

Clinic harassment and anti-abortion activity

Policing Powers Unit response update – August 2022

Overview

Anti-abortion harassment outside abortion clinics continues to be a chronic issue across England, with seven sites targeted for the first time since August 2020.

As of August 2022, since the public consultation undertaken by the Home Office in February 2018, 50 hospitals and clinics have been targeted.

27 of the sites targeted are BPAS clinics, which provided care for 30,000+ women in 2021.

It remains BPAS's position that national legislation is needed to stop this harassment.

Types of activity

Activity types, format, and size remain similar to those reported in 2020.

The main groups present outside clinics are 40 Days for Life, Helpers of God's Precious Infants, loosely-affiliated church groups, and a sizeable daily presence from the Good Counsel Network at a clinic in London.

Most activity occurs on a weekly or 40 Days for Life basis, with several clinics targeted more than one day a week, up to and including daily.

Operation of current law

Since 2020, no new methods for dealing with this type of harassment have been used. It remains the case that the only functional method of dealing with the activity is the use of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO).

Despite 50 sites being targeted since 2018, there are only three PSPOs in place, with two more in the pipeline.

Sites where PSPOs are not being pursued include:

- MSI South London (Brixton) where there is a daily presence during the week by the Good Counsel Network and at the weekend from the local Helpers of God's Precious Infants group
- BPAS Northampton where activists have been present 2-3 days a week for almost a year
- MSI Leeds where the clinic has sought to work with the council to address the prolonged issues with groups that include monks protesting outside the clinic on a weekly basis – and daily during 40 Days for Life – for more than 5 years
- NUPAS South Manchester where there has been a long-term protest immediately outside the clinic with weekly up to daily attendance from 2-3 people at the gate, with boards propped against the clinic's hedge. The clinic previously had security on the gates and police presence most weeks.

PSPOs leave women around the country at the mercy of anti-abortion groups because councils do not have the capacity or willingness to address the issue in their local area. 94% of clinics where there is harassment do not currently have buffer zones in place.

Clinics targeted since 2018

BPAS Birmingham Central

June 2020, group of 6 men outside the clinic with a loudspeaker, telling passers-by that the building was an abortion clinic and that 'they kill babies in there!'.

BPAS Birmingham South *Buffer zone in progress*

In 2019, first protest with 2 evangelical street preachers with head microphones telling women that abortion was murder and offering to adopt children. Told staff that they were murderers. Since then, 40 Days for Life have been present daily during the period and weekly/monthly outside these times. Significant upset caused to women, staff, and local residents.

BPAS Bournemouth *Buffer zone in progress*

Protest has been ongoing for many years – increased in intensity around 2014. Around 7 different groups present at different times. At least twice a week, rising to most days during 40 Days periods. Women told they were putting their baby in a meat grinder, told that lorries on the street were 'there to take the dead babies away', coming onto clinic property to harass women.

BPAS Brighton

Until clinic closed (loss of contract) in 2021, weekly presence up to daily during 40 Days for Life. Handing out leaflets, approaching women, handing out chocolates and gifts to women to encourage them to speak to them. Came after many years of sporadic presence and a concerted campaign 10 years ago from Abort 67.

BPAS Cardiff

Almost always on the 40 Days for Life list, with a group of people gathering outside to pray and sing with posters. Previously used to stand immediately outside the steps to the clinic and accost women who were attempting to cross to the taxi rank opposite.

BPAS Chester *New*

Clinic targeted for the first time in early 2022, with a male protester with a loudspeaker and sign saying 'babies are murdered here' and his wife with a pushchair. Shouting immediately outside the clinic window so women having trans-vaginal scans were unable to receive care.

BPAS Clapham *New*

Clinic opened when BPAS Streatham closed in 2020. Immediately targeted by protesters, now coming regularly two days a week, with larger presences every 6 months. One protesters kneels and praying with a cloak over his head and arms outstretched by the door, trying to talk to women and pushing leaflets into hands. Clients report intimidation and distress. Police and council have not undertaken any action.

BPAS Doncaster

Until 2019, regular protests and 40 Days for Life presence of c.10 people at the clinic gate with posters and leaflets – also prone to following and accosting women. More recently, up to 6 protesters irregularly at the clinic gate with leaflets.

BPAS Eastbourne

Local Abort67/CBR UK group with large graphic posters of dismembered fetuses immediately outside the gate to the clinic (which is based on an NHS site). Previously been once a year but reappeared out of sync late 2019.

BPAS Finsbury Park

Initial presence of 2 women outside handing out leaflets and praying in December 2019.

Helpers of God's Precious Infants march from local church (45 people) in February 2020. More recently been targeted by at least two different groups including a man with a microphone and a woman with a baby in a pushchair who follows women as they leave, and a larger group with graphic posters which seemingly used to be present at MSI West London (Ealing).

BPAS Hatfield

Before clinic closed in 2020, couple of female protesters with rosaries present immediately outside the GP surgery where the clinic is based. On and off presence since the clinic opened.

BPAS Leicester

Started round about March 2019 – local Church group/Helpers of God's Previous Infants with leaflets and posters, including a number for a 'crisis pregnancy' centre. Approach women and their partners. Disruptive to the doctor's surgery where the clinic is based.

BPAS London East

Regular presence of nuns and priests who pray the rosary outside. Every 6 months a larger protest (30-50) from a local church who kneel on the pavement opposite and pray.

BPAS Luton

Has been a long-time presence at Luton and Dunstable Hospital nearby but BPAS Luton had not had anybody until 2020. 3-5 elderly women and 1 priest 2/3 times a month handing out leaflets and miraculous medals. Separate protester claimed to be a client's escort to gain access to the clinic's waiting room in early 2020. Police called.

BPAS Merseyside

Long-term regular church group outside the clinic on Saturdays. From 2020, started being targeted by 40 Days for Life. Particularly disruptive action including rubbing a client's stomach and telling her 'it's murder', and a man with cuddly toys.

BPAS Newcastle upon Tyne

Regular monthly group (Helpers of God's Precious Infants) outside the building to pray.

BPAS Northampton *New*

Targeted by a local church group – present 2-3 days a week since November 2021 immediately outside the clinic door. Staff report serious distress caused to women. Police involvement but no solutions proposed.

BPAS Norwich

Targeted by 40 Days for Life sporadically. In 2018, up to 13 people present outside the entrance to the community hospital, with boards and leaflets.

BPAS Nottingham West

40 Days for Life protest that was previously at the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham (BPAS took over the contract). Group of 2 – 4 people with 40 Days signs on the main road outside the clinic.

BPAS Oxford

Two groups of 5/6, attending 1/2 days per week during the summer months. One group of monks and one local anti-choice group (which was previously present outside the John Radcliffe Infirmary).

BPAS Peterborough *New*

Targeted for the first time in summer 2021. Sporadic presence of two women with signs

including 'let babies live', 'choose life', and 'DIY at home abortions must end immediately'. Signs include a phone number seemingly to an unregulated 'crisis pregnancy centre'.

BPAS Portsmouth

Gosport friars (monks) and local church group who gather with signs and leaflets just off the NHS grounds on a roundabout. In 2012, one of the friars and an elderly woman entered the clinic and was filming clients from under their cassocks.

BPAS Reading

40 Days for Life presence on a weekly basis year-round, handing out leaflets against emergency contraception and abortion, approaching and talking to clients, handing out phone numbers for 'pregnancy crisis centre'. In autumn 2019, 5-10 adults with children present every day for several weeks, obscuring the entrance.

BPAS Richmond *BUFFER ZONE*

Daily presence until April 2019 when a buffer zone was introduced by the local council. Used to have 1 or 2 people by the gate with leaflets and rosaries, and a couple of people across the road with signs, praying. Also, plastic fetuses. A separate 6-monthly protest which was larger and involved following women, singing hymns, and displaying signs.

BPAS Southampton

Group regularly present by the entrance to the hospital grounds with graphic posters of fetuses (40 Days, autumn 2019 on).

BPAS Streatham

Prior to clinic closure in 2020, weekly presence of 3-8, by the gates with leaflets and rosaries, and across the road praying with signs. 6-monthly procession from a local church that culminated outside the clinic.

BPAS Swindon

During the pandemic, one or two male protesters with graphic signs close to the clinic door, telling staff they 'have blood on their hands' and approaching clients. Not maintaining social distancing.

BPAS Taunton

Sporadic to monthly street preacher and supporters telling women that abortion is murder and staff members that they are baby killers. Bodycam and phones to record clients. Scuffles with the public. One sexual health worker was called a baby killer in front of her 6-year old grandson. Police granted injunction to stop him using the word 'murderer' outside the clinic.

BPAS York

In a GP surgery and targeted by 40 Days for Life from 2020, with sizeable opposed response from local residents.

Cheltenham General Hospital

40 Days for Life presence for the past 4 years. Groups of around 4, with 16 actives on rotation. Same organisers as Gloucester. Outside hospital opposite a school.

Hope House Gloucester

Same group as Cirencester – similar activity on different days of the week.

Lister Hospital, Stevenage

Semi-regular Helpers of God's Precious Infants presence – up to 4 female protesters in a seemingly regular presence with a Love Them Both poster, praying and chanting by the

entrance.

Luton and Dunstable Hospital

Helpers of God's Precious Infants - 'Act of Witness' outside the hospital c.6 times a year with chanting, banners, and leaflets. Occasionally in the hospital car park.

MSI Birmingham (Edgbaston)

Clinic now closed (change in contract). While open, daily presence of protesters, around 2-3 people who stand outside the entrance to the clinic with 6ft crucifix and large signs. Larger protests/candlelight vigils (c.40 people) multiple times a year.

MSI Brighton *New*

Clinic opened in 2021 after BPAS Brighton closed, and inherited local protesters. Local group affiliated with 40 Days for Life, and additional women linked to Abort67 approaching women and asking to speak to them about her bad experience of an abortion in the 1970s.

MSI Bristol

Local evangelical church weekly presence, approaching clients and saying that abortion is murder. Sizeable disruption to clients and staff.

MSI Central London

Daily presence of protesters by the same group as previously present in Richmond and Ealing. 1-2 protesters outside the clinic door (opens directly onto the street) and people opposite with signs. Sometimes subject to increased presence of priests on a rotating basis.

MSI Essex (Buckhurst Hill)

Helpers of God's Precious Infants. Present with leaflets 2-3 mornings a week and with images of fetuses on Saturdays. Long-term protest since pre-2010.

MSI Hemel Hempstead

Protesters routinely present outside the building with pictures, plastic fetuses, and holy water.

MSI Leeds

Helpers of God's Precious Infants present every week (1-2), with an increase in numbers around religious holidays. Some are monks, there is a large crucifix, large posters of fetuses.

MSI Maidstone

Twice weekly Helpers of God's Precious Infants protests with several protesters. Six-monthly large protest from local church.

MSI Manchester *BUFFER ZONE*

Protesters present every Saturday morning and sometimes during the week. 40 Days for Life (5-10 people) twice a year from 7am - 7pm. Signs, plastic fetuses, approach clients, pray and scatter holy water on the path and surrounding areas. Council have been looking for a solution and now consulting on a PSPO (like Ealing and Richmond).

MSI Preston

Prior to closure in 2020, group present regularly praying, handing out leaflets, speaking to clients (Wednesday mornings), with reports of a larger group at certain times. Protest dates to 2012 when clinic opened.

MSI South London

Recent increase in presence with leaflets and notes addressed up 'mum' up to daily from the

Good Counsel Network – who were previous present outside Ealing and Richmond before buffer zones were instituted. Organised group that challenge council actions in court. Weekend presence from Helpers of God's Precious Infants.

MSI West London *BUFFER ZONE*

Ealing clinic with a buffer zone in place since April 2018. Buffer zone has a zone where protests can continue with certain restrictions. Protesters are present in this zone every day. Good Counsel Network, one of the groups who previously stood outside the clinic, continue to challenge the buffer zone in court (most recently their appeal was dismissed by the Court of Appeal).

NUPAS South Manchester

Long-term protest immediately outside the standalone clinic in Hazel Grove. Currently has daily attendance from 2-3 people praying on the same side of the road by the gate, with boards propped against the clinic's hedge. When women approach the clinic, they start chanting loudly. Previously (prior to c.2017), had security on the gates and police presence most weeks. Since MSI Manchester got a buffer zone, 40 Days for Life in Manchester have been targeting this nearby clinic.

Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham

Prior to closure in 2019, long-time protest by a local group outside the QMC. 3-5 people with signs and leaflets. Council attempted to get an injunction without success. The QMC no longer provides abortion care as they lost the contract when it went out to tender. Local group has now moved to BPAS Nottingham West.

Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital *New*

Targeted for the first time by 40 Days for Life in 2022.

Royal Hallamshire Hospital *New*

Hospital in Sheffield targeted by 40 Days for Life for the first time in 2022. A group present near the entrance with posters and leaflets, who told a local reporter that they intended to be there for the entire 40 day period. The hospital is on the target list for autumn 2022 too.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Monthly, up to weekly, gatherings outside the main hospital entrance.

Other information

Please find attached as part of this update:

- A spreadsheet with 190 individual accounts received since August 2020. These are indicative, not exhaustive. During the pandemic, clinics were not able to hand out paper forms so the amount of client feedback fell as conversion rates for the online forms were lower. This does not reflect a fall in activity.
- A selection of handwritten staff accounts from BPAS Bournemouth detailing the impact clinic protests have had on them and their clients
- A set of logs from BPAS Merseyside with a more full account of the presence of groups during the 40 Days for Life periods – to be read alongside the individual accounts.

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