Summary:

The purpose of this report is to highlight the range of both current and planned work undertaken in Barking and Dagenham to ensure that professionals within the authority are working towards developing cultural competence to effectively work with the diverse communities. This is particularly relevant where it is identified that there may be perceived harmful cultural practices that contravenes with Child Protection frameworks.

The report makes mention of the National Action Plan designed to tackle child abuse linked to faith and belief following the death of Kirsty Bamu together with the Cross Borough Learning Review that provided a benchmark to assist with the development of a localised workplan for the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board’s newly established Faith and Culture Committee.

This paper is supported by a presentation to be delivered on the day.

Recommendation(s)

None – For Information Only

Reason(s)

To inform member of current local and national initiatives taking place to safeguard children who may be subjected to harmful cultural practices

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 A previous paper was presented to the CSSC in February 2011 where the issue of Female Genital mutilation, Forced Marriage and Spirit possession was addressed. In the light of emerging issues, it was felt appropriate to now include a wider range of issues raising concern around safeguarding children and harmful cultural
practices. Barking and Dagenham have taken a proactive approach in developing cultural competence by way of embracing and organising activities and providing opportunities for practitioners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding pertaining to this area of work.

With the change in demographics in Barking and Dagenham coupled with the change in diversity it is crucial for Barking and Dagenham to ensure that the workforce is cultural competence to address the changing needs.

Recent data highlights an increasing number of such referrals coming to the attention of the authority regarding issues pertaining to potential harmful practices. These have included;

- Children receiving chemical burns to genital areas
- Scratches and bruises in attempts to remove demonic forces or negativity from children
- Children being subjected or exposed to exorcisms
- Physical beatings for being ‘bad’ spirits

Nationally we have also seen a rise in reported cases. The recent Newham case highlighted how quickly events can escalate and children die as a result. Dramatic as it was, these cases are not thought to be isolated or rare. The police have established a dedicated unit to combat this under Project Violence, such is their concern.

There is a need to take action and address these concerns. Children are coming to notice having experienced a number of abusive practices against them in the name of faith and religion. We also need to be sensitive in balancing the right of parents to practice their faiths and beliefs and the right of children to be protected from harm.

Below is a synopsis of some of the actions taken to address some of the issues

1.2 The National Action Plan to tackle child abuse linked to Faith and Belief:

The National Action Plan has been developed through partnership on the National Working group between central government and local statutory partners, faith leaders, voluntary sector organisations, local statutory partners and the metropolitan police. The plan is intended to help raise awareness of the issue of child abuse linked to faith or belief and to encourage practical steps to be taken to prevent such abuse.

The four key areas focused on in the plan include:

- Engaging Communities
- Empowering Practitioner
- Supporting Victims and Witnesses
- Communicating Key Messages

Barking and Dagenham will now localise this plan by way of making the relevant adaptations to address the local needs. This includes a robust action plan that is currently being developed.
1.3 The Cross Borough Learning Review:

Following the tragic death in Newham of Kirsty Bamu in 2010 who was murdered by relatives who believed him to be possessed by spirits, it was agreed that a cross borough learning review should be undertaken by the boroughs involved with the family.

In total, six boroughs took part in the review and considered ways in which the issues could be raised across practitioners and enable them to develop early indicators of potential concerns when working with families.

This review required Barking and Dagenham to complete a self assessment tool to objectively ascertain the impact of local learning since 2011 and progress local areas were making against the National Action Plan. We were able to report on the number of initiatives and training sessions delivered locally to address some of the issues identified but also to be self reflective around the areas we need to build and develop on.

The early indicators arising from the conclusion of this review have identified a number of areas for further development within all the authorities. Whilst this review is still being fully evaluated, it is proposed that a large part of the findings will form the basis of a key aspect of the work plan for the BDSCB Faith and Culture Sub Group.

1.4 Local Initiatives:

There are a number of active initiatives within the borough designed to addresses harmful practices including the Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy for Barking and Dagenham for 2012-15

This Strategy is a major piece of work that includes domestic violence, sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital, honour based violence, trafficking and prostitution. The aim of the strategy looks to prevent domestic and sexual violence form occurring. Provide support to victims where violence does occur and to work in partnership locally to achieve the best outcome for victims. The delivery plan clearly outlines the implementation processes of this plan.

The strategic group meets regularly to support this process.

The LSCB have also commissioned a series of training entitled, ‘Working with Black African Children and Families’. This provides an opportunity for professionals to gain a clearer understanding around cultural dynamics and safeguarding issues, the course contents addresses areas such as:

- To explore work with children and families where possession, religion and culture spirit impacts on their mental health;
- To provide participants with an insight and understanding of private Fostering and the perspectives of Black African parents/carers; Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child protection implication of FGM; The immigration Acts and its impact on refugees, asylum & unaccompanied children; To support professionals in developing a culturally competent perspective.

In addition to this, thematic workshops have been organised for education professionals in order to support and assist them in their respective roles.
Publications such as the London Child Protection Procedures supplementary guidance together with specific guidance produced by NSPCC and the Metropolitan Police have also assisted education leads.

With the change in demographics in Barking and Dagenham coupled with the change in diversity it is crucial for Barking and Dagenham to ensure that the workforce is cultural competence to address the changing needs.

Recent data highlights an increasing number of referrals coming to the attention of the authority regarding issues pertaining to potential harmful practices.

1.5 **Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

- *Domestic and sexual violence strategy 2012 – 15*
- *FGM guidance for schools – Met Police/NSPCC*
- *The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network*
- *Working with Black African Children and Families*
- *Guidance for social workers*
- *KHUTBA – tackling sexual grooming in the UK*
- *Cross Borough Learning review*