

## **CABINET**

**15 MAY 2012**

### **UPDATE ON DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mike O'Brien, Community Safety and Customer Contact

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Tim England, Head of Safer Communities

#### **Summary**

This report seeks to update Cabinet on the work undertaken around domestic abuse and on the way forward.

The responsibility for co-ordinating the council and its partners' work around domestic abuse passed from the Assistant Director Housing and Corporate Services to the Assistant Director for Frontline Services in January 2012.

#### **1 Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 Reducing domestic abuse and minimising its impact on families and children is a priority for Medway's Community Safety Partnership and Medway Safeguarding Children's Board (part of the Children's Trust arrangements). Tackling domestic abuse is one of the priorities contained within the Community Safety Plan 2012-2013, which was approved at Council on 26 April 2012.
- 1.2 There is multi-agency commitment to the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2010 - 2013 which has the following priorities:
  - Reduce domestic abuse and change attitudes
  - Provide support for victims of domestic abuse
  - Protect victims of domestic abuse
  - Improve multi agency working, including information sharing.

#### **2 Background**

- 2.1 Domestic abuse covers incidents of threatening or violent behaviour or abuse between adults (usually partners or family members). This covers a wide spectrum of incidents but affects millions of people, spanning 15 per cent of all violent incidents and claiming the lives of around two women a week.
- 2.2 Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off, and often forms a continuing pattern of behaviour by one adult towards another. The vast majority of cases are

violence by men against women, but there are cases of same-sex domestic violence, and violence by women against men.

2.3 Local authorities play a significant role in tackling domestic abuse and taking pro-active steps to prevent domestic abuse, particularly in the context of their housing management functions by:

- challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it;
- providing adequate support where violence does occur;
- working in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families;
- taking action to reduce the risk to victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice

2.4 The Cabinet considered a report on the progress made in making improvements to domestic abuse services within Medway and on the way forward for this service on 29 November 2012. The Cabinet noted the report and endorsed the improvement plan. It was also agreed that progress is reported to Cabinet every six months (decision number 157/2011).

### **3 Progress**

#### **3.1 Community Safety Partnership Sub group**

3.2 It is important that Medway Council and its partners play their part in pan-Kent arrangements where it is efficient to do so and it maximises outcomes for children and families. It is equally important, where a Medway- specific and targeted approach is required, that all partners work together locally to deliver those outcomes.

3.3 The Community Safety Partnership has established a sub group to lead on the delivery of Medway's response. The sub-group reports on progress to Medway Safeguarding Children's Board.

3.4 The sub-group comprises senior representatives from the Police, Children's Services, Housing Services, Public Health, the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator, Court Service, Probation and the Chair of the MDAF (Medway Domestic Abuse Forum). The two main providers of Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) services to Medway Council, Medway Consumer Advice Bureau (MCAB) and Kent Domestic Abuse Support And Help (K-DASH) also have representatives on the group.

3.5 An initial meeting of this group was held on 18 April 2012. The initial task of the group is to refresh the Medway-specific action plan to deliver the local components of the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy.

#### **3.6 Co-ordination with Kent County Council**

3.7 The Assistant Director, Frontline Services attends the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group meetings and sits on the executive of that group.

3.8 In addition there is a task and finish group that sits underneath the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group with the purpose of ensuring IDVA

provision across Kent and Medway. The main purpose of IDVAs is to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members to secure their safety and the safety of their children. The Head of Safer Communities sits on this group.

### **3.9 Domestic Homicide Reviews**

3.10 Community Safety partnerships became responsible for undertaking multi-agency reviews where domestic violence had culminated in a death from April 2011. Medway and Kent have a joint arrangement in place to discharge this duty. To date there have been five domestic homicide cases that have been, or are in the process of being, the subject of domestic homicide reviews. Two of these have been in Medway, resulting in the deaths of four people, including one child.

### **3.11 Kent Problem profile**

3.12 Kent Police has produced a domestic abuse problem profile for Medway and each of the districts in the county of Kent. Domestic abuse incidents reported to the police in Medway account for 18% of the total incidents in Kent, compared to 15% of the population, and the trend this is rising steadily, although the percentage of those victims subject to repeat violence has dropped slightly.

3.13 Domestic abuse is a component in just over 40% of cases where children are made subject to child protection plans, and domestic abuse was a feature in both of Medway's recent serious case reviews.

### **3.14 Safeguarding Board**

3.15 The Assistant Director of Frontline Services has attended the Medway Safeguarding Children's Board to update on progress and to outline plans for future direction.

### **3.16 Cathedral Service**

3.17 On 13 April 2012 Councillor O'Brien gave an address at a service of remembrance for victims of domestic abuse, held at Rochester Cathedral. The service was attended by many agencies working to support victims of domestic abuse across Kent and Medway along with victims and survivors. The Associate Director, Frontline Services and Head of Safer Communities also attended the service on behalf of Medway Council.

### **3.18 The Way Forward**

### **3.19 Action plan refresh**

3.20 At the meeting of 29 November 2011, Cabinet considered a report from the former Assistant Director (Housing & Corporate Services) containing an action plan for taking forward areas that were highlighted by the domestic advice review as being of high priority. This plan is in the process of being refreshed by the sub-group and will be reported back at a later date.

### **3.21 Training**

3.22 Delivering multi-agency training with an agreed training programme across Medway has been identified as a priority. At present, training does occur but it is provided by a number of different agencies and the sub-group is in the process of identifying training needs to ensure that a programme of training is identified and offered, with support from partners. There are exemplars of good practice nationally and we intend to learn from them to provide fit for purpose provision at minimal cost.

### **3.23 Independent Domestic Violence Advisor provision**

3.24 There are a number of agencies working across Kent and Medway that provide IDVAs to support high-risk victims of domestic abuse.

3.25 Medway Housing commissions an IDVA from MCAB to support its clients, to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are identified and provided with advice and support at an early stage.

3.26 We have set up a pilot project from January 2012 to place an IDVA in the Accident & Emergency Department at Medway Maritime, commissioned through K-DASH.

3.27 In addition, in September 2011 a specialist domestic violence court was set up in Medway to cover the North Kent bench area. This is partly funded by Medway Council and provides victims of domestic abuse with access to an IDVA, who helps to support victims through the process of prosecution and to ensure that they remain safe with appropriate support.

3.28 Medway is poorly resourced in terms of IDVA provision per high-risk victim compared to the rest of Kent and the caseload per IDVA is higher. We need to critically examine how we can enable better provision.

## **4 Risk management**

4.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Using the following table this section should therefore consider any significant risks arising from your report.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>
Failure to deliver the priorities set out in the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy or the improvement plan being developed.	Failure to deliver the targeted priorities or the improvement plan which highlights the areas identified could mean an increase in the numbers of victims of domestic abuse in Medway with the consequent risks of family breakdown, child protection issues, potential homelessness and health related issues.	Ensure that the improvement plan and KMDA Strategy are regularly monitored by the Sub-group and progress is reported to the CSP, Medway Safeguarding Children's Board and Children's Trust.

## **5 Financial and legal implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.
- 5.2 Responsibilities were transferred to Frontline Services from 1st January 2012. Discussions are ongoing to consider ways to fund the co-ordination and service elements, either by using existing resources or identifying alternative funding streams, within or external to the Council.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

## **7. Suggested reasons for decision(s)**

- 7.1 To ensure that domestic abuse and the consequent issues it raises are given a clear focus within Medway and that the Cabinet can be assured that progress is being made.

### **Lead officer contact**

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### **Background papers**

None