



Report to the Overview Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Domestic Violence Follow Up Review

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Purpose of the Report

To inform Members of the progress achieved in following up the recommendations of the Domestic Violence Review.

Background

The Work to Deliver Domestic Violence in Gedling Review considered a range of issues including the strategies, structures, roles and responsibilities, referral mechanisms and outcomes involved in addressing domestic violence. It also considered how services could be maintained into the future. Members of the review received a range of statistics and information relating to the prevalence and effects of domestic violence incidents. They discussed with a wide range of service providers the practices, procedures and systems in place to support victims of domestic violence and the preventative work that is in place. Information about the criminal justice response to incidents of domestic violence was also examined in addition to the funding arrangements and possible effects of budget reductions in relation to the provision of services.

Members of the follow up review group heard about progress of the recommendations made in the earlier report and acknowledged the commitment to maintaining funding and the adoption of new structures, and ways of working, to sustain support for victims and their families. Members considered it necessary to gain an understanding of the recent changes to existing services and current data when considering the earlier report and recommendations. To

facilitate these Members received information from Gedling Borough Council's Community Safety Coordinator, Nottinghamshire Police, the South Nottinghamshire Community Partnership and Gedling Borough Council's Chief Executive John Robinson, the Domestic Violence Champion for the County.

Information

In 2008-09 27% of all violence that occurred in Gedling was domestic related, in the current year this has increased to 43%. Whether this increase is due to an actual increase in incidents, improved recording, better identification or improved support available possibly promoting a feeling of more confidence to report is difficult to assess. Netherfield and Colwick, and Carlton wards have consistently had the highest levels of domestic abuse over the last 3 years. 25% of all domestic abuse in the borough has occurred in these two wards.

Members were informed that Gedling Borough does not provide direct services for victims of domestic abuse. The Community Safety Manager and the Co-ordinator however do have a strategic and tactical link into domestic abuse issues and the agencies dealing with them. It does, provide funding for the Sanctuary Scheme – a system used to maintain victims in their own homes. Nottinghamshire County Council commissions domestic violence services across Nottinghamshire through its Supporting People budget and also grants aids a number of organisations that provide preventive, information and advice services for victims and their families and training. The services commissioned by the County Council address the aims of the Safer Nottinghamshire Board's Domestic Violence Framework this includes 4 key areas of work prevention, provision of support, action to reduce risk and partnership work to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families.

Current challenges presented by reductions in funding streams have necessitated all organisations look at how they operate and to develop alternative ways of working. Services commissioned by the County Council have been subject to consultation and realigned into a North and South model aligned with the new Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) structure. It is envisaged that this will clarify who is responsible for both partners and service user, aligning more closely with the MARAC, Children's Social Care arrangements, the Police and health services. In the future this should reduce duplication, improve efficiency and make it simpler for organisations to bid for funding.

John Robinson, Chief Executive, Gedling Borough Council is currently the Domestic Violence Champion on the Safer Nottinghamshire Board maintaining Gedling Borough's high profile in the domestic violence sphere. The White Ribbon Campaign, which encourages men never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women, was promoted by the Borough to raise awareness of domestic violence issues.

The South Notts. Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which incorporates Ashfield, Broxtowe, and Rushcliffe and Gedling districts have made training available to agencies that do not work in the domestic violence sphere, but have contact with victims or children living with abuse. Training is aimed at helping agencies understand the MARAC process; identify who should be referred and how to refer. Gedling Borough Council Members have been invited to this training.

Schools do not have to include this in the curriculum although many do in the PHSE programme. Some schools choose to use an outside provider to supply this option. Funding has been made available for the Nottingham Domestic Violence Forum to undertake age appropriate sessions for year 8 pupils across the borough area. The GREAT (Good Relationships are Equal and Trusting) programme initiative is available in primary schools in Partnership Plus locations (Netherfield & Colwick and Carlton wards); this focuses on healthy relationships and promotion of respect.

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness and district councils work hard to ensure victims can be supported to remain in their own homes. The Sanctuary scheme allows additional security arrangements to be installed for example alarms, locks or security lighting. It is only available where it is felt safe for the victim and only after the perpetrator has left or been removed. This assistance is only offered to cases that have been assessed as high risk by the MARAC. Gedling has a commitment to funding the Sanctuary scheme and has allocated £10,000 towards this programme. Currently £8,000 of this has been committed and because of demand there will be some unmet need. Because this scheme is funded by local funding streams and each Crime and Disorder Partnership supports this work differently different levels of support and methods of working exist throughout Nottinghamshire. If the Sanctuary scheme is not suitable or affordable the housing option service will advise on the housing possibilities available, if victims have to use the private market to secure housing they may have difficulty affording a deposit.

It is very difficult to influence health service participation in work to support interventions for victims and their children. NHS Nottinghamshire County supports some domestic violence programmes but how this will continue and who in the future will have responsibility for the commissioning of services after the phasing out of Primary Care Trusts is unclear.

A number of agencies work together to deliver criminal justice and support to victims throughout the legal process for victims and families affected by domestic violence. Nottinghamshire Police attend all incidents of domestic violence categorising as high, medium or low risk incidents reacting accordingly. High risk cases are referred to the MARAC. The two Nottinghamshire Police Districts have public protection units which include specialist domestic work investigators

and increasingly these units are becoming multiagency safeguarding hubs with the co location of Children's and Adults social care workers, Probation and Victim Support all having access to shared computer records. Prosecution of perpetrators is a complex area as in some cases victims will retract evidence or fail to attend the court. The support of the Individual Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) through the criminal justice process and the use of specialist domestic violence courts are increasing the number of cases going to court and the prosecution success rates.

Conclusions

Members recognised that domestic violence is an issue that requires integrated working across a number of agencies and that currently organisations are considering new ways to work more effectively with reduced funding. The changes to the commissioning of services by the County Council and consequently the changes to support of victims and organisation of domestic violence services will undoubtedly be reflected in the level of assistance available. Members consider that this issue need further examination when the new ways of working currently is developed and funding arrangements have had time to become established.

Members believe education to be fundamental if domestic violence incidents are to be reduced. They identified that the early years of a child's life laid out the pattern of behaviour for later years and that schools had an influential role not just in educating the child but in also in supporting young people who lived in homes where they witnessed domestic violence. Members considered it essential that young people were taught about healthy relationships and that schools may not always have adequate resources to do this.

Members fully agreed with the recommendation made in the earlier review 'Elected members should take up the importance of preventative work with their local schools in their role as community Champions' and wanted to further develop this commitment. It was felt that Members in their position as governors in schools had a role to play in underlining the importance of including healthy relationship education in the school curriculum, and emphasising the role that school staff have in safeguarding young people affected by domestic violence. In order to stress the importance of this and enhance the role of governors Members recommended that schools should be encouraged to appoint a governor who has responsibility for championing healthy relationships education and domestic violence safeguarding initiatives in schools.

If elected Members are to take up this responsibility in their local schools and role in the community they need to be fully informed about domestic violence initiatives and how to signpost victims to appropriate agencies.

The importance of victims and their families remaining in their own homes, provided it was safe to do so, was perceived as key to maintaining stability for family members. Ways to sustain the current level of funding, and if possible increase, need to be considered. It was felt that consideration should be given to all areas of the county making available similar levels of provision to provide a countywide effective response. Consideration should be given to aligning provision with the new North and South MARAC structure, which would make it easier for support services to understand and implement a level of consistency of support across the county. Members considered that this was an area that the County Domestic Violence Champion should support and advocate. In addition there was a need to harness all housing providers under one scheme and that consideration should be given to how private land lords could be required to fund some of the cost of Sanctuary equipment in their properties.

The role of the health services both at GP and hospital level was recognised as fundamental to this issue and requires further examination. It was also felt that consideration for the sharing of health service data in a similar way to the network currently operated by the Police, social care and probation could also be explored.

Members were concerned about the level of prosecutions for domestic violence incidents. It was felt that work should be undertaken with perpetrators who had not been prosecuted but were known to the Police. Suitable programmes should be available to help perpetrators control their anger and understand why they are violent to women and how this affects partners and families and to control their anger.

Recommendations

The working group makes the following recommendations to:

- Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing
- The Safer Nottinghamshire Board.
- The review group wishes to register their concern at the continuing high number of domestic violence incidents and expects resources to combat the issue to be given a level of funding commensurate with the scale of the problem:
 - the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing reinstates funding for domestic violence support in Gedling to at least its former level and considers how this can be increased in the future

- Gedling Borough Council should seek to achieve parity with higher spending authorities in the region for the funding of the Sanctuary scheme.

- Members, in their role as school governors, support work in schools to encourage healthy relationships education and enhance safeguarding for children and young people affected by domestic violence.

- The appropriate governor with responsibility for safeguarding is fully aware and informed of their additional responsibility for championing related domestic violence issues.

- Member's awareness of domestic violence issues and support services be raised and more fully informed through the Member training programme. All Members be strongly encouraged to attend MARAC awareness training.

- Further MARAC training is available for all front line staff to enable them to identify who should be referred and to understand the mechanics of how to refer.

- Private land lords should be encouraged to support the funding of Sanctuary equipment for privately rented properties.

- Within available funding streams, programmes to be developed for perpetrators in an attempt to change behaviour and thus reduce the number of domestic violence incidents.

- The Overview Scrutiny Committee considers including in the work programme, a further review of domestic violence services in Nottinghamshire and particularly in the Gedling Borough area, within 12 months.