving all relevant agencies such as the police, social services, schools, colleges and universities, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards, On Track, etc, and local community groups, especially women's groups and religious institutions. This work needs to be coordinated within the Forced Marriage Unit's Action Plan, and formal structures should be put in place. Ideally, the local lead should be taken by an independent women's group, drawn from the affected communities.

(viii). Empower women's self-help groups who are more frequently approached by victims than other agencies

72. In essence, forced marriage is a women's issue. The overwhelming majority of victims are women and there is evidence that they feel more at ease in approaching women's self-help groups with representation from their own communities. Some victims may need safe houses and refuges, either to give themselves some breathing space while they consider their options, or to get away from their families.
73. In addition, the concept of family honour and the culture of bullying and enforcement within families are inextricably linked to a notion of traditional patriarchal authority, and the maintenance of the status of the head of the family. Even though sons and female members of the household may participate in the abuse, they take their lead from the patriarch. The most effective way of modifying this structure is to empower women, so that there is a more equal balance within the family. Empowering and strengthening women's self-help groups are one way of building up the momentum.
74. Therefore, it is essential that women's self-help groups take a leading role in combating forced marriage. Their public visibility would serve two functions:
- i. To get across the message that the empowerment of women is vital to the progress of all communities;

- ii. To ensure that potential victims are aware of their existence and how to contact them.
75. Consequently, women's self-help groups must be given the resources and training to play an effective role. This should include the establishment of local refuges which employ staff and/or volunteers who are familiar with the cultural and religious backgrounds and language needs of the clients. The development of a national victim and witness support network as discussed below is a step in the right direction.
76. The 15% of victims who are men must not be ignored and further research may be necessary on how best to address their needs. It is possible that male victims may also find it easier to approach women's groups, since they may be less concerned about the stigma of displaying powerlessness in a patriarchal culture when talking to a woman. We welcome the work that the Forced Marriage Unit is doing in this case, but more still needs to be done.

Conclusion on strategy

77. Several strategies should accordingly be adopted to foster a culture in which forced marriage is perceived as abusive and shameful to the family and the community, and the victims and potential victims both seek and receive the support they need. The strategies need to be formulated in consultation with both men and women from the communities where forced marriage is prevalent, and they should be accompanied by extensive training targeted at professionals and community groups. The provisions introduced by the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 should form part of these strategies. Meanwhile, cases of forced marriage will continue to arise and if the campaign is successful the numbers reported should increase. These must be tackled effectively, to prevent forced marriages from taking place.

Casework

78. In many respects, a case of forced marriage will be treated similarly to any other case of domestic violence or abuse, following current local and national advice, and so professionals and others should apply these standards. However, advice focussing specifically on forced marriage has also been prepared.

Identifying individual families which are 'at risk' of forcing marriage

79. It was discussed earlier that forcing somebody into a marriage is likely to be the culmination of a pattern of bullying stretching back over several years. Teachers and others working with children should be on the look-out for signs of bullying, domestic violence and behavioural problems as part of their day-to-day duties. When following up concerns about bullying etc within families which are perceived to have traditional attitudes, they should be alert to the possibility that forced marriage might be one of the eventual manifestations of the bullying syndrome. In particular, they should encourage girls to stay in education after sixteen, and appreciate that if students from traditional backgrounds make negative comments about marriage, this may be a hint that they are concerned about being forced.
80. Finally, if a teacher knows that a student's older sibling has already been subjected to forced marriage, that should trigger action to try to prevent the tragedy being repeated - for example by passing on a helpline number, discussing options for with other professionals, community groups, etc.

Victim and witness support

81. Victims of forced marriage need support throughout their experience and often after. Like other victims of domestic abuse, they may need to be taken away from the family but - unlike conventional abuse cases - this may not always be because they are at risk of physical harm. Forced marriage presents problems which may be unfamiliar to professionals, and outside their normal guidelines. While physical threats are certainly an issue in some cases, more often the objective is to remove the victim from the pressure imposed by the family and their circle within the community, so that they have the opportunity to think through their options and discuss them with people who understand their social background. Since the objective is to avoid an unwanted marriage, many victims are not 'at risk' in the conventional sense of the term - although a minority face acute risk. Their requirements are inter-related:
- i. ***Counselling:*** after being pressurised by their families and acquaintances, victims may no longer be sure what they want, or what their choices are. They need to be able to talk matters through with someone who understands their cultural background, and who also knows the legal and practical remedies available to them. It is also important that the counsellor is not judgmental, will not attempt to impose a solution - and is not connected to the people who have

been trying to force the marriage. There may also be language requirements.

Good counselling is critical because the victims have to make some important decisions. For example, if they reject the marriage, they may have to make a break not just with their family, but with the community in which they grew up. If they have been abused, they need to decide whether to apply for restraining orders against particular individuals or seek prosecution. These are difficult choices which will affect their lives and the lives of their families. They must be made in a cool, unpressured environment.

Once the decision is made, they may need further counselling on how to live with the consequences. This may be a question of rebuilding their lives away from their families. On the other hand, they may decide after all to go through with the marriage, in which case, they may need training on assertiveness and influencing skills, to enable them to live with the marriage on their own terms.

To ensure that victims receive advice which is sensitive and takes account of their own cultural and religious backgrounds, they will often need counsellors from within their own community. Such counsellors should be properly trained and made aware of issues such as confidentiality and the dangers of approaching third parties without the express request of the victim or the agreement of one of the professional agencies. This is crucial to gain the confidence of the victims, since there have been cases when apparently neutral community members have disclosed information to the victims' families. A number of women from the voluntary sector should be trained as counsellors, sponsored by the local authority, health authority and the police. Support should be given to those programmes that offer counselling training, especially training in the areas of listening techniques, the framework of legal and administrative support for victims of forced marriage, the victim-focussed approach, and good practice in dealing with forced marriage.

- ii. ***English language and citizenship:*** Many victims of forced marriage, especially those brought into the UK as spouses, are unable to speak English well. Women, who have deliberately been kept secluded by their in-laws, may not speak English at all. Without English, they face multiple disadvantage. They cannot exercise their rights and

obligations effectively, engage with education or health professionals over the welfare of their children, or earn their own living. We believe that every effort should be made to enable these women to learn English. This is a prerequisite to enable them to live independently. The recent report by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion on *Our shared future* recommends that local authorities should cut back on ESOL classes. However, victims of forced marriage were allowed entry to the UK without language tests and were often deliberately prevented from learning English by families who did not wish them to gain independence or knowledge of their human rights.

Teaching English to those recently arrived in the UK represents an investment in the future. Language skills empower victims to make a full contribution to society and support themselves and their children, and so reduce potential long-term demand on the taxpayer and service providers. We believe that relevant classes can be provided cost effectively through relevant community organisations, such as, in Luton All Women's Centre, the Centre for Youth and Community Development and Women's Aid, etc. They should be combined with citizenship classes, so that people brought up outside the UK are aware of their rights and duties.

- iii. ***Economic support:*** The victims of forced marriage include a wide range of individuals - high and low standards of education, skilled and unskilled, strong and poor command of English, born and/or brought up in the UK and overseas, and so on. As explained above, the immediate priority after assuring their security is to ensure all victims have a good command of English.

Victims and potential victims with no language barriers need to be provided with prompt and efficient support to access work opportunities and secure jobs through Job Centre Plus to get work, whether part or full time. This should be done as soon as practicable so that they can feel confident and secure and start their lives on a stronger footing. Women who are less educated and skilled should be provided specific support to work from home, as many used to do in the past and still do, such as sewing, dress-making, making soft toys etc.

Meanwhile, their skills could be further enhanced by training providers at places which are safe and easily accessible. This can be done in partnership with support services and training providers.

Government investment will be helpful either through Learning and Skills Councils (or their successor bodies) or local authorities to provide skills training to victims of forced marriage. The training venues will need to be chosen carefully in consultation with relevant community organisations, especially Luton All Women's Centre, the Centre for Youth and Community Development, Women's Aid etc. Without an appropriate government strategy on economic support backed by adequate resources, the disempowered victims of forced marriage will not be able to make the transition from being victims to fully contributing citizens.

- iv. ***Residence status and children:*** The residence and citizenship status of spouses brought into the UK is often ambiguous, their in-laws having failed or refused to apply on their behalf for permanent residence status or citizenship. This can lead to anomalous situations, where children are British citizens, but their mothers do not have the right to live or work in the UK.

In at one case covered by this study, the Home Office decided to deport British-born children to their mother's country of origin because her husband had refused to regularise her residence status. Like many victims of forced marriage, she had suffered domestic violence and the failure to apply for resident status was part of the pattern of physical and mental intimidation, and also a means of increasing her dependency. The Home Office decision not only violated the human rights of the woman and her children, all of whom were victims of domestic violence, it also deprived the British children of their rights under national child protection procedures.

The Home Office should recognise that permanent UK residence and British citizenship are among the many legal and human rights to which the victims of forced marriage may have been denied by abusive families, and should take a sympathetic view of their situation.

- v. ***Barriers to immigration and on passport control:*** It has been suggested that the Home Office could support victims and potential victims of forced marriage by exercising its discretion on the issue of entry permits and passports to block opportunities for forced marriage. In particular:

- a) When interviews are introduced for the issue of new passports, the interviewing officer could tactfully explore whether certain applicants, such as young Asian women, are being taken to their heritage countries against their will and are at risk of being forced into marriage. In such circumstances, they could refuse to issue the passport.
- b) When foreign nationals apply from their countries of origin to join their spouses in the UK, interviewing officers could refuse permission if they believe the marriages had been forced - but this should only be done with the consent of the British spouse.
- c) The introduction of an English language test would also block a significant number of forced marriages, but by no means all.

These could be useful tools to combat forced marriage, but they require considerable care and tact. There is a risk that bona fide applicants might be harassed, discriminated against or made to feel like second-class citizens. If such proposals were to be implemented, they should be accompanied by carefully researched guidance on the questions to be asked and the sensitive exercise of discretion.

On the question of language, it must be recognised that this would only apply to non-EU citizens, so would discriminate against applicants from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. EU citizens' freedom of movement is not restricted by their language skills

- vi. **Refuges:** The need for culturally competent refuges for women from minority communities has been reiterated in many reports on domestic violence and forced marriage. Domestic violence is the main reason for placing Asian women in supported housing, yet few schemes offer appropriate language skills, cultural support, cuisine or religious facilities. The Asian clients of women's refuges across the country have felt isolated and some have been harassed on grounds of race or religion by other inmates. Luton's refuges are few and always full. More refuges and resources are needed, with appropriately skilled staff from the key client groups.
- vii. **Placement of victims outside their community:** Some of those who reject a forced marriage provoke such hostility from their family and the community around them that they have to leave their local neighbourhoods and rebuild their lives elsewhere. Some live in fear of

kidnap by bounty hunters, who would return them to their families where they would face further abuse and possibly murder. If they have married, both they and their spouse may be under threat.

Further research on support needs

82. Further research is required in a number of areas related to the support of victims and witnesses:
- i. **Best practice:** Comprehensive and systematic best practice guidance based on objective research is required about the support erstwhile victims of forced marriage need to live their lives free from fear. At one extreme, if some members of their family are considered dangerous, they may require assistance along the lines of the Witness Protection Scheme, involving the creation of a completely new identity. At the other extreme, they may simply need to be eased into a community where they are unknown, through occasional counselling.
 - ii. **Health issues:** There needs to be research into the impact of forced marriage on family health. *Health inequalities in Luton - Getting to the point*, the annual public health report produced by Luton teaching Primary Care Trust in 2003 has along with other health reports indicated high perinatal and infant mortality rates, and low birth weights among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. There are also high rates of suicide, depression and poor health generally among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Many factors affect these health inequalities, but the stress and neglect associated with forced marriage may play a role.
 - iii. **Witnesses:** It is also important to protect witnesses and supporters. Other family members may have broken ranks to support a victim of forced marriage - alerting the authorities, helping a victim to get away, or giving evidence in court. They may themselves be at risk of revenge attacks or persecution. If they are young and unmarried, then their own risk of forced marriage will increase substantially. The family, far from being chastened by its experience, may decide to get it right this time and marry them off as quickly as possible - and may take them permanently out of the country, so that they spend the rest of their lives in an environment where their behaviour can be supervised more closely. Little or nothing is known about the

experience or motivation of those who have helped to prevent forced marriage or provided evidence against families.

- iv. **Male victims:** Although forced marriage is primarily a women's issue, the FMU estimates that 15% of the victims are men, which is a significant number:
- a) The support needs of male victims and potential victims are likely to be different from those of women. In particular, it needs to be investigated whether they would respond better to male or female advisors.
 - b) Some men brought into the UK as spouses may have been forced or tricked into marriage, and if the marriage breaks up they may face problems with language, skills, residence status, etc. Little is known about this aspect of forced marriage.
 - c) Some marriages are forced in order to break up daughters' relationships with 'undesirable' boyfriends. Some of these men have been physically assaulted or intimidated, or even murdered in honour killings, a dramatic manifestation of the unacceptable pressures that can be put on young men who cross the boundaries set by certain families. Such men may become indirect victims of forced marriage. They may also be witnesses or potential witnesses if they report or attempt to prevent the marriage of their girlfriends. The support needs if any of such boyfriends are not known, nor the best means of persuading them to come forward to prevent forced marriage.

Victim and witness support network

83. There is a strong need for a victim and witness support network to combat isolation, share experience and spread awareness of the options available. To begin with, this needs to provide victims with an easy way to contact other survivors for emotional and practical support. In time, this could develop into a network of physical locations across the country (eg safe-houses in people's homes, trustworthy community centres, etc) linked together through an on-line network with web-based resources, advice, useful addresses, internet chat-rooms, etc. Such a network would serve four main functions:

- i. Building up the capacity of the community and voluntary sector to provide counselling services on forced marriage;
 - ii. Supporting people who are under threat of forced marriage and need guidance and advice ;
 - iii. Supporting people who are isolated because they have had to leave their family and friends.
84. The network should include a ‘buddy mentoring’ scheme, linking victims and potential victims with mentors who have survived actual or attempted forced marriages - the mentoring could be conducted both online and face-to-face. It might also apply to witnesses and potential witnesses.
85. Since the pilot for such a scheme has been attempted in Luton, we hope that our experiences can be fed into the national project being co-ordinated and funded by the Forced Marriage Unit.

Findings from interviews

86. This section presents the findings from the interviews and case studies in Luton, in the context of the national analysis.

Extent of forced marriage in Luton

87. Predictably, it has been extremely difficult to establish the extent of forced marriage in Luton. It is widely believed that most do not get reported. A retired Education Welfare Officer's comment sums up what many others said: 'Most victims or potential victims don't have the himmat (courage) to report what they are going through.' Only a few extremely brave individuals get in touch with the help-lines known to them or some of their enterprising friends. Sometimes young women may approach students' liaison/support officers at schools and colleges, specific women's groups, while exceptionally young men may approach men's youth clubs or even the Samaritans. Sometimes they may be brave enough to approach the local LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) Group if they can find their contact number, which is not widely publicised. Interviewees said that they would be surprised if young men or women were confident enough to contact any national agency relating to LGBT or even the Government's Forced Marriage Unit. Voluntary sector self-help groups believe there is little awareness about the existence of national support or advice agencies among young people or adults in specific minority ethnic communities.
88. Not all agencies maintain consistent records of the number of cases of forced marriage because they are not necessarily reported as such. They are more likely to be classed as domestic violence. The government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) deals with approximately 300 cases per year, of which 4% are from the Eastern Region. This indicates about a dozen cases across the whole region. The FMU, however, sees only the most serious cases. The number of reported forced marriages dealt with by agencies in Luton itself such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Law Centre etc is small and not growing year on year. On average, each deals with no more than six cases per year.
89. The local police do not maintain a separate file on forced marriages, and so incidents are currently not recorded under the heading of forced marriage. Their impression is that in recent years they have only dealt with two or three cases related to forced marriage. It is likely that cases are missed. For example, one victim in Luton described calling the police when the man

with whom she had been forced into marriage attempted to rape her. The Police dealt with the incident promptly and effectively, warning the man ‘not to ever touch me again unless I asked him,’ but it will probably have been recorded as a case of domestic violence, since that was the immediate problem.

90. The police indicated to the researcher that they intend to open a specific file on forced marriage in the future. The situation at the beginning of the Millennium in Luton was different. Three conferences on forced marriage were held in Luton in 2001, soon after the Parliamentary Working Party’s publication, *A choice by right*, and these created a momentum of support activities across Luton. At that time the police were able to identify about 200 cases and enquiries relating to forced marriage. The conferences and resource document which followed them, *Silence Hurts Too*, produced in 2002 by local women’s groups, were supported by many agencies including the Local Borough Council and the police. It appears that some of the ground gained at that time may have been lost and must therefore be regained promptly.
91. The interviews conducted for this project clearly indicate that remarkably few victims of forced marriage approach agencies like Citizens’ Advice Bureaux, Law Centres or the police. There may be many reasons for this, but trust and familiarity are important. If individual members of staff are not reaching out to community organisations and communities, then these agencies may be perceived as forming part of the white establishment - so victims presume they will not have a good understanding of their cultural background. In addition, victims are afraid that, as white institutions, they are more likely to play by the book and bring in statutory agencies which will then bring the powers of the state against their parents. The victims are not usually trying to punish or shame their parents - they just want to get out of the unwanted marriage. Where women have been brought into the UK from overseas after marriage, they lack the language skills and awareness of the system to approach such agencies, and they may also be nervous about their legal status and benefit entitlements. These assumptions of victims may or may not be correct. The important point is that the perception affects the behaviour of the victims. The agencies’ image puts them off.
92. Instead, victims are more likely to approach local community groups, who present a very different picture. According to Women’s Aid, cases of domestic violence and forced marriages are on the rise: ‘10 years ago there was hardly any case of forced marriage dealt with by the Women’s Aid.’ Now it receives about twelve per year.

93. The number of enquiries about forced marriage made to Luton All Women's Centre during the past five years was over 300. The Centre for Youth and Community Development receives on average 100 enquiries per year. Shanthona, a newly emerged women's group in Luton formed a year ago, has already supported 10 cases with advice. Ghar Se Ghar, a well established women's support group in Luton, receives no less than 60 enquiries for advice per year. Luton Rights deals with enquiries about benefits. Their suspicion is that 'most of these women who wish to separate their benefits from their husbands are living in a forced marriage situation.' On average about 6 such cases per year come to them. Unfortunately, they do not ask clients whether they were forced into their marriages, so they are treated as cases of domestic violence and not necessarily of forced marriage. Khidmat receives over 50 enquiries per year. The current Director of Luton Training and Mentoring came across over 70 young people from South Asian communities (mostly girls), while working at Luton Sixth Form College during 2004/5 and 23 during 2005/6 as Project Manager of Luton Training and Mentoring. They were unhappy because they felt they were under pressure from their parents to marry partners of their parents' choice. The young women in particular wished to carry on with their education, but were concerned that their parents might not allow them to have the future that they wished for themselves. They did not wish to insult their parents by reporting this situation to any agencies.
94. On this basis, there are over 300 approaches to external bodies for advice of some sort on forced marriage in Luton per year. Some may be the same people going from organization to organisation, so there may be a degree of double counting. Several different people may be concerned about the same wedding. Against that, evidence collected among British women indicates that less than 10% of rape victims tell anyone else of their experience (see L Kelly, J Lovett, L Regan, *A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases* (Home Office 2005)). If a similar gap applies to forced marriage, that would indicate upwards of 1,000 people in Luton each year who might be concerned about forced marriage. To be concerned about forced marriage is of course not necessarily to be under immediate threat. Someone may be worried about the possibility over a number of years, without in the end having to face it.
95. To set these figures in context, the number of marriages across all communities in Luton is around 700 - 672 in 2004, the latest date for which figures are available (Office of National Statistics, *Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics 2004* (HMSO 2007)). Even if one assumes the number of weddings in Luton is matched by an equal number elsewhere within or outside the UK, this still makes only 1,300 - 1,400 weddings of Lutonians per

year, which is as much as a population of 180,000 can reasonably sustain. Only a minority of these weddings will involve Asians.

96. One cannot therefore put a figure on the number of forced weddings of Luton residents each year. However, when one puts together the number of enquiries to voluntary groups and the probable gap between those who seek help and those who suffer in silence, one is left with the disturbing conclusion that a significant proportion of Luton residents who marry each year may feel that they have been forced into marriage.
97. Most cases arise from the Kashmiri community. This could be simply because the Pakistani/Kashmiris are the largest minority ethnic group in Luton and many women in this group face a serious language barrier. The next largest group is Bangladeshis, who face similar issues. Both of these groups are from traditional backgrounds. Their family values and cultures - albeit in slow transition in the UK - are still closely linked to their rural heritage. Both Kashmiris and Bangladeshis are also mainly Muslims and deeply religious. It is therefore imperative that cultural and religious sensitivities are built into the support services along with the linguistic ones.
98. There are much fewer cases from the Indian community which is smaller in size than the Kashmiris and Bangladeshis and their backgrounds are also different. The Indian Sikh community has a significant presence in Bedford where a culturally sensitive women's refuge is run by an Indian woman. Since Luton has been increasingly receiving new communities since the 1990's, Luton Women's Aid has picked up a small number of cases arising from South African and Nigerian backgrounds. Some cases from the Somali community have also been picked by other women's groups.
99. It is of fundamental importance for all agencies and the media to appreciate that forced marriage is not an exclusively South Asian issue. It is linked to traditional hierarchical power-relationships between men and women and parents and children. Education and its impact on families over a period break down such hierarchies and power relationships. This was validated by the fact that all the cases/examples except one that were brought to the notice of the researcher by support agencies involved families where parents were from rural traditional backgrounds, women and children were living in a culture of inequality and men had a socially sanctioned status superior to other members of their families. This condition can cut across many of the diverse communities coming to Luton. Dealing with forced marriage will require sensitivity about the various cultures, languages and family values. As one interviewee said:

‘Finger pointing to one or two communities alone may aggravate the already difficult situation even further. This might promote prejudice. This might even unite powerful community leaders against support agencies.’

Nature of forced marriage in Luton

100. Some interviewees suggested an extension of the definition of forced marriage, to cover what they described as ‘false marriages.’ In these cases, force was not necessary because the marriages were based on deception. The young women did not know the full facts about their potential husbands before marriages took place. The deception related to the age, educational qualifications, wealth, habits, disabilities, drug addiction and other characteristics of the grooms. In some cases, when young men are having affairs with women considered unsuitable, especially if they are from outside their community or biratheri (brotherhood, clan or caste among Kashmiris), the parents hope marriage will cure them. Instead - predictably - they continue the adulterous relationships with the women of their choice. At best, they put up with the wives of their parents’ choice. At worst, they may take out their frustration with their parents on their brides.
101. Marriages can break down on many grounds, but forced marriages can be a recipe for disaster. Even if only one of the partners was actively forced, the other is still a victim provided s/he was not a party to the coercion - shackled to a reluctant and possibly embittered spouse. This is not the basis for a successful lifetime’s partnership. It is the basis for a troubled, distrustful marriage, with a high risk of separation and divorce. Divorce is disliked by all communities, but is particularly looked down upon by traditional families. One community group in Luton has expressed serious concerns over the unsuitable age gaps that exist between some brides and grooms. This may be linked to false information given to brides about their potential husbands’ actual age before the marriage or it could be because some very young brides are actually forced into marriage with much older grooms against their will. Khidmat, a well established community group in Luton, is developing a strategy to prevent such unsuitable marriages taking place outside of UK or within. Unfortunately, their dedicated female volunteer for women’s work passed away recently, creating a serious gap in their services. Like other well established community services in the voluntary sector, Khidmat needs core funding and most particularly funding to appoint a female worker to deal with forced marriage, domestic violence and other women’s issues. The Chief Adviser at Khidmat said to the

researcher, ‘we are approached by one or two people every week for information and advice on forced marriage.’ On a conservative estimate, Khidmat receives more than 50 such approaches per year. In a variety of ways, Khidmat is also raising awareness among men about the unfortunate consequences of forced marriage on the immediate victims, children, other family members, the extended family and the community. This group has a close working relationship with the Central Mosque of Luton. This liaison should be positively used by other agencies to combat forced marriages and the causes of such marriages in Luton.

102. Some girls are married off by their parents when they are only 16 and have just completed their compulsory education in the UK. According to Luton Training and Mentoring Ltd, as many as 70% of their female and a smaller proportion of male learners either had direct experience and/or the knowledge of their relations and friends having pressure from parents and extended families to accept marriages arranged for them:

‘It is most difficult for girls in particular because, despite aspirations for further and higher education, many of them yield to such pressures which almost certainly mean the end of their education.’

103. In a recent case, a young woman came to a community organisation and burst into floods of tears. She is bright and doing well at her A levels, but unfortunately has ‘to live like a prisoner.’ Wherever she goes outside her college, she is chaperoned by her family members. She feels she has ‘no life at all.’ She fears that as soon as she will complete her college education, she will be married off without her consent. She wishes to continue her studies. This could be a case of potential forced marriage.

104. At this age, girls have hardly any real experience of life and are in no position to resist their parents’ demands. They are taken to their country of heritage under the pretext of the serious illness of grandparents or other relations, somebody’s death, or to attend a wedding, and once there, are forced into marriage. Sometimes force is not needed since the girls can be duped into false marriage rather than forced:

‘They can be bought off by their parents with the promise of an attractive holiday, lovely clothes, jewellery etc.’

In return for these they are persuaded to get married - sometimes to men who are much older, having been shown photographs from their younger days, or even a picture of a cousin or distant relation.

105. When the brides discover the truth after their marriage, their disappointment adversely affects the couple's relationships from the start. When men and their family members try to assert their power on their frustrated brides, domestic violence often follows. One woman said that her husband beat herself and her children and spent most of his earnings on his relations who were not in the UK. She had not been told by her parents that her potential husband had been married twice before. She said she was given a very different image of the person before her marriage:

‘Had I known what kind of a person he was, I would not have agreed to go along with the wedding.’

106. There is particular concern about young women who are born and brought up outside the UK, are married overseas and then brought into the country as brides. In one case the religious wedding ceremony took place outside the UK in the absence of the groom. Having arrived in this country, the bride discovered that her husband was severely disabled. If she had been warned beforehand, she could have prepared herself, but it came as a shock. Because of the nature of the disability:

‘She was forced by the groom's family to consummate the marriage in an unthinkable manner. She became a victim of domestic violence by her in-laws. She put up with the marriage as long as she could and then sought advice from a women's group.’

107. In another case, the Police referred the young woman to a local women's agency. She had been forced into a marriage overseas and brought over to Luton. Hours after her arrival, violence was used to subjugate her into the in-laws' family culture. The case was reported to the police and she was taken to a safe house outside Luton. The women's organisation, which did not wish to be named in the report, was concerned that a young person had such a traumatic experience within hours of her arrival in a new country and there was no guarantee that she was given refuge in a place suitable for her cultural needs.

108. It is not only women from overseas who are tricked into marriage. Arranged marriages are also taking place between brides and grooms from different parts of the UK, based on false information, persuasion, coercion, emotional blackmail, physical threats, threats of suicide by mothers, threats of fathers divorcing mothers if girls or boys do not agree to marry partners chosen by their parents.

109. In one case, a young woman born and brought up in the UK was going out with someone from her own faith and cultural background. The women in the family seemed to have been aware of this. However, as soon as she became 19, the father decided to marry her off to a man of his choice in the country of his origin. Despite protests from the young woman supported by some female members of her family, the father took her out of this country and forced her into a marriage which she announced she would abandon as soon as she was able to do so. Having returned to England, she ran away from home. Later, she secretly contacted some women in the family. However, the father still does not know where she is. The speculation is that if he does, the young girl will be severely punished for bringing dishonour to the family. In some cases, such circumstances lead to serious physical assaults and even honour killings. This case is interesting because the family is well educated and middle class and was regarded as liberal in its outlook. This illustrates an important point made by an interviewee that:

‘the mindset of male heads of traditional families may not change just because of a superficial layer of education.’

Financial affluence or class may not mellow the all powerful and community-supported superior authority of the patriarch.

110. With so many factors coming into play, those involved may not always think of themselves as being forced into marriage until some time later. In addition, their pride and self-esteem may prevent them from recognising themselves as victims. As a community advice worker said:

‘Sometimes even the victims are not aware or not willing to accept that they are in a situation of forced marriage. If they can’t recognise it, how can schools or colleges recognise it?’

111. Some cases are starting to come from overseas university students in Luton. Young women on student visas seek advice on how to break up home ties, because they have met students over here who they wish to marry, but their parents back at home have not accepted their choice.

112. The picture is not unremittingly grim. There is evidence that young girls born and brought up in the UK are becoming increasingly aware of the issues of forced marriage and domestic violence, and are conscious of their own human rights as well. According to some interviewees, these topics are discussed at schools under the umbrella of bullying and relationships etc - although not specifically as forced marriage and not as widely as they

should be. This awareness, however small, may be having an impact on parents. It could be that young people of traditional families are becoming more assertive and are better able to resist parents' coercion, blackmail or threats.

Domestic violence

113. Most interviewees believed that much domestic violence starts with a forced or false marriage, since a forced or deceived bride is undervalued by her new husband and his family and is also likely to undervalue herself, making her a prime target for bullying: 'Many women get stuck into forced marriage and domestic violence as long as they possibly can put up with the situation.' Even when the relationships do not work, most marriages are tolerated by women for the sake of their children, for fear of the wrath of relations, fear of the condemnation of the community and also fear of the unknown. One woman admitted to an adviser that she would have had to put up with her 'terrible life' if her husband had not luckily decided to marry again. In addition, if they were brought in from outside the UK, or married at the age of 16, they have hardly any marketable skills to sustain themselves financially.

114. Actual or potential forced or false marriages lie at the root of much domestic violence but, according to Luton's Women's Aid, people are reluctant to admit they were forced into marriage, even when reporting domestic violence:

'Initially all of them say their marriages were arranged and their relationships got worse over a period. One doesn't know some of them were forced into their marriages until they were probed - sometimes extensively.'

In practice, the staff of statutory or voluntary agencies seldom probe this deeply. They rarely ask women or men reporting bullying at home or domestic violence questions about forced marriage.

'We simply don't ask them this question, but I feel that we should as a matter of course. I feel that all agencies across the sectors should be trained about how to find out the truth.'

115. Even identifying victims of domestic violence can be problematic since they are often ashamed of admitting to it. Many women in their thirties and forties seek help from benefit advisers about separating their benefits from their husbands' because they are being 'mentally tortured:'

‘These women find it difficult to say that they are also physically assaulted by their husbands. This is mostly for cultural reasons. This could also be for religious reasons. They might believe that God will be angry with them if they blame their husbands too much!’

116. Psychological violence is occurring widely. In a group discussion with a women’s luncheon club, most women said that forced marriages where serious violence was not used would be difficult to eradicate in the next two generations, because fathers’ authority over children’s marriages will not change easily. However, they were keen to see how daily psychological violence by undermining women in front of children and physical violence can be stopped. One woman said, ‘even an animal is not beaten up as cruelly as some husbands beat up their wives every day.’ It was also clear from some comments from this group that husbands could demand sexual favours from their wives who had to oblige in the face of threats of divorce. Sometimes, women with gynaecological problems are psychologically tortured and abandoned by their husbands in favour of a new wife.
117. The solutions offered by the group included empowering the next generation of women through education and ‘putting the fear of God in the hearts of men’ through Imams of mosques and other religious institutions so that they were made aware that treating women badly, forced marriage or domestic violence physical or psychological were not condoned by religions.

Suicide and self-harm

118. Linked to domestic violence, forced marriage and a culture of patriarchal bullying is the high suicide rate and incidence of self harm among Asian young women, which is about three times higher than among White women. This was mentioned frequently by interviewees. One pointed out that:

‘Girls wearing cultural and religious dresses can easily cover evidence of self harm. It is difficult for staff in youth clubs and at school or college to identify abuse or self harm for these young women.’

These issues are important and should be picked up in multi-agency training courses.

119. The links between self harm, suicide, attempted suicide and forced marriages in Luton should be clearly made through further research. An interviewee was emphatic that not enough energy is put into preventative action by schools, colleges, police, GPs, health visitors, local authority staff and community groups: ‘Appropriate risk assessments are not undertaken by them before it is too late.’ She strongly recommended that women’s groups

and MPs should lobby the Department for Children, Families and Schools to make it a requirement for all educational institutions to routinely carry out risk assessments of young women and men ‘if they look depressed, miss classes and if their normal performance starts going down.’

Assistance to victims

120. Almost every interviewee from the voluntary sector wished to see ‘a true partnership developed between the statutory and voluntary sectors’ to tackle forced marriage.
121. There is a persistent perception in the voluntary sector that the statutory agencies should be more culturally sensitive and caring. It was mentioned several times that women with language barriers find it difficult to access local authority services and their solicitors effectively. It would be helpful to have joint training sessions for multi-agency staff across all sectors on the law and cultural needs and sensitivities relating to forced marriages and domestic violence. This would also be an opportunity for support services to develop an appreciation of standardized data collection and maintenance, child protection procedures (while dealing with young people under 16 and adults where children are involved) and confidentiality issue, etc. There was no evidence that all agencies including the voluntary sector support services were using or even aware of the national guidance issued by the FMU or what steps they had taken to take advice and support from this Unit. All such training courses should therefore aim at raising trainees’ awareness about the Forced Marriage Unit’s guidance, as well as issues relating to language barriers, awareness of the law, child protection procedures, and the importance of sharing information about how many cases they are receiving per year.
122. Lack of data impedes inter-agency cooperation. It is imperative that all relevant agencies collect data on forced marriage in a standard format, preserve its confidentiality and share information with appropriate agencies, subject to rigorous safeguards on to prevent the unauthorised identification of individuals.
123. Voluntary community groups in Luton do not have dedicated counselling or adequate advice services to assist people threatened with forced marriage or are living within forced marriage. They cannot give enough time to clients to build up their trust. One interviewee captured this aspect well when she said:

‘When someone approaches us, we should give her enough time to relax and build up trust. If they suspect we are not going to keep

their confidentiality from their family, or community leaders, they will switch off and never come back to us.’

This also underlines the value of the guidance from the FMU by confirming the lack of trust in community leaders who support services might consider to be the upholders of traditional family values, but who are suspected by the victims as likely to condone forced marriage in practice through their unwillingness to recognise it for what it is. Rightly or wrongly, victims assume community leaders will normally take their parents’ side.

124. Since voluntary bodies do not have the resources or expertise to handle forced marriage cases, they signpost enquirers to other agencies including the Police, Women’s Aid, CAB, Luton Law Centre and to other voluntary groups such as Ghar se Ghar, Luton All Women’s Centre, etc. At this stage, many drop out and do not find enough courage to go any further. Some might hop from voluntary group to voluntary group until they find enough courage to deal with their own situations themselves or go a step further and report to the Police, or else give way to despair and accept their situations as an unavoidable fate.
125. Currently, there is no single counselling service in Luton’s voluntary sector dedicated to the victims of forced marriages. The Bengali Women’s Project at the Centre for Youth and Community Development had a full time dedicated adviser a few years ago who covered a wide range of women’s issues including forced marriages. Her salary was funded by Luton Borough Council. This post was discontinued some time ago when the funding ceased. There is now a part-time post seconded to the Centre by the local authority. The post-holder’s main responsibility is to co-ordinate the activities relating to the girls’ youth club. There is another club for boys which is coordinated by a male youth worker. As a result enquiries about domestic violence and forced marriages are picked up by anyone at the Centre who is around and who seems approachable by clients for such sensitive issues. This Centre, based in the heart of Bury Park, one of the most deprived areas of Luton, needs at least two female support workers for women’s issues and one male support worker - to help with the current luncheon clubs for men and women and also to systematically raise awareness among men of domestic violence and forced marriages as unlawful, unethical, immoral and destructive of family cohesion.
126. There is a strong argument for setting up a family centre at CYCD with two female and one male advice workers and an administrative worker. One of the female workers should be Asian, the other non-Asian, in case young Asian girls do not wish to confide to an Asian worker because they may fear

that parents or community leaders would be informed. The administrative worker could be from another community. All staff should be bilingual in English and other key languages which most clients are able to speak such as Urdu, Bengali/Sylheti, and perhaps Punjabi or any other. The male advice worker should advise men and raise their awareness about the legal implications of forced marriage, domestic violence, “honour” killings and so on. He should also raise awareness of Luton’s religious leaders and male worshippers in places of worship such as mosques, temples and gurdwaras.

127. The Youth Club coordinators must also be extensively trained to raise awareness of young men and women about the legal implications of forced marriages and domestic violence. They should continually empower young people so that they develop enough confidence to tackle their situations in the family in a constructive manner without tearing apart the family cohesion.
128. Similarly, Luton All Women’s Centre had one qualified person in the past to provide counselling. This was welcome. However, the post was discontinued because of the lack of funding. On the basis of two extensive interviews with this person who currently is managing the Centre on a part-time basis, it seems important to have a culturally sensitive emergency refuge to accommodate women victims and their children for a short period:

‘There is a serious shortage of culturally competent refuges in the country. In Luton, we desperately need at least an emergency half-way house attached to the Women’s Centre so that these women can be given a safe place to rest, reflect and plan for their future in a culturally sensitive and welcoming environment.’

Language is critical since many victims seem to be unable to communicate in English:

‘The care and supervision must be provided by appropriately qualified bilingual women support workers who can communicate in English as well a few other languages such as Pahari/Urdu, Bengali/Sylheti and Punjabi.’

Rights of victims

129. Some women’s groups and agencies raised the issues of serious legal and financial implications for women who were already traumatized because of their forced or false marriages which became intolerable to live within. Those who have not got resident status in this country have no legal rights to access benefit. This is the single most important reason why most cases

of forced marriages are not officially reported by victims who come from abroad. As soon as victims understand their weak legal status, they are frightened of approaching the police, Women's Aid, Luton Rights, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Local Authority Services eg Social Services or Housing. They normally do not go beyond voluntary community groups. This may partly explain why some women's groups receive about 100 enquiries a year and statutory or semi-statutory agencies receive no more than 6 or 7 cases per year.

130. However, these women desperately need a better understanding of the legal processes and procedures as well as their current situation. Since passports are official documents, the practice in most families is to keep such documents with their husbands who are traditionally the link between them and the rest of the world. In a traditional family, the women's world is within the household alone. Women from overseas coming from a traditional family background and entering into another traditional family in the UK have little or no understanding of the law in this country. They leave their passports with their husbands and are not even aware that it could be their only identification document in this country.
131. In one case picked up by Luton Women's Centre, the woman did not ask her husband to apply for her resident status and the husband did not bother to take this initiative either. The marriage was unworkable from the start, because she discovered after coming over to the UK (Luton) that he was a heroin addict. Meanwhile, a child was born. The child benefit used to be picked up by the husband, because the wife did not have any legal status, nor did she know where to go to pick it up even if she was entitled to collect it. Domestic violence became a daily routine. Once when she was seriously assaulted, she was compelled to seek help from neighbours and eventually the Police were involved. This then led to the arrest of the husband (later released on bail) and involvement of all relevant agencies and an injunction against the husband not to enter his home where his wife and child lived and not to harass his wife again. However, the husband had his keys and he came into the house and beat the wife up severely. Only then she got the firm advice to change the lock. When the author of this report asked her why she did not change the lock, she said she thought the arrest by the Police and the court order to her husband not to enter the premises were sufficient deterrent. The police or the local support services should have briefed her on how to face her life alone with a small child. She also had a serious language barrier. She was not entitled to benefits, because she never applied for her legal status. The Social Services became involved to monitor whether the child was safe in her care. She was more traumatized by that than by anything else. She could not speak to her

solicitor, because of her lack of English and the solicitor did not always arrange for an interpreter. The latest situation was that the Home Office decided that she should go back to her country of origin. Her own position was that she could not do that without damaging her child's future educational prospects. The child (a two year old girl) is a British citizen and she is entitled to live here and get educated here. The Social Services concluded that she is very well looked after by the mother, so there is no need to take the child away from the mother. The woman herself asserts that she cannot go back to her relations in her country of origin without damaging the child and without losing her own status and the status of the child among her relations. She bitterly regrets now that she agreed to her arranged marriage without the knowledge that her would-be husband was a drug addict. This is an illustration of another false marriage and also of the utter powerlessness of women who have a language barrier, cultural barrier, lack of understanding of the law and the system and absolutely no access to a counselling service in Luton, because it does not exist.

132. It was also argued by several interviewees that protection for victims and witnesses must be strengthened. The community support groups should be made aware how effective the protection is, otherwise 'they are not in a position to convince nervous victims and witnesses that it is all right to come forward.'
133. There was no consensus about the need for specific legislation relating to forced marriage. Firstly, because the level of understanding varied. Some believed that the situation could be legally tackled in a variety of ways as the Law currently stands. Others believed that without making forced marriage a criminal offence, parents will not be sufficiently willing to change their current practice. The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Bill, as it was then, was not widely known by interviewees. Those who knew about it did not think it was going to be of much use.
134. However, interviewees were keen to see legal aid readily available and accessible to those, irrespective of their legal status in this country, who were victims of forced marriages and wished to separate from their husbands and live independently alone or with their children as appropriate. Steps should be taken to make them entitled to benefits. We believe that the Local Law Centre could be better empowered to provide training on legal implications of domestic violence and forced marriage to agencies across the sectors.

Collusion culture

135. Many interviewees expressed anger that on some occasions agencies promptly involved community leaders who also happened to be local councillors to mediate with parents and victims. This is a serious concern since it violates the firm and explicit advice issued by the Forced marriage Unit to the police, social services and education professionals. The guidance emphasises that involving local prominent people can put victims in danger.
136. Some interviewees argued forcefully that local politicians, especially from the same or similar ethnic backgrounds as victims or potential victims, 'must never be involved in dealing with a case of forced marriage or domestic violence.' To keep the 'false reputation of their community' they are likely to collude with parents: 'This collusion culture must be changed.' Interviewees pointed out that agencies would never consider taking this course of action in cases of domestic abuse within the white community:
- 'Why do they involve community leaders and councillors to resolve a forced marriage or domestic violence in minority ethnic communities only? Why should we be treated so differently from say - white victims of domestic violence or rape? No body involves the White community leaders or politicians in any of these cases.'
137. Involving local leaders is bad practice. It put victims at risks and implies that agencies believe Asians lack the maturity of other communities, who are not treated as if they are followers of local chiefs. There is evidently an urgent need to train the staff of all statutory and voluntary agencies, and improve internal guidance. The correct procedures should be set out in all guidance and explicitly discussed in training courses for staff including the volunteers of support services.

Raising community awareness and educating communities

138. Suggestions were strongly put to the author of this report by some interviewees about raising South Asian and other communities' awareness about the adverse effect of forced marriage and domestic violence and also their religious, moral, social, economic and legal implications. The ways forward included producing powerful and professionally produced television plays and programmes of discussion and debate and broadcasting them via all the specialist minority ethnic TV channels, religious channels as well the mainstream media such as the BBC, ITV, Sky, Channel 4 etc. Since most adults - particularly from the older generation of the South Asian communities watch Zee TV, Bangla TV, Channel 5 as well as Islam Channel, these should be effectively used to launch a sustained campaign over a period. However, concerns were raised by some men that this might be

used as a weapon against minorities and Muslims by extremist groups. Mitalee Youth Association has already done some work on social issues including drugs and forced marriage by producing teleplays. They also use a radio channel, Diverse FM, to educate the community about social problems. This group needs to be empowered through financial support to produce high quality educational documentaries and films relating to forced marriage and domestic violence to make an impact locally and nationally.

139. Since it is mostly men who are perpetrators of forced marriages and domestic violence, the education of men is essential as a preventative measure. This was raised by interviewees many times during this research. Since places of worship are led by men - at least in the South Asian communities - a few panels of men should be set up to cover the catchment areas of the key mosques, temple and gurdwaras in Luton. Since the African Caribbean interviewees quite categorically said that they did not have situations of forced marriages occurring in Luton, it would be wise not to prioritize other groups where the incidences are less common. These panel members can be trained up to be champions of human rights and family cohesion. With active support of the Imams of various mosques, they can start influencing the Muslim worshippers at Friday congregations. Similarly, Luton Council of Faiths can take the responsibility to identify some people from their membership to form a panel to influence the worshippers in Luton Hindu Temple and the two Gurdwaras. A list of proposed members is attached at Appendix 4.

Regaining and maintaining the momentum

140. Luton Multicultural Women's Coalition (LMWC) has been at the forefront of raising awareness about forced marriage and its pernicious effect since 2001. Having convened the first conference on forced marriage in Luton in 2001 and then produced a user-friendly resource pack for support agencies and also to victims and potential victims in 2002/3, it is now planning to launch a series of seminars/conferences to regain the momentum of activities. LMWC needs financial support to start this initiative and also to review and update the resource pack it produced over three years ago.
141. Ushrat Sultana at Margaret Moran MP's Office, in collaboration with the Bury Park Community Development Trust, took the initiative in 2005 to launch a training programme 'Changing Lives Project.' This provided knowledge and skills to a number of local men and women to 'achieve significant changes in their own lives and also in the lives of others. Since April 2006, four sets of training courses have been completed, and the first course for peer group facilitators. A launch event was held on 26 June 2006, involving Margaret

Moran MP and Baroness Scotland. According to the Director of the Changing Lives project, the participants ‘have worked hard to achieve significant changes in their own lives and have made a difference in the lives of others, who they work with, their families and friends and colleagues.’ The outcomes of this programme should be externally evaluated and appraised so that the programme, if appropriate, can be extended to secondary schools and colleges in Luton. We are pleased that the Forced Marriage Unit has recently agreed continued funding to the project.

142. In addition, a Steering Group on Forced Marriages and Family Cohesion should be set up in Luton to develop strategies relating to forced marriages, encourage appropriate initiatives of good practice across all sectors, monitor progress in tackling forced marriages and related domestic violence and hold seminars and conferences in Luton to keep up the momentum. The terms of reference should be drawn up. The membership should be drawn from existing women’s organisations mainly. However, representatives from the statutory agencies such as the police, primary care trust, local authority as well as appropriate groups such as Victim Support, LGBT etc should be included. A chair should be elected every year through an Annual General Meeting. This Group could eventually become a Charity and apply for funding to support initiatives to empower vulnerable women in Luton or remain a Steering Group simply to empower the existing support groups to tackle potential and existing victims of forced marriage, domestic violence and their children and campaign for a town where human rights abuse such as forced marriage simply becomes a thing of the past.

Conclusion

143. This project has investigated forced marriage in Luton, as a means of drawing out issues which are of national concern. It makes some local conclusions, but its findings are relevant to Britain as a whole. Some recommendations are directed at central government and national agencies, but even those recommendations addressed specifically to Luton should be taken as indicative of action which could be taken locally elsewhere.
144. As mentioned earlier, Luton has had three conferences on forced marriage since 2001. The first was organized by Luton Multicultural Women's Coalition in liaison with a number of statutory and voluntary agencies. Scholars and practitioners from London, the Universities of Oxford and Luton and other places beyond Luton were included. The outcome was a user friendly resource booklet - *Silence Hurts Too* which was produced by the women's groups including Luton Multicultural Women's Coalition with sponsorship from Bedfordshire Police, Lloyds TSB Foundations and Luton Borough Council. This was a good example of a multi-agency initiative to tackle forced marriage in Luton. A Directory of Domestic Violence with the same title - *Silence Hurts Too* - was also produced around the same time sponsored by the Safer Luton Partnership, the Police and Luton Borough Council. Both these documents provide helpful guidance and contact details of support services which can be used by agencies and by potential and actual victims of forced marriages and domestic violence. However, these documents need to be reviewed urgently to update important contact details of support agencies. It seems that after the third conference, some key activists moved on and there was no joined up thinking or actions for sometime. However, recently initiatives have been taken by some organisations including Margaret Moran's Office, eQuality Networks, Luton All Women's Centre, Ghar se Ghar, Shanthona Women's Group and Equality in Diversity to keep the issue of forced marriage on the agenda. It is hoped that on the back of this research report, Luton will start moving again with a clear shared vision and vigorous action across all sectors under the umbrella of the proposed Steering Group. Forced Marriage is an abominable abuse of human rights. The sooner it is removed from Luton, the better for this town.

Recommendations

National Action Plan

1. The Forced Marriage Unit's Action Plan, linked to and building on the Domestic Violence Action Plan, pulls together all major recommendations and provides a framework for action. The implementation of this plan should be supported at all levels with appropriate resources and funding.
2. The professional guidance issued by the Forced Marriage Unit should form the basis for all training in this field and should be strictly applied by all agencies. The guidance should be updated to include references to the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007, and its status enhanced by redrafting it as a Code of Practice to be issued by the Secretary of State as guidance under section 63Q(1) of the Family Law Act 1996 as amended by the 2007 Act.
3. Support should especially be given to those local partnerships developed under the Action Plan to combat forced marriage, involving all relevant agencies such as the police, social services, schools, colleges and universities, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards, On Track, Sure Start, etc, and local community groups, especially women's groups and religious institutions. Work at local level needs to be better structured and coordinated than they currently are. Women's self-help groups should take a leading role and be given appropriate resources and training.

Victim-oriented approach

4. All agencies and individuals dealing with forced marriage should adopt the victim-oriented approach recommended by the government's working party on forced marriage, and codified in the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007. A marriage is defined as forced if one of the parties believes s/he is being coerced. The potential victim is the only person who can say, in the Act's words, whether s/he is giving 'free and full consent' to the marriage. No-one else can make that judgment on her/his behalf. It is the victim's perceptions which should be accepted, not the family's, and it is the victim's welfare which is paramount - not the family's.

False marriage

5. The definition of forced marriage should be expanded to include ‘false marriage,’ where a person has been tricked into giving consent through false information or the withholding of critical information about the other party (eg the existence of previous marriages). A person’s consent cannot be said to be free if it is based on information which has been deliberately falsified or obscured.

Link with bullying and domestic violence

6. Forced marriage should be recognised as a form of bullying and domestic abuse, and tackled in accordance with the normal professional standards and guidance for such cases. Domestic Violence Forums should include a focus on forced marriage.
7. Teachers and others working with children should be on the look-out for signs of bullying, domestic violence and behavioural problems as part of their day-to-day duties, and should be alert to the possibility that forced marriage might be one of the eventual manifestations of the bullying syndrome in traditional families. In particular, if a teacher knows that a student’s older sibling has already been subjected to forced marriage, that should trigger action to try to prevent the tragedy being repeated - for example by passing on a helpline number, discussing options for preventative measures with potential victims and (subject to preserving individuals’ confidentiality) with other professionals, appropriate community groups, etc.

Changing attitudes and promoting awareness of the rights and duties of citizens

8. The most effective way of preventing force in marriage in the long term is to change attitudes. Action should be taken to:
 - i. Support the implementation of the Forced Marriage Unit’s Action Plan;
 - ii. Improve parenting;
 - iii. Increase awareness of rights and duties;
 - iv. Promote a culture of condemnation of forced marriage;

- v. Promote the education of women;
 - vi. Encourage continued training for professionals and others involved in forced marriage;
 - vii. Develop partnerships between statutory, private and voluntary sector support agencies to tackle forced marriage;
 - viii. Empower women's self-help groups;
 - ix. Develop parents' associations to take on board training for parenting as well as issues such as forced marriage and domestic violence.
9. Children should be aware that they can discuss any concerns about forced marriage with the various children's services such as ChildLine and There4Me, but the staff themselves may need training on how to deal sensitively with the subject.
10. There should be a campaign to generate a culture which recognises and condemns forced marriage as an abuse of human rights:
- i. Traditional notions of family honour must be redefined so that it is the families who force their children who feel shame, not the other way round, and that perpetrators are regarded as bringing shame upon themselves and their communities.
 - ii. Some suggestions for developing a campaign included powerful and professionally produced television plays and programmes of discussion and debate, broadcast via specialist minority ethnic TV channels, religious channels as well as the mainstream media such as the BBC, ITV, Sky, Channel 4 etc. Most South Asian adults - particularly from the older generation - watch satellite channels in their heritage languages and the Islam Channel. However, concerns were raised by some men that this might be used as a weapon against minorities and Muslims by extremist groups. Care should be taken to ensure that this is not one of the outcomes of the campaign.
 - iii. Community leaders must take the lead on condemning forced marriage. They should recognise that more damage is done to the reputation of their community by attempting to suppress information about forced marriage, and pretending it does not exist, than by making a stand against it. Suppressing the information leaves an impression that the problem is more widespread than it actually is.

Combating forced marriage makes it clear this is a minority activity, disapproved of by the majority.

- iv. The unacceptability of forced marriage should be incorporated into the wider framework of initiatives to improve parenting skills across all communities within the UK. Agencies such as On Track, the DfES's Parent Centre, the NSPCC and Positive Parenting, which support children and parents, should work with community and religious groups to ensure that forced marriage is discussed in their resource material, handbooks, good practice guidance and websites. The material should include the strictures of the various religions against force in marriage, and short leaflets should be prepared in appropriate languages which directly address each of the major religions, so that they can be placed in places of worship and religious centres.
- v. This material should be used as a basis for discussion with priests and imams, to help them address the issue of forced marriage in their sermons, teaching and guidance.
- vi. Short training courses or workshops should be developed for priests and imams so that they can explore techniques and share experience on how best to raise these sensitive topics with their congregations.
- vii. Both parents and children need to be aware of their legal rights and duties - for example, that the use of violence and unnecessary force within the home could lead to charges of assault, cruelty to persons under 16 or false imprisonment, that seizing someone's passport could constitute theft, that relatives and friends who join in illegal activities to force someone into marriage might be charged with aiding and abetting a criminal offence, etc, and that a marriage conducted through force or deception is not valid under English law.
- viii. Appropriate advice should be made available to people applying for residence status in the UK and/or citizenship about the powers of the state to intervene in family affairs and the legal position on domestic violence, corporal punishment, etc.

Third party mediators

11. All agencies involved with forced marriage must apply the FMU's advice against the involvement of third parties as mediators, however respected or well intentioned they might be. The FMU's guidance stresses that involving

local prominent people can put victims in danger. The correct procedures should be fully discussed in training courses for staff including volunteers of support services across the sectors.

Women's education

12. The take-up of further and higher education by Asian and African young women must be increased to:
 - i. Reduce the risk of forced marriage for young women aged 16-19;
 - ii. Buy time for family attitudes to change and for the young women themselves to become more assertive, articulate and aware of their rights under UK law and their own religious traditions;
 - iii. Obtain qualifications which will expand their options for independence and self-respect if they do find themselves in a forced marriage or abusive relationship.

Roles and training of professionals and volunteers

13. Training relating to forced marriage must be mainstreamed for all professionals and volunteers and based on the Forced Marriage Unit's guidance. The training should be undertaken in liaison with local and national agencies and community groups:
 - i. Training relating to forced marriage should be included within all appropriate professional courses, to ensure that all professionals are aware of the child protection procedures and process, and all key issues, and also of the available guidance and contact details of the FMU and other local and national agencies.
 - ii. Professionals in the Police, social services, housing, educational, health and other services should be encouraged to undertake additional training on tackling forced marriage, so that they can include this as a specialist skill within their portfolio of expertise, reducing the need to take advice on specific cases from within the community. The Police restrict the handling of forced marriage cases to 'qualified officers,' who have relevant experience and specialist training, and there is a similar system within most social services departments. This model should be extended to all professional services, including teachers and youth services.

14. All relevant agencies must collect data on forced marriage in a standard format, preserve its confidentiality and share information with appropriate agencies, subject to rigorous safeguards on to prevent the unauthorised identification of individuals. Safeguards would need to go beyond those normally prescribed by the Information Commissioner. Training courses should cover maintenance, consistency and sharing of data, and also workforce development in a multi-agency setting to improve standards of cooperation.

Support to victims and witnesses

15. Appropriate support must be provided to victims of forced marriage, throughout their experience and afterwards if necessary, and also to family members or relations who have acted as witnesses or supporters of the victim.
16. The national Survivors' Network which was launched earlier this year by the FMU and Karma Nirvana, an NGO in Derby, should be encouraged to work in partnership with other initiatives across the country, to combat the isolation suffered by victims of forced marriage, share experience and spread awareness of the options available. It should be complemented by physical locations across the country (eg safe-houses in people's homes, trustworthy community centres, etc) linked together through an on-line network with web-based resources, advice, useful addresses, internet chat-rooms, etc. The network should:
 - i. Build up the capacity of the community and voluntary sector to provide counselling services on forced marriage;
 - ii. Establish and maintain a virtual and physical network, to ensure full security;
 - iii. Support people who are under threat of forced marriage and need guidance and advice;
 - iv. Support witnesses and potential witnesses;
 - v. Support people who are isolated because they have had to leave their family and friends.
 - vi. Include a 'buddy mentoring' scheme, linking victims, potential victims and witnesses with mentors who have survived actual or

attempted forced marriages. The mentoring could be conducted both online and face-to-face.

- vii. Act as a national resource centre for research and good practice on forced marriage and related issues;
 - viii. Ensure the online material is up to date and appropriate;
 - ix. Maintain, coach, select, vet, guide, etc the mentors in the mentoring network;
 - x. Arrange safe internet access to help and support for women at risk of forced marriage, who do not have unsupervised access to a PC.
17. Public funding should be made available for initiatives across the country.
18. The support needs of victims of forced marriage are inter-related:
- i. **Counselling:** after being pressurised by their families and acquaintances, victims may no longer be sure what they want, or what their choices are. They need to be able to talk matters through with someone who understands their cultural background, and who also knows the legal and practical remedies available to them. It is also important that the counsellor is not judgmental, will not attempt to impose a solution - and is not connected to the people who have been trying to force the marriage. There may also be language requirements.

To ensure that they receive advice which is sensitive and takes account of their own cultural and religious backgrounds, they will often need counsellors from within their own community. Such counsellors should be properly trained and made aware of issues such as confidentiality and the dangers of approaching third parties without either the express request of the victim or the agreement of one of the professional agencies. Support should be given to those programmes that offer counselling training, listening techniques, the framework of legal and administrative support for victims of forced marriage, the victim-focussed approach, and good practice in dealing with forced marriage.

- ii. **English language and citizenship:** Many victims of forced marriage, especially those brought into the UK as spouses, are unable to speak English well. Women, who have deliberately been kept secluded by

their in-laws, may not speak English at all. Without English, they face multiple disadvantages. They cannot exercise their rights and obligations effectively, engage with education or health professionals over the welfare of their children, or earn their own living. Every effort should be made to enable these women to learn English. This is a prerequisite to enable them to live independently. The recent report by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion on *Our shared future* recommends that local authorities should cut back on ESOL classes. However, victims of forced marriage were allowed entry to the UK without language tests and were often deliberately prevented from learning English by families who did not wish them to gain independence or knowledge of their human rights.

Teaching English to those recently arrived in the UK represents an investment in the future. Language skills empower victims to make a full contribution to society and support themselves and their children, and so reduce potential long-term demand on the taxpayer and service providers. We believe that relevant community organisations, such as, in Luton, Luton All Women's Centre, the Centre for Youth and Community Development and Women's Aid, can be supported in offering this education. They could be combined with citizenship classes, so that people brought up outside the UK are aware of their rights and duties.

- iii. ***Economic support:*** The victims of forced marriage include a wide range of individuals - high and low standards of education, skilled and unskilled, strong and poor command of English, born and/or brought up in the UK and overseas, and so on. Victims and potential victims with no language barriers should be provided with prompt and efficient support to access work opportunities and secure jobs through Job Centre Plus to get work, whether part or full time. This should be done as soon as practicable so that they can feel confident and secure and start their lives on a stronger footing. Women who are less educated and skilled should be provided specific support to work from home, as many used to do in the past and still do, such as sewing, dress-making, making soft toys etc.

Meanwhile, their skills should be further enhanced by training providers at places which are safe and easily accessible. This can be done in partnership with support services and training providers. Government investment will be helpful either through Learning and Skills Councils (or their successor bodies) or local authorities to

provide skills training to victims of forced marriage. The training venues will need to be chosen carefully in consultation with relevant community organisations, especially Luton All Women's Centre, the Centre for Youth and Community Development, Women's Aid etc. Without an appropriate government strategy on economic support backed by adequate resources, the disempowered victims of forced marriage will not be able to make the transition from being victims to fully contributing citizens.

- iv. ***Residence status and children:*** The residence and citizenship status of spouses brought into the UK is often ambiguous, their in-laws having failed or refused to apply on their behalf for permanent residence status or citizenship. This can lead to anomalous situations, where children are British citizens, but their mothers do not have the right to live or work in the UK. The Home Office should recognise that permanent UK residence and British citizenship are among the many legal and human rights to which the victims of forced marriage may have been denied by abusive families, and should take a sympathetic view of their situation.
- v. ***Barriers to immigration and on passport control:*** It has been suggested that the Home Office could support victims and potential victims of forced marriage by exercising its discretion on the issue of entry permits and passports to block opportunities for forced marriage. In particular:
 - a) When interviews are introduced for the issue of new passports, the interviewing officer could tactfully explore whether certain applicants, such as young Asian women, are being taken to their heritage countries against their will and are at risk of being forced into marriage. In such circumstances, they could refuse to issue the passport.
 - b) When foreign nationals apply from their countries of origin to join their spouses in the UK, interviewing officers could refuse permission if they believe the marriages had been forced - but this should only be done with the consent of the British spouse.
 - c) The introduction of an English language test would also block a significant number of forced marriages, but by no means all.

These could be useful tools to combat forced marriage, but they require considerable care and tact. There is a risk that bona fide applicants might be harassed, discriminated against or made to feel like second-class citizens. If such proposals were to be implemented, they should be accompanied by carefully researched guidance on the questions to be asked and the sensitive exercise of discretion.

On the question of language, it must be recognised that this would only apply to non-EU citizens, so would discriminate against applicants from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. EU citizens' freedom of movement is not restricted by their language skills

- vi. **Refuges:** The need for refuges which are competent to deal with the cultural, religious and linguistics needs of women from minority communities has been reiterated in many reports on domestic violence and forced marriage. Domestic violence is the main reason for placing Asian women in supported housing, yet few schemes offer appropriate language skills, cultural support, cuisine or religious facilities. The Asian clients of women's refuges across the country have felt isolated and some have been harassed on grounds of race or religion by other inmates. Luton's refuges are few and always full. More refuges and resources are needed, with appropriately skilled staff from the key client groups.
 - vii. **Placement of victims outside their community:** Some of those who reject a forced marriage provoke such hostility from their family and the community around them that they have to leave their local neighbourhoods and rebuild their lives elsewhere. Some live in fear of kidnap by bounty hunters, who would return them to their families where they would face further abuse and possibly murder. If they have married, both they and their spouse may be under threat.
- 19. Consideration should be given to making legal aid available to those, irrespective of their legal status in this country, who were victims of forced marriages and wished to separate from their husbands and live independently alone or with their children as appropriate. Local Law Centres should be empowered to provide training on legal implications of domestic violence and forced marriage to agencies across the sectors.
 - 20. There should be a campaign for core funding for refuges so that they can accommodate victims free of charge while their benefit status is being resolved. In most refuges, women have to pay for accommodation, but many victims of forced marriage have no jobs or money. Claiming benefits is

not an instant process. If they have fled their homes, they may not have access to the documents they need to establish their eligibility since these are held by their families. Some do not yet have the legal status to claim benefit. Luton is unusual in that its refuges do not charge rent. However, most victims of forced marriage take refuge outside Luton.

21. It is imperative that all agencies including the Job Centre Plus provide safe places outside public areas to interview victims and witnesses. The practice of bringing victims back to their home areas to complete benefit forms in the open office, where they are at risk of being identified by their families, must end. This task can and should be conducted through correspondence or in private rooms at the benefit offices where victims have been relocated.

Further research on support needs

22. Further research is required in a number of areas related to the support of victims and witnesses:
 - i. **Best practice:** Comprehensive and systematic best practice guidance based on objective research is required about the support erstwhile victims of forced marriage need to live their lives free from fear. At one extreme, if some members of their family are considered dangerous, they may require assistance along the lines of the Witness Protection Scheme, involving the creation of a completely new identity. At the other extreme, they may simply need to be eased into a community where they are unknown, through occasional counselling.
 - ii. **Health issues:** There needs to be research into the impact of forced marriage on family health. *Health inequalities in Luton - Getting to the point*, the annual public health report produced by Luton teaching Primary Care Trust in 2003 has along with other health reports indicated high perinatal and infant mortality rates, and low birth weights among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. There are also high rates of suicide, depression and poor health generally among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Many factors affect these health inequalities, but the stress and neglect associated with forced marriage may play a role.
 - iii. **Witnesses:** It is also important to protect witnesses and supporters. Other family members may have broken ranks to support a victim of forced marriage - alerting the authorities, helping a victim to get away, or giving evidence in court. They may themselves be at risk of

revenge attacks or persecution. If they are young and unmarried, then their own risk of forced marriage will increase substantially. The family, far from being chastened by its experience, may decide to get it right this time and marry them off as quickly as possible - and may take them permanently out of the country, so that they spend the rest of their lives in an environment where their behaviour can be supervised more closely. Little or nothing is known about the experience or motivation of those who have helped to prevent forced marriage or provided evidence against families.

- iv. **Male victims:** Although forced marriage is primarily a women's issue, the Forced Marriage Unit estimates that 15% of the victims are men, which is a significant number. We welcome the work of the Forced Marriage Unit on the issues relating to male victims of forced marriage, but more needs to be known about best practice in this area:
- a) The support needs of male victims and potential victims are likely to be different from those of women. In particular, it needs to be investigated whether they would respond better to male or female advisors.
 - b) Some men brought into the UK as spouses may have been forced or tricked into marriage, and if the marriage breaks up they may face problems with language, skills, residence status, etc. Little is known about this aspect of forced marriage.
 - c) Some marriages are forced in order to break up daughters' relationships with 'undesirable' boyfriends. Some of these men have been physically assaulted or intimidated, or even murdered in honour killings, a dramatic manifestation of the unacceptable pressures that can be put on young men who cross the boundaries set by certain families. Such men may become indirect victims of forced marriage. They may also be witnesses or potential witnesses if they report or attempt to prevent the marriage of their girlfriends. The support needs if any of such boyfriends are not known, nor the best means of persuading them to come forward to prevent forced marriage.

Recommendations for Luton

23. There are some specific recommendations for Luton:

- i. Funding needs to be identified in order to establish a counselling service and culturally/religiously competent emergency refuge to be attached to Luton All-Women's Centre, so that victims, potential victims can be removed to safety outside the family environment, to relax, reflect and take decisions for their future.
- ii. Luton Multi-Cultural Women's Coalition in partnership with other groups intend to set up a series of seminars/conferences to regain the lost momentum in tackling forced marriage and domestic violence. They are also keen to update the resource pack. As in the past, their initiatives should be supported by all statutory agencies in Luton, including assistance with costs.
- iii. The voluntary sector organisations providing services for clients relating to forced marriage and domestic violence are starving for core funding and sustained financial support - eg Ghar se Ghar, Luton All Women's Centre, the Centre for Youth and Community Development, Luton Multi-Cultural Women's Coalition and Shanthona. These are the organisations to which potential victims of forced marriage turn in the first instance. It is strongly recommended that the appropriate statutory agencies consider urgently how best to support them.
- iv. Ghar se Ghar needs access to language support - especially for Bengali/Sylheti speakers who approach them for help. Currently Ghar se Ghar can deal with clients who speak Pahari, Urdu, Hindi and English. However, clients speaking Bengali/Sylheti also approach them and they need to be supported. It is recommended that Ghar se Ghar, being one of the few women's organisations in Luton providing support to victims and potential victims of forced marriages, should be helped by all statutory agencies to recruit an Advice Worker who could provide support in Bengali/Sylheti
- v. A family centre should be set up at the Centre for Youth and Community Development with two female and one male advice workers and an administrative worker. One of the female workers should be Asian, the other non-Asian, in case young Asian girls do not wish to confide to an Asian worker because they may fear that parents or community leaders would be informed. The administrative worker could be from another community. All staff should be bilingual in English and other key languages which most clients are able to speak such as Urdu, Bengali/Sylheti, and perhaps Punjabi or any other. The male advice worker should advise men and raise their

awareness about the legal implications of forced marriage, domestic violence, honour killings and so on. He should also raise awareness of Luton's religious leaders and male worshippers in places of worship such as mosques, temples and gurdwaras.

- vi. The local authority should set up an effective parents' association in Luton which will be able to take on issues relating to parenting, domestic violence, forced marriage, etc.
- vii. A Steering Group on Forced Marriages and Family Cohesion should be set up in Luton to develop strategies relating to forced marriages, encourage appropriate initiatives of good practice across all sectors, monitor progress in tackling forced marriages and related domestic violence and hold seminars and conferences in Luton to keep up the momentum. The terms of reference should be drawn up. The membership should be drawn from existing women's organisations mainly. However, representatives from the statutory agencies such as the Police, health, local authority as well as appropriate groups such as Victim Support, LGBT etc should be included. A chair should be elected every year through an Annual General Meeting. This Group could eventually become a Charity and apply for funding to support initiatives to empower vulnerable women in Luton or remain a Steering Group simply to empower the existing support groups to tackle potential and existing victims of forced marriage, domestic violence and their children and campaign for a town where human rights abuse such as forced marriage simply becomes a thing of the past. Since Margaret Moran, MP for Luton South, has been playing an important role in the debate on forced marriage, she and her office should be closely involved in setting up and running the steering group during its formative phase.
- viii. Since schools, colleges, and community organisations do not have an up-to-date list of local and national support agencies, a list based on Annex 5 should be issued to all local groups and agencies as soon as possible.
- ix. The Steering Group should set up a panel of male champions of human rights who will engage with men's groups and places of worship to educate men about the harmful impact of forced marriage on families, communities and society. A meeting with a representative group of men should be set up to discuss this further.

- x. Since a specialised training programme, 'Changing Lives,' was launched in 2006 and a number of individuals trained up to deal with social issues, this programme should be externally evaluated to establish its impact on the ground in tackling forced marriage.
- xi. Provided the above programme has made a difference to victims of forced marriage and promoted practical preventative measures, it should be extended to more men and women.
- xii. A course was provided by Changing Lives in 2006 for peer group facilitators. This should also be externally evaluated and skills provided to more peer group facilitators if it has been found to have made a difference on the ground.
- xiii. Since the communities most affected by forced marriages also place significant importance on their religious identity as recorded in the 2001 Census Report, it is strongly recommended that religious sensitivities are built into all training courses and support services.
- xiv. To engage the community in dealing with forced marriage, domestic violence and "honour" killing, a series of meetings needs to be set up with key community organisations to develop an agreed action plan which can be owned by these groups and implemented as short, medium and long term measures.
- xv. Since this is the first research report on forced marriage in Luton, we hope that it will be published and distributed to all statutory and voluntary support services in Luton, as well all relevant agencies such as the Metropolitan Police, Home Office, Forced Marriage Unit, etc.

Annex 1

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James Brandon and Salam Hafez, *Crimes of the Community - Honour-Based Violence in the UK*, (Centre for Social Cohesion, 2008)

Annex 2

List of individuals and groups contacted

Discussions took place with a total of 104 people individually and in groups:

1. Ushrat Sultana, Office of Margaret Moran MP for Luton South
2. Peter Abbott, Forced Marriage Unit, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London
3. Sarita Jain: Luton All Women's Centre, Luton
4. Sayeeda Khan, Luton All Women's Centre
5. Jaswinder Challie, Luton All Women's Centre,
6. Sarah Karau, Advice worker for African and other women, at Luton All Women's Centre
7. Fatema Nessa, Shanthona (Women's group), Luton
8. Shellie Hossain, Shanthona (Women's Group), Luton
9. Shahanara Begum, Centre for Youth and Community Development
10. Noor Jahan, Centre for Youth and Community Development
11. Fatema Islam, Barnfield College, Luton
12. Fozia Irfan, Muslim Education Forum
13. Mobeen Qureshi, Khidmat, Luton
14. Muhammad Yasin, Khidmat
15. Luton Pakistan Kashmir Development Trust (x2)
16. Jenny Moody, Women's Aid
17. Joan Bailey, Safer Luton Partnership
18. Jocelyn Bullock, Midwife, Luton Dunstable Hospital

19. Michelle Welsh, Bedfordshire Police (Luton)
20. Michelle Webb, Bedfordshire Police (Dunstable)
21. Rumi Choudhury, Luton Rights
22. Gillie Sharp, Luton Law Centre
23. Marina McAlister, Citizen Advice Bureau
24. National Citizens' Advice Bureau
25. Hafsha Ali, Luton Borough Council
26. Hasna Matin, Luton Borough Council
27. Yasmin Akhtar, Luton Council of Faiths
28. Zafar Khan, Luton Council of Faiths
29. Safia Stroud, Somali Women Unite
30. Pari Rashid, Ghar Se Ghar
31. Sultan Mahmood, Bury Park Community Development Trust
32. Dr Fiaz Hussain, Press Secretary, Luton Council of Mosques
33. Natubhai Solanki, The Hindu Temple
34. Sandeep Sandra, Students Support Officer, Luton Sixth Form College
35. Michele Read, Luton Sixth Form College
36. Giyanjit Mehl, Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Luton
37. Anjana Parmar, Luton Training and Mentoring Ltd
38. Jayshree Panikker, Retired Education Welfare Officer
39. Caribbean Nurses' Guild (x2)
40. Education Welfare Officers (x2)
41. Family support workers, On Track (x2)
42. Wendy Gray, Centre for Youth and Community Development, Luton

43. Andy Calvert , Luton Assembly Committee and Forum
44. Neville White, Luton West Indian Association
45. Link workers, Luton & Dunstable Hospital (x2)
46. Anne Laing, Voluntary Action Luton
47. A R Malik, Luton Race Advisory Forum
48. Alec Taylor, Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service
49. Christina Plater, Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service
50. Ashuk Ahmed, Mitalee Youth Association
51. Two youth Clubs at the Centre for Youth and Community Development =
10 young men and women
52. Two Luncheon clubs for men and women at the Centre for Youth and
Community Development = 28 individuals
53. Purbachal - the eastern sky = 11 members

Annex 3
Questionnaire

1. What are your, your organisation's or group's experiences of dealing with issues relating to forced marriages (FM)?
2. How many FM cases have you, your organisation or group have dealt with over the last 3 years?
3. How many staff do you have to deal with FM cases?
4. What other groups or agencies do you liaise with in dealing with FM cases?
5. How effective do you think you have been in tackling the issues surrounding FM?
6. What are your perception and/or understanding about the scale of FM in Luton?
7. What training does your group have for dealing with FM cases?
8. Do you or your group use the guidance issued by the Forced Marriage Unit of the Government based at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?
9. Do you think FM should be made a Criminal Offence? If, so Why?
10. Do you think the existing support services in the public, private and voluntary sectors are adequate, well resourced and effective in dealing with FM cases in the town? If not, what can be done?
11. What steps /measures can and should be taken by all relevant agencies and groups to make Luton an FM free zone?
12. Does the Community have a role in tackling FM? If, yes, who in the community should be involved?
13. What would be the most effective way/s of raising community awareness in Luton about the unacceptability of FM which is a breach of human rights?
14. Would you like to make further comments or suggest ways forward?

Annex 4

Proposed membership of Luton Forced Marriage, Family Cohesion and Community Engagement Steering Group

1. Luton All Women's Centre
2. Luton Multicultural Women's Coalition
3. Ghar Se Ghar
4. Centre for Youth and Community Development
5. Luton Women's Aid
6. Luton Rights
7. Shanthona Women's Group
8. Somali Women Unite
9. Pakistan Kashmir Youth Forum
10. Police
11. Luton Domestic Violence Unit
12. Victim Support
13. Luton Borough Council
14. Luton teaching Primary Care Trust
15. A Headteacher representing Secondary Schools
16. Luton Sixth Form College
17. Barnfield College
18. Luton Law Centre
19. Citizen's Advice Bureau
20. Luton Council of Faiths

Annex 5

Key local and national contacts

1. Forced Marriage Unit, 0207 008 0151, fmufco.gov.uk
2. Police Domestic Violence Unit, Luton – Police Station, Buxton Road, Luton. Tel : 01582 394384
3. Luton All Women’s Centre (Information, Advice and Support). Tel : 01582 416783
4. Luton Centre for Youth and Community Development. (Information and referral). Tel: 01582 519501/2
5. Luton Women’s Aid (Refuge, Advice, information and support). Tel:01582 391856
6. Luton Borough Council (Social services/Housing, Statutory Services re Care). Tel: 01582 546000
7. Ghar se Ghar - Asian and other minority ethnic women’s support group (Information, Advice, Referral and Support), C/O Bury Park Community Resource Centre, Dunstable Road, Luton. Tel: 01582 450194
8. Safer Luton Partnership, 6 Cardiff Road, Luton LU1 1PP. (Information and Advice). Tel: 01582 480770
9. Shanthona Women’s Group, C/O Dallow Learning Community Centre, 234 Dallow Road, Luton (Information, Advice, Support). Tel: 01582 410333
10. Luton Law Centre (Legal Advice and Rights), 28 Clarendon Road, Luton Tel: 01582 481000
11. Luton Rights (Information, Referral, Advice re Benefits and Rights, Support), 15 New Bedford Road, Luton (1st Floor). Tel: 01582 453372
12. Luton Citizen’s Advice Bureau (Information, Referral, Advice, Support). Tel: 01582 731616
13. Samaritans (Telephone Counselling, Support). Tel: 01582 720666
14. Muslim Women’s Helpline (Information, Advice, Counselling), London. Tel: 020 8904 8193/8908 6715

15. NSPCC (Asian Child Protection Helpline (free confidential Information, Advice, Counselling). Tel: 0800 096 7719
16. Southall Black Sisters (Information, Advice, Advocacy, Practical Help, Counselling and Support). Tel: 020 8571 9595
17. The Asian Family Counselling Service (Information, Advice, Counselling). Tel; 020 8571 3933
18. Karma Nirvana (Advice, Support, Advocacy). Tel: 01332 604098/299166
19. The Children's Legal Centre (Free Legal Advice and Information Service). Tel: 01206 873820; fax: 01206 874026
20. Victim Support (Information and Support). Tel: 0845 30 30 900
21. MIND (Advice, Support re Mental Distress). Tel: 0845 7660163
22. National Domestic Violence Helpline (24 Hour Information, Advice, Referral and Support). Tel: 0808 2000 247
23. Shelterline (Emergency Access Service to Refuge). Tel: 0808 800 4444
24. Gatwick Travel Care (Advice for victims of forced marriage requiring assistance): Tel: 01293 504283
25. Heathrow Travel Care (Advice for victims of forced marriage requiring assistance). Tel: 020 8745 7495