

Scrutiny Committee on Community Safety and Community Services – 1st September 2011

Report of the Chief Executive.

A report outlining recent developments in domestic abuse policy and service provision in the borough of Dudley

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Scrutiny Committee of domestic abuse service policy and provision in Dudley.

Background

2. Domestic abuse is a generic term to describe a pattern of coercive behaviours used by one person for the purpose of maintaining power and control over another adult or child.

Domestic abuse is defined as any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. (Dudley Domestic Abuse Forum Definition).

3. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator, employed by the Local Authority, co-ordinates all domestic abuse activity in the borough through the Dudley Domestic Abuse Strategy. Duties include:
 - Co-ordinating a multi-agency response to domestic abuse and sexual violence through liaison and networking with statutory, voluntary sector organisations and local partnerships.
 - Acting as a central contact point for professionals who want advice or information on various domestic abuse matters.
 - Identifying gaps in provision and exploring good practice initiatives with a view to filling those gaps. This could include liaison with other national or local organisations.
 - Support and act as Co-ordinator for the Dudley Domestic Abuse Forum and Sexual Violence Forum.
4. The number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police for the Dudley Borough was 3665 during 2010/11 revealing a decrease of 699 or 16% on the previous year. The number of domestic abuse crimes recorded for the same period was 1016 demonstrating a decrease of 17 or 1.6 % on the previous year.
5. Data indicates that domestic abuse is more prevalent in certain areas of the borough. There is a general correlation between areas of deprivation and domestic abuse. However, domestic abuse is a cross cutting issue and this does

not mean to say that the problem is not present in more affluent areas.

6. In Castle and Priory ward nearly half (45%) of all female victims were aged between 20 and 39 years with domestic abuse accounting for 44% of the crime type committed against them.
7. In St Thomas's ward domestic abuse was categorised in 24% of all calls and violence accounted for 72% of the total domestic violence recorded crime. For all female victims of crime the age range is between 21 and 40 years with domestic abuse accounting for 33% of the crime type committed against them.
8. In 2009/10 86% of victims were female with 14% being male. This reflects national figures demonstrating that domestic abuse is a largely gendered crime.
9. Children are often referred to as the hidden victims of domestic abuse. Data from Children's social care for 2010/11 reveals notifications from the police in respect of 2887 children living in a household where a domestic incident had occurred. This showed an increase from the previous year when 2793 notifications were made

10. **Lessons from Research**

Children may suffer both directly and indirectly if they live in households where there is domestic violence. It is likely to have a damaging affect on their health and development and they are likely to suffer emotional and psychological maltreatment. Some 200,000 children (1.8%) in England live in households where there is a known risk of domestic violence or violence (Laming 2009, The Protection of Children in England).

11. "Working Together" (2010) is the Government Guidance for how agencies should work together to safeguard children. In respect of domestic abuse, the guidance sets out three central imperatives of any intervention for children:
 - To protect the child/ren, including unborn child/ren
 - To empower the mother to protect herself and her child/ren, and
 - To identify the abusive partner, hold him accountable for his violence and provide him with the opportunities to change.
12. There is therefore a clear need for a collaborative approach across all agencies whose roles are outlined in the "Working Together" Guidance, which goes on to suggest a number of ways in which agencies might assure themselves of the adequacy of arrangements.
13. The links between alcohol and domestic abuse are complex. A number of women will drink alcohol to cope with their situation. Some perpetrators will argue that the abuse is a result of their alcohol consumption, that is, alcohol is the cause. Excessive alcohol intake can be a contributory factor but not the cause. For Dudley, the 2009-10 Strategic Assessment highlighted alcohol as a major contributory factor to domestic abuse, accounting for 35% of detected offences.

14. **Developments in Domestic Abuse Policy**

New legislation came into force in April of this year concerning Domestic Homicide Reviews which were established on a statutory basis under section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act. The legislation states that a review needs to take place when the circumstances surrounding the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have resulted from violence, abuse or

neglect by a person who is related to them, or has been in an intimate personal relationship or is a member of the same household.

15. Community Safety Partnerships will play a prominent role in Domestic Homicide reviews. The Partnerships have overall responsibility for setting up and conducting a review. The Home Office has issued guidance for the process and the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator is presently engaged in examining the necessary steps required for a Domestic Homicide Review.
16. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences are multi-agency meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives endeavour to keep victims and their children safe from harm through sharing information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse. A co-ordinated action plan is put together to increase victim safety. The agencies that attend these conferences vary but are likely to include, for example, the Police, Probation, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), Children's Services, Health and Housing. Dudley's Multi-agency risk assessment conference meets monthly.
17. A national review was undertaken this year and the findings were reported in July. One of the key findings relates to the decision to place Multi-agency risk assessment conferences on a statutory footing. A decision has not been taken yet regarding whether or not this will go ahead.
18. **Domestic Abuse Service Improvement Review**

A Domestic Abuse Service Improvement Review which began in September last year is now coming to a conclusion with the draft report out to consultation. Recommendations by the Project Team will form part of future work around the domestic abuse agenda. Early findings indicate:

- There is a substantial multi-million pound investment being made to build a purpose built refuge that will be operational in early Spring 2012. This involves over £4 million pounds worth of investment to deliver new self contained accommodation that will accommodate larger households, male service users and people with mobility issues. This will facilitate a co-location of services to deliver better value for money. Once operational a review of further accommodation needs will be undertaken.
- The organisational changes made throughout the police service and courts have seen significant challenges but there is clear evidence of service improvement. Dudley Council's commissioning arrangements and Safe and Sound ensure vital support to victims in difficult financial times. However, there is a real risk if these services were cut.
- Data Collection as a means of benefiting shared data practices and resource targeting was highlighted as an issue. Also there was an issue in respect of the Domestic Abuse Forum, the review has identified that this is in need of change.

The final part of the report outlines gaps and risks identified. The most significant gaps are those around our response to those who have no recourse to public funding, the lack of services to perpetrators, role of the Domestic Abuse Forum and the lack of clear referral pathways. The most significant gaps that have emerged are those around funding that could have consequential harmful outcomes for victims and an increase in work for various agencies.

19.

The Contribution of all Services

Professionals in all agencies, whether their prime focus is adults or children, are in a position to identify or receive a disclosure of domestic abuse. They should ask direct questions and be alert to the signs that a child or parent may be experiencing domestic abuse, or that a father/partner might be perpetrating domestic abuse. Everyone working with women and children should be alert to the frequent inter-relationship between domestic abuse and other issues, which should be considered, such as drugs and alcohol misuse, deprivation and social exclusion, homelessness and housing needs, mental health difficulties and child abuse.

20. The Contribution of The Directorate of Children's Services.

All of those involved in the provision of universal services are well placed to identify domestic violence – this would include Education, early years and health services professionals in particular. Over the past 3 years, Children's Social Care and West Midlands Police have sought to improve the identification of children living in domestic violence situations so that effective action can be taken to safeguard their health and well-being

21. In particular, a dedicated screening arrangement has been put in place called the Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART). All of the Police notifications are passed through to this team who use an evidence based risk assessment tool to help identify the concerns and what needs to be done. Children's Social Care second a full time Senior Practitioner to this team. In Dudley, the team has also included Education and Health representatives. The Domestic Abuse Response Team has been evaluated regionally and locally in Dudley, and has been found to be a worthwhile and effective process. Around 3,000 children per year are supported in this way in Dudley.

As a result of discussion at the Response Team meetings, agencies already involved with the child (e.g. school or health) may be asked to undertake an assessment. In broad terms, Children's Social Care would undertake an assessment where the level of risk appears to be at a high threshold.

22. In working with children where there are concerns about domestic abuse, Children's Social Care would seek to ensure that the children are protected and supported. In doing this they work collaboratively with colleagues in other agencies regarding work with perpetrators and courses on the impact of domestic abuse for example. Over the past several months a number of such resources have ceased due to budget constraints.

23. Whilst the aim is always for children to be supported within their families, in a minority of complex cases where it is not possible to safeguard children from significant harm, Children's Social Care may initiate care proceedings.

24. The Contribution of The Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services (DACHS).

The Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services contributes £482,000 per annum for housing related support (Supporting People) which includes floating support, Staying Put (support and security upgrades), the refuges and contributes to a Black and Minority Ethnic specific support service.

The provision of homelessness prevention services, temporary and permanent accommodation for people who have experienced domestic abuse, contributions to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference, provision of new affordable housing and specific projects such as the Lye Project all contribute to the range of services and support that is provided.

25. **Domestic Abuse provision in Dudley**

Appendix A attached to this report documents domestic abuse services in Dudley and the funding providers. These services provide support for victims and children who can also suffer harm from the abuse.

26. In Dudley two Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) who are commissioned by the Safe & Sound Partnership and managed by Victim Support encourage, as part of their role, victims to go to court and support them in the process. This service is provided to all victims of domestic abuse irrespective of gender, social group, class, age, race, disability, sexuality or lifestyle. The advisors also liaise with the police on a daily basis. In addition, they will support the victim to secure a civil injunction such as a non-molestation order. If necessary support for victims is also available through the Police Witness Care Unit and the Witness Service at the Courts.
27. Many victims would not proceed through the court process without this help and support. National evidence from the Women's National Commission and Co-ordinated Action against Domestic Abuse reports that there are many reasons why victims do not report domestic abuse or continue their case through the Criminal Justice Process. These reasons can range from fear of reprisals from the perpetrator or the family to the fear that their children will be taken into care. In reality, children are only taken into care in extreme cases. If there is concern over the welfare of the children then usually a Child Protection Plan is put into place. The Independent Domestic Violence Advisers work closely with the mother and Children's Services to ensure that all parts of the plan are adhered to thus decreasing the likelihood of the children being removed.
28. The above support is also available for those victims who do not wish to proceed through the court process. A prosecution can go ahead against the victim's wishes. However, it is more difficult to secure a conviction without the testimony of the victim and the Crown Prosecution Service will always wish to proceed with maximum evidence in order to gain a conviction.
29. Support for victims enabling them and their children to stay safe in their own homes is provided by 'Staying Put'. The service provides security measures ranging from locks and bolts to a full safe room within the property. A dedicated Support Worker is also linked to the scheme. The project has proved to be very successful.
30. During the period March 2010 –April 2011 Staying Put enabled 38 households to remain in their own homes, thus reducing the costs associated with homelessness as well as the quality of life for the individuals concerned. The referral rate rose by 67% on the previous year.
31. My Space, My Time is a service established in 2007 following concerns about the high numbers of children in Dudley who witness domestic abuse. Through creative activities, some therapeutic, the children are able to express their

thoughts and feelings. The service caters for 5 to 14 year olds and is run by Barnardos. Referrals to the project are consistently high (for 2010/11 there were 80 referrals) posing challenges for capacity with many children and young people remaining on a long waiting list.

32. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator together with the Council's Marketing and Communications Section regularly run domestic abuse campaigns to highlight awareness around domestic abuse and encourage victims to report. Recent campaigns have included:
 - Teenage dating abuse
 - Christmas campaign highlighting the effects of domestic abuse on children
 - A campaign targeting 'hard to reach groups' including male victims, those who have disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities.
33. New and innovative ways are being used to get the message over to the target audience. Online videos have been produced and are utilised through social media outlets such as You Tube. This has proved very successful and allows us to measure the number of individuals accessing the site.
34. Last year a series of workshops highlighting and giving information on domestic abuse issues were run for all Asian women in the borough. Those from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities are often not aware of services available and are reluctant to report.
35. The Lye Community Project has senior staff members who have been providing support for approx 19 years. They are called upon to offer advice, guidance and support to other staff, in and out of the borough. They have in depth knowledge especially around No Recourse to Public Funds issues. A female worker is on hand to offer emotional support, a form of counselling, by listening to the service users and offering advice and guidance where deemed necessary.
36. The majority of the service users presenting with domestic abuse issues tend to be of Pakistani origin given the location of the Lye project, but there are smaller numbers of service users from different ethnic backgrounds i.e. Indian, Bangladeshi, Eastern European. Referrals are mainly from females, of south Asian background, primarily of Pakistani origin and of Muslim faith, some of Indian background of the Sikh faith. Age tends to vary between 16-64 mainly within the ages of 22-35.

Service Users with domestic abuse related problems that have been supported at the Lye Project from 2008 -2011

Male/female	Country of origin	Amount
Female	Pakistan	51
Female	India	3
Female	Eastern Europe	3
Female	Nigeria	2
Female forced marriage victims	Pakistan	3
Male	Pakistan	11
Male	Gambia	1

37. In summary, domestic abuse victims both locally and nationally now have more support than they ever have. In recent years awareness and commitment to

addressing domestic abuse has risen on everyone's agenda. Domestic abuse is a highly complex problem that involves emotions, life changing decisions and frequently issues concerning children. Multi-agency working is key to tackling domestic abuse and Dudley is fortunate to have strong partnership links. The future holds many challenges for everyone.

Finance

38. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage. However, the Community Safety Partnership is aware that there will be a reduction in the Community Safety Fund in 2012/13. Early discussions are taking place to manage this accordingly.

Law

39. Section 2 Local Government Act 2000 enables the council to do anything which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the borough. Principal legislation includes the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004, Children Act 2004 and The Homelessness Act 2002.

Equality Impact

40. This report is in accordance with the council's equality and diversity policy. An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted on the present Dudley Borough Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Recommendation

41. It is recommended that the committee note the information contained in this report with further information surrounding the findings of the Domestic Abuse Service Improvement Review to be reported at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.

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List of Background Papers

Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) Advocates' Training Programme, 2007

Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls: A Strategy, HM Government, 2009

Dudley Borough Strategic Assessment, safe & sound, April 2009 (Restricted document)

Dudley Borough Strategic Assessment, safe & sound, February 2011 (Restricted document)

Laming, The Protection of Children in England, 2009

Working Together to Safeguard Children, March 2010

Appendix A

Project	Description	Funding Providers	Amount of Funding	Staff Resources	Throughput
Independent Domestic Violence Advisers	Advocacy Service to victims	Safe and Sound Partnership	£62,000 per yr	2 FTE	204 referrals for 2010/11. All high risk victims
Stourbridge Family Centre	Whole family support	Action For Children and Primary Care Trust	Information not available	1.5 FTE	150 referrals per year
Lye Project	Intervention and support	DMBC	Not provided in the questionnaire.	2.5 FTE	30 referrals per year.
Staying Put	Enables victims to remain in their own homes	Supporting People and Safe and Sound	£31,539 per year	1 FTE	38 households were kept safe in 2010/11
Domestic Abuse Outreach	Support for victims with mental health problems	Primary Care Trust	£31,411 per year	1 FTE	123 referrals per year
Rape and Sexual Violence Counselling.	Counselling service	Primary Care Trust	£34,000 per year	.5 FTE	55 referrals per year
WHAT Centre	Support to young people	Primary Care Trust	£27,000 per year	1.75 FTE 10 Volunteers	Approx 30 per year
Chadd x 2 Refuges	Accommodation and Support	Supporting People	£460,000 per year for 2 refuges.	13.5 FTE	538 referrals per year
Sandwell Womens Aid	Humdard Project Resettlement of mainly Asian women escaping violence	Supporting People	£5,000 per year	2 FTE (but only a proportion of this for Dudley)	7 referrals per year
Specialist midwife	Support for pregnant victims of domestic abuse and those who have substance misuse issues	Primary Care Trust	£50,000 per year	1 FTE	Service Provider unable to supply.
Barnardos My Space, My Time	Support for children who have witnessed abuse	Children's Trusts	£78,000 per year	2 FTE	80 referrals in 2010/11
Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator	Co-ordinating the Domestic Abuse agenda	DMBC	£30,000 per year	1.FTE	Not applicable.
Domestic Abuse Response Team Social Worker	Provides social care element of the screening process for children who have witnessed domestic abuse	Childrens Services	£41,000 per year	1 FTE	2887 contacts screened per year