



Actions to *Serving You*

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**30 SEPTEMBER 2021**

### **ACTIONS TO REDUCE DOMESTIC ABUSE HARMS FOR CHILDREN IN MEDWAY**

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#### Summary

This report presents the interventions undertaken by Medway Council and its partners that contribute to reducing Domestic Abuse (DA) harms faced by children. The Domestic Abuse Act 2020 places additional requirements on Local Authorities (LAs) regarding the support of children. DA has an impact on people of all genders, ages and ethnicities; while acknowledging this, the scope of this report is limited to children under the age of 18 as survivors or children of survivors. Due to the limited scope this report does not represent the totality of services and interventions to address DA.

#### 1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. Due to its multi-faceted impacts, DA interventions are delivered by a number of agencies through a variety of funding streams including Public Health, Housing, Social Care, Police and the Police Crime Commissioner's Office, and the third sector.
- 1.2. In 2019, budgets were pooled from Housing, Children's Services, Public Health and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to commission an integrated DA service (Medway DA Service/Oasis) with a financial envelope of £1,064,917 over 5 years.
- 1.3. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was introduced to:
  - Raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.
  - Further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.

- Strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4. The Act places new requirements on a range of agencies including the Courts, Police, General Practice and Local Authorities (LAs).
  - 1.5. The Act requires LAs to have a DA Strategy, Action Plan and a Local Partnership Board to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan. Medway had both before the requirement was made and the existing structures have been adapted to meet the new requirements. The existing Kent and Medway joint Domestic Abuse Strategy was approved by Cabinet in November 2020 (Appendix 1). An addendum to the strategy, covering the new LA responsibilities for safe accommodation is due to be finalised soon. These include a duty on local authorities in England to provide accommodation based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation and that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance.
  - 1.6. Medway statutory partners were subject to a Joint Targeted Area Inspection in June 2018 which focussed on the impact of Domestic Abuse on Children. The resulting action plan was monitored via the Medway Safeguarding Children's Board (MSCB) Executive Group (as was). The plan covered a wide range of areas from improved information sharing through the MASH to fragmentation in commissioned services.
  - 1.7. In November 2019, MSCB agreed the action plan had made sufficient progress to be closed. The remaining outstanding actions would be captured within the Social Care Improvement Plan. These included embedded training within social care, consistency in quality of assessments and timeliness of decision making at the front door.

## 2. Background

The following section sets out interventions currently in place to reduce the impact of DA on children, later sections will address actions that are planned and gaps that have been identified.

### *Impact of DA on Children*

- 2.1 Children experiencing DA within the family home face physical danger as well as emotional distress as they may feel responsible, fearful and isolated. They may feel they have no one to talk to without exposing family secrets or making things worse. Studies show that as many as one in 5 children in the UK are exposed to DA during childhood.
- 2.2 Children who experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in early childhood, such as experiencing DA, can also experience a negative impact on their mental health later in life. One study found that adults who had

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-overarching-factsheet>

suffered four or more types of ACEs (which could include DA) were almost ten times more likely to have felt suicidal or self-harmed than those who had experienced none. Barnardo's found that around 52% of children exposed to DA developed behaviour problems and over a third (39%) found difficulties adjusting at school.

- 2.3 DA impacts the self-esteem, the ability to form positive relationships and mental health of young people. In turn, mental health difficulties are more likely to have a negative impact on education, health and social issues. All of which are likely to lead to poorer health for the individuals and family and affect wider societal population outcomes.
- 2.4 DA is a significant factor that contributes to the safety, emotional harm, physical harm and neglect of children. Parental DA, mental health and drug use are factors that can lead to children becoming looked after (LAC).

### ***Services where Children are the primary focus***

- 2.5 Medway Public Health have a bespoke Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) scheme of work for Key Stage 1-3 in Medway; this includes a suite of lessons on Abusive Relationships. This programme of lesson plans and teaching materials has been produced in partnership with the PSHE Association and is cited nationally as best practice in RSE. Public Health are currently working with over 86% of Medway's 103 schools.
- 2.6 Operation Encompass is a nationwide initiative to improve communication between police and schools where DA is suspected. The Domestic Abuse Notifications generated, enable schools to support the child appropriately after an incident. Schools promote their support of Operation Encompass, through their websites, letters, leaflets, posters and Safeguarding policies.
- 2.7 Two DA Early Help Workers (EHW) are funded by Medway Council to provide additional specialist support and advice to Family Solutions staff and partners working from Medway's Children and Family Hubs. One works across Gillingham and Strood Children and Family Hubs and the other works across Wayfield and Chatham Hubs. The DA EHWs also complete direct work with families, including interventions or assessments, with the main focus being DA.
- 2.8 Medway's Domestic Abuse Service (MDAS/Oasis) deliver lessons and groups to children and young people:
  - Loves Me, Loves Me Not is a classroom session presented by a suitably trained project worker. The sessions are delivered over 6-weeks as a DA prevention programme.
  - Guiding Lights is a female only group programme for 11–16-year-olds, delivered in schools, youth hubs and other settings by a Young Persons Mentor. Run over 10 weeks it is for females vulnerable to the risks of sexual exploitation.

### ***Services where children are supported by supporting parents and carers***

- 2.9 Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are designed for victims and families assessed as being at high risk of significant harm or homicide. In MARAC meetings, representatives from statutory, community and voluntary agencies share information and agree an action plan to support victims. Referrals may be made into this process from a variety of agencies, although the majority are from the Police. MARAC aims to determine the risk posed by the perpetrator, reduce victimisation and support through accountable multi-agency action planning. A recent review indicated a gap in engagement from education providers. To improve this and help keep our most vulnerable children safe, a MARAC Briefing for Education Partners was delivered to schools.
- 2.10 Medway's Domestic Abuse Service (MDAS/Oasis): Using the pooled budget Oasis charity were awarded the contract to deliver support for medium and high-risk victims in Medway.
- 2.11 The licensed Domestic Abuse Recovering Together (DART) Programme: DART is facilitated by Family Solutions. Over ten weeks, mothers and children aged 7-14 meet for a weekly two-hour group session. Women learn more about how DA happens, how it affects children, and they explore experiences and strategies that can be used as a parent. Children take part in activities together that help them build their own understanding of DA and how they are feeling.
- 2.12 Support2Court Programme supports those who are attending Family Court without a legal representative and can support victims/survivors to apply for a Protective Order through the Civil Courts, help with writing statements and submitting these to court. They accompany victims/survivors to hearings and provide support through child arrangement proceedings, giving advice about divorce and financial proceedings.

### ***Support, training and other resources for the wider workforce***

- 2.13 Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) deliver Trauma Informed training and DA Awareness training. MSCP has developed a suite of Factsheets on 'emerging issues and themes', with some focusing on children and families living with DA.
- 2.14 Public Health Child Health team are raising awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) with Medway Schools and other settings.
- 2.15 Medway's DA Assessment Checklist for Children and Families aims to increase professional curiosity to help support decisions in assessments where DA is identified, capture the voice of the child and details potential protective factors that may be identified in homes where there is or has been DA. It also identifies risk factors that need to be considered for children, victims/parents and perpetrators where identified protective factors are being relied on. The checklist was written by stakeholders led by the MSCP and has

been included in DA training. The uptake and impact of the DA Assessment Checklist for Children and Families will be reviewed in early 2022 by the Learning Lessons subgroup.

- 2.16 DA Champions Train the Trainer Programme enables professionals and volunteers to understand, recognise and respond to signs of DA. Approximately 140 people are now a DA Champions, including youth workers, staff from schools (Head Teachers, Safeguarding Leads, Family Liaison Officers, SENCOs), pre-schools and nurseries, Early Help Workers, Children's Social Workers and 0-25 Disability Team, Home-Start, NSPCC, NELFT Specialist Safeguarding Children Advisor, Named Midwife for Safeguarding Medway NHS Foundation Trust, MCH School Nurse, Childcare Lawyer, Medway Campus University staff and various other Medway Council employees.
- 2.17 Social Work Practitioners in the Children's service also received bespoke DA training.

### ***Interventions planned or being developed***

- 2.18 Although Refuges and Sanctuary Schemes (Target hardening of Properties) have been delivered in Medway for a number of years their method of delivery will be changed in response to the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. Using the New Burdens Funding - dispersed safe accommodation will be procured; these premises can be rotated to reduce the likelihood of identification and disclosure. Refuges will be reconfigured to provide improved wrap around and follow-on services with a greater emphasis on Medway residents. Counselling support will be available to children and their parents across the refuge and sanctuary schemes.
- 2.19 There is agreement to co-locate MDAS services within the adolescent service, this has been delayed due to COVID restrictions but can now progress. This will provide support for staff within the adolescent service as well as direct access to support for young people who are experiencing DA.
- 2.20 Working with the Education Safeguarding lead, a review of the impact of Op Encompass will be carried out. This will help inform how schools use Domestic Abuse Notifications (DANs) information and identify any training gaps there may be.
- 2.21 Kent Police have recently been subject to a Child Protection Inspection. The inspection found that Kent Police is strongly committed to providing effective child protection and safeguarding services. In relation to DA the inspectors found improvement in the way that Op Encompass has been rolled out. They also noted that the force has introduced vulnerability hubs to support investigators in the division's vulnerability investigation teams. Vulnerability hubs are staffed by safeguarding co-ordinators. They help officers deal with domestic abuse incidents, reviewing open domestic abuse incidents and advising responding officers so they can prioritise actions. This extra support is intended to improve the quality of initial investigations and outcomes for

vulnerable families. However, it was noted that the voice of the child is not consistently recorded in domestic abuse incidents and there is not always enough information for effective referrals to other organisations. These actions will be addressed by Kent Police and monitored via the Medway Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Executive Group.

### 3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1. The DA Strategy must be published to comply with legal requirements and the Local Partnership Board must oversee the delivery of the Action Plan. Therefore, pathways between services delivered and commissioned by the LA, Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) must be in place to facilitate the delivery of the action plan. The current strategy will have an addendum that reflects the additional housing support requirements of the Act.
- 3.2 There is a range of interventions in Medway, to support children, delivered by a number of partners which address aspects of prevention, identification and support following incidents of DA. There are no immediate threats to funding for these services and additional funding has been made available for housing support in response to the DA Act 2020.
- 3.3. The Council and its partners are clear that this collaborative approach to reducing harms to children because of DA should be recognised, continued and further developed.
- 3.4 Additional opportunities will be sought to identify and address DA at every opportunity in the same way that Child Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility.

### 4. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating after mitigation
Children and Young People (CYP) not adequately supported.	DA action plan that is intended to improve service provision and reduce should adequately highlight the needs of CYP	Actions are recorded and allocated. Partners will be held to account for non-completion of tasks. Local DA Partnership Board scrutinise and monitor the DA action plan at quarterly meetings and strategic challenges can be escalated to other boards including the Community Safety Partnership and K&M DA Tactical Group.	D3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating after mitigation
Measuring impact is complex and therefore may inadvertently be under valued	Data quality and quantity is limited, data is collected across several provider organisations. This may result in attention being directed to the things that are measurable rather than best outcomes in an attempt to demonstrate 'value' of the services	Annual strategic analysis has now been started across Kent and Medway. This provides an opportunity to have more consistent data over time to identify trends and patterns	C2
Reduction in available funding and resources.	Services are funded through pooled budgets and therefore at risk of impact from several directions.	Collaborative working continues to lead to pooling of resources and joint working on projects. Commissioned DA service are very resourceful and have excellent track records of being successful at obtaining additional funding through grants. The DA Act lead-in stage has produced some additional funding. There are no immediate, obvious risk to funding streams, but this will be monitored	D2

## 5. Consultation

- 5.1. Stakeholder and service users were consulted for the Safe accommodation needs assessment. Consultation between Social Care, Public Health and Housing Strategy in compiling this report.

## 6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## 7. Legal implications

- 7.1. There is a requirement for the LA to comply with the requirements of the DA Act 2020. This report has no impact on that legal requirement.

## 8. Recommendation

- 8.1. The Committee are recommended to note the report and the proposed actions by the Council and its partners, as set out in section 3 of the report.

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### Appendices

Appendix 1: Current Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy

### Background papers

None