

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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UPDATE ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

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Summary

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.

A report was made to Cabinet on 27 November 2012 on the work undertaken since January 2012.

This report seeks to update the Committee on progress since November 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. There is multi-agency commitment to the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2013 - 2016 which has the following objectives:

- Preventing Abuse
 - To prevent domestic abuse from happening in the first place, by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early to prevent it.
- Provision of Services
 - Provide adequate levels of support when domestic abuse occurs.
- Justice Outcomes and Risk Reduction
 - Take action to reduce the risk to domestic abuse victims and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

- Partnership Working
 - Work in partnership to obtain the best outcomes for those affected by domestic abuse and their families.

2 Background

- 2.1 Domestic abuse covers incidents of threatening or violent behaviour or abuse between persons aged 16 or over (usually partners or family members). This covers a wide spectrum of incidents, but affects millions of people nationally, spanning 15 per cent of all violent incidents and claiming the lives of around two women a week. Over 20,000 cases of domestic abuse are reported to Kent Police every year.
- 2.2 Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off, and frequently forms a continuing pattern of abusive behaviour by one person towards another. The majority of cases concern abuse of women by men, but there are cases of abuse in same-sex relationships and of women against men.
- 2.3 Local authorities play an important role in supporting victims of domestic abuse and proactive prevention, 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;
 - Working in partnership to reduce the risk to victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

3 National Developments

3.1 Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

- 3.1.1 A pilot domestic violence disclosure scheme where individuals have a right to ask about any violence in a partner's past began in July 2012 in the Gwent and Wiltshire police force areas, with the Greater Manchester and Nottinghamshire police force areas joining soon after. The pilot was due to end in September 2013.
- 3.1.2 Under the scheme an individual can ask the police to check whether a new or existing partner has a violent past ('right to ask'). If police checks show that a person may be at risk of domestic violence from their partner, the police will consider disclosing the information.
- 3.1.3 The pilot will also look at how the police can proactively release information ('right to know') to protect a person from domestic violence where it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so. Both processes can be implemented within existing legal powers.

3.2 Definition of Domestic Violence

3.2.1 The Government definition of domestic violence was widened in March 2013 to include those aged 16 to 17 and wording to reflect coercive control. The decision followed a consultation, which saw respondents call overwhelmingly for this change.

3.2.2 Extending the definition will hopefully increase awareness that young people in this age-group experience domestic violence and abuse, encouraging more of them to come forward and access the support they need.

3.3 Teenage Relationship Abuse and Rape Prevention

3.3.1 National campaigns to prevent teenagers from becoming victims and perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse and to direct them to support and advice services have taken place for the past two years.

3.4 Stalking Laws

3.4.1 In November 2012 the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was updated by provisions made in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, creating two new offences for stalking. The amendments also set out new police powers to enter and search premises.

3.5 Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and Notices

3.5.1 Under the scheme, which is being piloted by the West Mercia, Wiltshire and Greater Manchester police during 2013, police and magistrates can prevent the perpetrator from contacting the victim or returning to their home for up to 28 days. Previously, there had been a gap in protection for victims of domestic violence due to either the police being unable to charge the perpetrator due to lack of evidence, or the process for granting longer-term injunctions taking several days or weeks. DVPOs are designed to bridge this gap by helping victims who may otherwise have had to flee their home, giving them the space and time to access support and consider their options.

4 Progress

4.1 CSP Subgroup

4.1.1 It is important that Medway Council and its partners play their part in pan-Kent arrangements, where it is efficient to do so, as 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.

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

4.1.3 The sub-group comprises senior representatives from the Police, Children's Services, Housing Services, NHS, Public Health, the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator, Court Service, Probation and the Chair of the MDAF (Medway Domestic Abuse Forum).

4.1.4 An initial meeting of the subgroup was held on 18 April 2012 and has met regularly since then; the last meeting being on 4 November 2012.

4.1.5 A part-time co-ordinator has been appointed to support the subgroup and ensure delivery of the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy.

4.2 Co-ordination with Kent County Council

4.2.1 The Head of Safer Communities attends the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (KMDASG) meetings and sits on the executive of that group.

4.2.2 During 2012 - 2013 KMDASG made a successful bid to access a Home Office funded, independent partnership review. This was provided by a specialist domestic abuse agency, Standing Together, and involved a detailed look into the partnership's arrangements for tackling domestic abuse.

4.2.3 The partnership received a 'good' rating and was ranked 12th nationally. The findings have been used to help clarify the areas of work that we need to focus on improving and to develop the new strategy and delivery plan.

4.2.4 A new three-year strategy and delivery plan to run up to 2016 has been prepared and consulted upon. This strategy aims to assist partnerships and agencies in delivering appropriate responses to those affected by domestic abuse across Kent and Medway, assisting people to live free from abuse.

4.2.5 The focus on local needs is informed by local needs analysis as well national research and developments. The strategy will be accompanied by a Delivery Plan, which will be refreshed annually and will provide partners with a framework for domestic abuse work.

4.2.6 Tackling domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue requiring varied responses across all sectors. The strategy is underpinned by a recognition and commitment to partnership working and an understanding that no single agency can address domestic abuse in isolation.

4.3 IDVA Commissioning

4.3.1 Since the last report to Members, Medway has entered into joint commissioning arrangements with the Kent district and county councils, criminal justice partners and health to provide independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) support to high-risk victims of domestic abuse. The service is provided through a consortium of voluntary sector organisations, known as Kent Domestic Abuse Consortium (KDAC). A key benefit from commissioning through the voluntary sector is that KDAC, through accessing other income streams, is able to lever in additional support for lower risk victims of domestic abuse. Medway's contribution is £96,000 per year.

4.3.2 The service went live in April 2013. A network of IDVAs is now fully operational across Kent and Medway and is engaging with local partners to ensure that referral pathways are clear and additional support services continue to be developed. High-risk cases are referred in through the Multi-

agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process. KDAC also provide support to Kent's Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVC).

- 4.3.3 KDAC service managers attend both the specialist court steering group and the MARAC Co-ordinators meeting to ensure that consistent practice is developed and sustained across Kent & Medway. Service to victims going through the courts has now been extended to Crown Court.
- 4.3.4 The consortium opened a new 24-hour domestic abuse helpline in July 2013. Apart from providing an out of hours service, it provides a single contact number for both the public and professionals. There have been 205 calls to this service from across the area. The calls have been a mixture of self-referrals and consultations by professionals. All feedback to date has been positive about the availability of this service.
- 4.3.5 A highly experienced IDVA is now undertaking a six month pilot of combined working within Kent Police's Central Referral Unit (CRU) to strengthen the co-ordinated response to victims of domestic abuse. The IDVA will be looking at the quality of Risk Assessments coming through the CRU, the pathways to services and identifying ways of ensuring that safety plans produced via CRU partners meet the needs of clients.
- 4.3.6 In the first two quarters, KDAC has engaged with 165 Medway clients, 146 of whom have been referred by MARAC (high risk). There are 173 children in the households of those high-risk cases.
- 4.3.7 62 cases have been closed. 88% of clients experienced a significant or moderate reduction in risk. CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) has set a benchmark figure for combined Significant and Moderate Reduction at 74%. The assessment of very positive or positive impact on children's wellbeing stands at 100%. CAADA's benchmark figure is 45%.
- 4.3.8 Eight clients have been supported at SDVC. Three perpetrators pleaded guilty at the hearing and the other five were successfully convicted following trial.

4.4 Schools Notifications Pilot

- 4.4.1 In September 2012 a pilot was launched which involved Medway Police sending notifications of standard and medium level domestic abuse incidents, that did not meet the threshold for referral, to health colleagues in Medway Community Healthcare, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust and Medway Foundation Trust, as well as selected pilot schools, via the Medway Council's Systems Support team, who check the education database to establish which school the affected child/children/young people attend. The pilot was focused on 5 wards, where there are high numbers of domestic abuse incidents, and ran until July 2013. An evaluation report was presented to partner agencies in August, and the structure of the Medway wide roll out will be presented to Medway Safeguarding Children's Board in November 2013.

4.5 CAADA Report into Defining MARAC Outcomes

- 4.5.1 In October 2013 CAADA presented their report to KMDASG on the outcomes of the (former) six Kent and Medway MARACs between May 2011 and October 2011. For each case the police incidents and resulting police actions have been mapped for the year before and year after the MARAC meeting, along with demographic information about the victim and the number of children in the household.
- 4.5.2 The report provides information on the impact of the Kent MARACs on the victims supported and on public services and contains comparison information with the national MARAC outcomes dataset, which was collected in 2011 - 2012.
- 4.5.3 The headline findings for Medway were that 54% of victims experienced a reduction in police call outs. There was a decrease in high severity incidents of 75% and 71% in medium severity. There was an estimated reduction in average police costs per victim of £454. Other agency costs have not been calculated.

4.6 Domestic Homicide Reviews

- 4.6.1 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 nine domestic homicide cases that have been, or are in the process of being, the subject of domestic homicide reviews. There have been no deaths referred to domestic homicide review in the past year in Medway or Kent.
- 4.6.2 Two incidents involving domestic homicides occurred in Medway in 2011 - 2012, resulting in the deaths of four people, including the child of one of the victims. One Medway review has been through the Home Office quality assurance process, the other is currently being quality assured by the Home Office and will be published once they are satisfied. The remainder of the reviews involve deaths in Kent; however lessons learned will be shared with Medway agencies, and there is a unified process in place to disseminate learning.
- 4.6.3 The Home Office has recently issued new guidance on domestic homicide reviews. Kent and Medway's processes have been updated to reflect these changes.

4.7 Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse

- 4.7.1 The Kent and Medway domestic abuse support website was developed to provide advice and information on services for victims, friends & family, and perpetrators of domestic abuse. The site was launched on 28 November 2012 and can be accessed at <http://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/>. The site attracts between 900 and 1,100 visitors per month, with 11,900 visits from 8,700 unique visitors. One in six people access the site via mobile platforms and 71% of visits come from new clients.

4.8 Refuges and Housing Related Support

4.8.1 Supporting People funding in Medway has been disbanded with the relevant service areas taking control of funding and commissioning of the services previously know as Supporting People Services. Funding now badged as "Housing Related Support" currently provides 14 refuge spaces in Medway across two schemes as well as a floating support scheme for up to 40 people. The refuges operate nationally on a mutual aid basis with the floating support service offering support for those remaining in the Medway area. Work is ongoing to review the provision of housing related support and explore options for providing service to those suffering domestic abuse. Consideration is being given to providing a pathway of services to allow people to return to independent living. Full details will be made available in the Housing related support strategy to be published in the New Year.

4.9 Finances

4.9.1 Responsibilities were transferred to Frontline Services from 1 January 2012. A sum of £120,000 was transferred into Safer Communities' base budget to cover the additional costs of the KDAC contribution and co-ordination.

5 Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
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 Medway Children's Action Network.

6 Financial and legal implications

6.1 There are no financial or legal implications arising directly from this report.

7 Recommendations

7.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

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Background papers

None