

Title of the review: Domestic Abuse and accommodation working group

Date review completed: 13 July 2021

Date presented to Cabinet: 5 August 2021

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Ellis

Chair of the review group: Councillor Roxanne Ellis

Officers supporting the review: Helen Lee/Alec Dubberley

Response received by O&S Committee: 6 September 2021

Recommendation 1

The Executive recognises the financial savings achieved and the benefits to clients of the Sanctuary Scheme and ensures that the service continues to receive funding at a level that fully meets the needs of families to enable them to live safely.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly accepted Do not accept

Cabinet response:

The Panel's recognition of the value of the Sanctuary scheme is welcome. Despite budgetary pressures Gedling BC has maintained its commitment to the scheme. This has proved particularly useful over the last year in responding to the pressures caused by the Covid pandemic

The implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 gives the County Council the statutory responsibility to commission support services, in conjunction with a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. MCHLG funding has been provided for 2021/2 to support the implementation of this duty.

The Commissioning Plan offers funding of up to £20k providing it is matched by the Borough Council. Using the current budget plus additional funding from the Housing and Homelessness service will enable us to make maximum use of this offer. So for 2021/22 the resources available should be four times the previous level. Further discussions will be necessary within the Partnership Board for future years which the Council will need to consider as part of its budget setting process.

Implementation comment:

The Sanctuary scheme is an important part of helping protect victims in their homes. The Borough Council was able to access the additional £20k, made available to support the implementation of the 2021 Act, by spreading it over two financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23. We were able to meet all requests, including some from medium risk victims. We are hopeful that additional funding will be available in future years.

Recommendation 2

Work is undertaken to Increase awareness for both the public and staff members of domestic abuse and the services available to address this issue using the website, Contacts magazine and council owned buildings, leisure centres, community centres, Intranet etc.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly Accepted Do not accept

Cabinet response:

Awareness work has previously been undertaken by the Public Protection Service in conjunction with the Communications Team. This has often tied in with IWD and White Ribbon events.

Limited physical access to the Civic Centre and other buildings during lockdown has reduced the effectiveness of posters etc.

Materials are readily available and it would be appropriate for these to be refreshed in the Council's buildings as well as key community buildings.

Campaigns need to be co-ordinated with the Police and other partners and will be included in the Public Protection Service supported by the Communications Team.

Implementation comment:

The Public Protection Service continues to work with the Communications Team on raising awareness of domestic abuse and support services. Although the Civic Centre is a useful focus, the limited access recently has reduced the effectiveness.

Communications efforts are around national events, such as White Ribbon Day. We were aware that the football World Cup last year had the potential to spark an increase in domestic abuse so liaised with comms to discuss what could be done.

Recommendation 3

The Council pro-actively works with organisations such as JUNO so that they can be given access to council owned buildings to provide outreach/drop-in session.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly Accepted Do not accept

Cabinet response:

The Council would be happy to support sessions by support agencies in its premises where this would be suitable. However, it may be that community facilities are more suitable for drop-in sessions. The Public Protection Service will support agencies in this.

The Civic Centre had been made available for JUNO to hold individual sessions in during 2020 but the closure of public buildings due to Covid prevented this further.

Implementation comment:

Through the funding available to implement the 2021 Act, Juno has been able to employ a specialist worker for 3 days per week. This worker is based in the Council's Housing and Homelessness team and is able to combine specialist knowledge of domestic abuse services with understanding of housing options to provide a comprehensive response.

Members continue to help support agencies through their community grants budget.

Recommendation 4

Compulsory training on identifying and interacting with victims of domestic abuse is given to front line officers and elected members and that this is delivered at future member inductions.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly Accepted Do not accept

Cabinet response:

Compulsory training is already required for many front line officers. A review of those trained over the last three years is underway and will identify needs for refresher training or gaps.

Good quality training is available online which officers can do when it is convenient.

Domestic Abuse was part of the general safeguarding briefing in the members' induction in 2017. The Induction Programme will be reviewed in advance of the next election with the suggestion that it is a standalone element.

Implementation comment:

The Council's Safeguarding Board monitors training. The large scale safeguard training was completed in 2019, and after 3 years is due for refresh. Training is provided online and therefore is suitable for officers to access when working from home.

Managers are required to ensure that their staff are up to date on safeguarding and domestic abuse training. Discussions continue on enabling staff who are not office based (e.g. Leisure Services and PASC) to access this training.

Recommendation 5

A section on safeguarding considerations including domestic abuse is included as a specific section in committee and decision reports.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly Accepted Do not accept

Although it is recognised that decision-makers should take account of safeguarding concerns, and that report writers should draw them to their attention it is considered that most reports would state “no safeguarding implications” which would reduce the effectiveness of a specific section. However, it is proposed that the guidance on the equalities section could be expanded to include safeguarding concerns.

Implementation comment:

For the reasons set out in the Cabinet response this has not been actioned.

Recommendation 6

The Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Public Protection and Housing continue to monitor the need for refuge provision with a view to providing an adequate level of funding for delivering dispersed refuge and “move on” accessible accommodation in the Borough.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly Accepted Do not accept

Cabinet response:

Responsibility for the adequacy of refuge provision (of various types) rests with Tier 1 authorities working with the Local Domestic Abuse Partnership. Gedling BC is represented on the Partnership with the relevant portfolio holders receiving feedback from our officer representative. We are committed to working with the partnership to improve the response to Domestic Abuse

The initial countywide needs assessment recognises that there is a need for further refuge places in Nottinghamshire. We welcome this.

Implementation comment:

Under the Act this responsibility rests with the County Council as the Tier 1 authority. It isn't clear whether any additional places are planned.

Recommendation 7

Partnership working across the country for the provision of refuge spaces continues offering accommodation on a reciprocal basis. This should be based on need rather than geographical residence in Gedling.

(Please tick) Recommendation Accepted Partly Accepted Do not accept

Cabinet response:

There are a range of refuge providers – some are commissioned by local authorities while others are independent charities. They operate according to need – so, for instance, a survivor may wish to be located away from their local

area for safety. There are established mechanisms for finding safe locations but these are not formalised as reciprocal arrangements.

The Panel may have been thinking of the need for temporary accommodation. Its report notes that all those in need of temporary accommodation are assessed on their circumstances and that some weight is given to residence in Gedling. While this does disadvantage survivors without any connection wanting to relocate to Gedling it is difficult to see how a reciprocal arrangement could be established with their home authority.

Implementation comment:

Pressures on temporary accommodation continue, although the Council is seeking to increase the availability of such provision. As discussed in the Cabinet's response, the allocation of temporary accommodation depends on individual circumstances with both domestic abuse and local connections being considered.