

Select Committee on Community Safety and Community Services
11th September 2008

Report of the Chief Executive

Dudley Borough Domestic Abuse Strategy Update

Purpose of Report

1. To update select committee on the Dudley Borough Domestic Abuse Strategy

Background

2. In the last five years the profile of domestic abuse has risen on the crime and disorder agenda both locally and nationally. In 2006 the Home Office issued a National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan. Prior to this in 2005 the Government published a revised domestic abuse Best Value Performance Indicator, BVPI225. Its purpose is to assess the overall provision and effectiveness of local authority services designed to help victims of domestic abuse and prevent further domestic abuse. Eleven questions cover a range of activities including the provision of a domestic abuse strategy. Dudley's strategy was commissioned as a result of these moves to address these national and local priorities.
3. The strategy is divided into 3 key areas:
 - Prevention and early intervention
 - Protection and justice
 - Support for victims
4. Aims of the strategy are to:
 - Raise awareness of domestic abuse to all agencies and organisations throughout the borough of Dudley.
 - Improve services for victims so they are better protected and supported, including managing perpetrators to reduce risk.
 - *Comply with government guidance including the 2004 Crime and Victims Act, The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, Best Value Performance Indicator, BV225, National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan.*
 - Comply with the delivery of the LAA (Local Area Agreements) mandatory outcome and stretch targets. (Targets as detailed below)
 - 1) Maintain reporting levels of domestic violence at 3300 incidents per year
 - 2) Reduce repeat incident rates of domestic violence
 - 3) Increase the number of sanctioned detections for domestic violence crime incidents
 - 4) Increase the number of offences brought to justice

The strategy and action plan will be updated every six months in line with the borough strategic assessment. The next update will be in February 2009.

Current Position

Prevention and Early intervention

5. Overall domestic abuse awareness training is progressing in all areas with a good uptake of places on the courses. The training is administered through Safeguarding Children Board and is open to professionals from a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations such as Health, Children's and Adult Services, Police and Victim Support. A more robust programme of awareness in secondary schools is under development. A programme for primary school children is yet to be developed and implemented.
6. Strengthening links with various Health services through Dudley Group of Hospitals and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) is ongoing. Maternity services now have routine enquiry surrounding domestic abuse for pregnant women through ante-natal care. A domestic abuse worker is to be appointed shortly in the Emergency Department at Russells Hall Hospital. The worker's role is to identify and encourage victims of domestic abuse to do something about their situation and report the perpetrator. The post is jointly funded through the PCT (mental health) and safe and sound. Data collection procedures are still to be developed for this post and other relevant health service locations.
7. Public awareness campaigns are ongoing especially at key times when domestic abuse incidents rise. Lately, there has been awareness raising through a campaign around Valentine's Day and the recent European Football Championships. Future plans include education and awareness around the link between alcohol abuse and domestic abuse.
8. Recently, a voluntary perpetrator programme was set up for perpetrators who want to do something about their behaviour. The programme is voluntary as opposed to actions directed by the courts. The course is a rolling programme lasting 32 weeks. At the moment recruitment is still taking place and the sessions will be starting shortly. A maximum of ten participants are allowed on the programme.

Protection and Justice

9. Multi – agency domestic abuse training for new magistrates is available. When the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts were set up a training session for all magistrates was run by a multi-agency team including the police, Victim Support, Probation Service and a past victim of domestic abuse.
10. The Public Protection Unit (PPU) at Brierley Hill Police station is now fully operational housing domestic abuse officers, independent domestic violence advisers, vulnerable adult officers, sex offender managers and admin support. The unit provides a co-ordinated approach to domestic abuse. For 2007/8 all LAA stretch targets were achieved except for the target for increasing sanctioned detections. Work is ongoing on what measures are needed to improve performance against this target. One area being looked at is improved evidence gathering at the scene of the incident. In addition, Visual Evidence for Victims (VEV) has been

piloted through Victim Support. This is a scheme whereby if the victim does not want to proceed with the court case then evidence such as photographic evidence is stored for future use when prosecuting the perpetrator. At the moment no prosecution has taken place using this system.

Support for victims

11. The sanctuary scheme whereby victims of domestic abuse and hate crime can stay in their homes with added security is due to begin shortly. Level one provides basic security such as stronger locks and bolts. Level two includes further security measures such as strengthened doors and window grills. Level three involves a separate safe room within the house with a range of secure features. For those who need higher security levels a dedicated support worker will be available. The project is linked to the Home Security Initiative. The sanctuary scheme will be in operation by the end of September 2008.
12. Work is ongoing in putting together a sexual violence action plan in line with government recommendations. A sexual violence forum which will link into the domestic abuse forum will oversee the action plan.
13. Preliminary investigations into the implementation of a domestic abuse help line are in progress. The national helpline is often overloaded and one of the advantages of a local helpline is that the service will be based on local knowledge and information.
14. Services for children who experience domestic abuse have been strengthened. Barnardo's run a project which provides activities for such children. In addition, they are able to speak to someone if they want to 'offload'. Mothers and children are also helped through Stourbridge Family Centre who provide workshops for mothers.
15. Two independent domestic violence advisers have been in post for 12 months. Their role is to support victims of domestic abuse and encourage them to proceed with a court case. Support is offered all the way through and after the case. The service is proving vital to services for victims with the workers having a busy caseload. From August 2007 to end of March 2008, 127 referrals were received. 72% of these referrals engaged with the service.

Barriers to access

16. The domestic abuse forum directed a working group to look at putting together procedures and protocols to help women who have no recourse to public funds. Women in this situation do not have automatic entitlement to refuge provision and other services. The group has met three times and is looking to other areas for guidance. The issue is very complex with each case being unique. In order to keep victims in this situation safe, access to funding is essential. The group are going to approach various heads of service in order to inform them of the difficulties faced when dealing with victims who have no recourse to public funds. A request will be made for funding from the interested parties.
17. Early discussions are taking place on the best way to help Asian women who are subject to domestic abuse in the Lye area. Those involved in the planning include Lye Community Project, Neighbourhood Renewal, Police, Sandwell Women's Aid and the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator. A meeting has been arranged for September to explore the various options available.

18. The domestic abuse forum is planning to raise awareness around men as victims of domestic abuse and gay, bisexual and lesbian groups. Early discussions have taken place concerned with the best way to progress this work. An organisation that supports male victims has been invited to address the Domestic Abuse Forum in September. From 1 August 2007 to 31 July 2008, there were 1075 victims of crime recorded with a Domestic Violence marker of which 14.6% (156 victims) were male

Finance

19. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage

Law

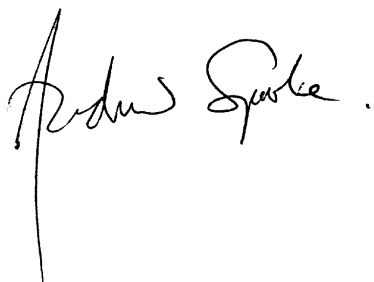
20. Principle legislation includes the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004, Children Act 2004, Homelessness Act 2002, Local Government Act 2000

Equality Impact

21. This report is in accordance with the council's equality and diversity policy.

Recommendation

22. It is recommended that the committee note the information contained in this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Sparke', with a long vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.

Andrew Sparke
Chief Executive

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