

North Somerset Council

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REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 9 OCTOBER 2018

SUBJECT OF REPORT: DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: LOUISE BRANCH, DOMESTIC ABUSE CO-ORDINATOR, SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SERVICE, NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. That the panel notes the updates on the successful implementation of domestic abuse strategy objectives set out in this report.
- II. That the Panel notes the significant increase in reporting and referral rates of domestic abuse alongside an increase in the complexity of cases and the implications of these trends for service provision in North Somerset.
- III. That the Panel considers and provides feedback on future priorities and planned actions for continuing to respond to domestic abuse in North Somerset.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the successful implementation to date of the objectives set out in the North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2016-19. This work has been led by the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Service, in partnership with other agencies who work together within the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (DASG).
- 1.2 The report also provides an update on performance trends and highlights a significant increase in domestic abuse reports and referrals to services and details some of the actions which have already been taken to increase service capacity including through successful bids for additional Government funding and service re-configuration. The report sets out the future challenges which the continuing increase in referrals and the complexity of cases presents.
- 1.3 The report provides an opportunity for the Panel to feed into the future priorities and planned actions of the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (DASG).

2. POLICY

- 2.1 There is a statutory requirement for a number of agencies including the Council to work in partnership to address Crime and Disorder. In North Somerset the People and Communities Board fulfils the statutory role of Community Safety Partnership. In addition to the overall Crime and Disorder duty, there is a specific duty to conduct a Domestic Homicide Review in line with Home Office guidance in the event of a death resulting from domestic abuse.
- 2.2 The People and Communities Strategy identifies domestic abuse as a priority particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable victims. The Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner also identifies protecting vulnerable victims as a priority in the statutory Police and Crime Plan. This prioritisation is also reflected in the joint Police and Crime Plan for North Somerset approved by the People and Communities Board and presented at Scrutiny Panel earlier in the year.
- 2.3 A multi-agency North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2016-19 is in place which sets out actions to work towards the following objectives:
- Adults and children affected by domestic abuse are helped and protected
 - Adults and children affected by domestic abuse have improved health and well-being
 - Adults and children affected by domestic abuse have improved personal resilience
 - Perpetrators of domestic abuse are challenged and supported to change their abusive behaviour
- 2.4 Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting crime impacting upon adults' and children's health and well-being, aside from the serious physical harm a victim may suffer it can cause social isolation and often impacts upon an individual's ability to work and form social networks. It therefore requires a multi-agency response from criminal justice as well as health and social care agencies which means that it has links to many aspects of the local strategic agenda. There are therefore a range of multi-agency strategies which highlight domestic abuse, including:
- **North Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy, 2008-2026:**
This states that "challenges for North Somerset include: Reducing incidents of domestic violence and victimisation rates by addressing perpetrators' behaviour and providing more support to those who have survived domestic abuse."
 - **North Somerset Public Mental Health Strategy, 2015-19:**
This strategy includes an action to "Improve joined up working between domestic abuse and mental health services"

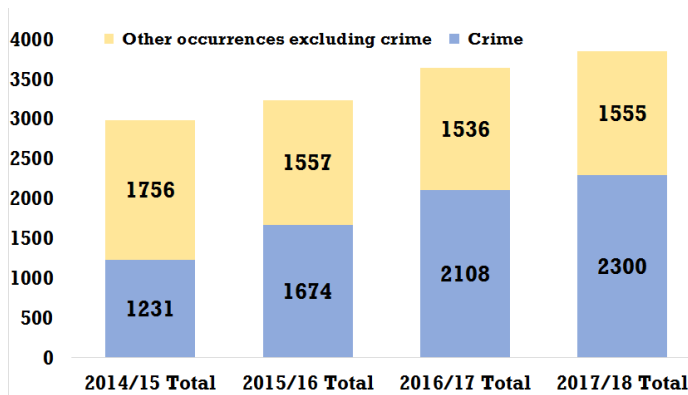
3. DETAILS

3.1 PERFORMANCE

Domestic Abuse incidents reported to police have been steadily increasing since 2014/15 (see chart below). Between 2014/15 and 2017/18 there has been a 29% increase in incidents recorded (there were 2987 reports in 2014/15 compared to 3855 in 2017/18). The biggest change has been those incidents classified as crimes – (87% increase between 2014/15 and 2017/18 which equates to 1069 more crimes).

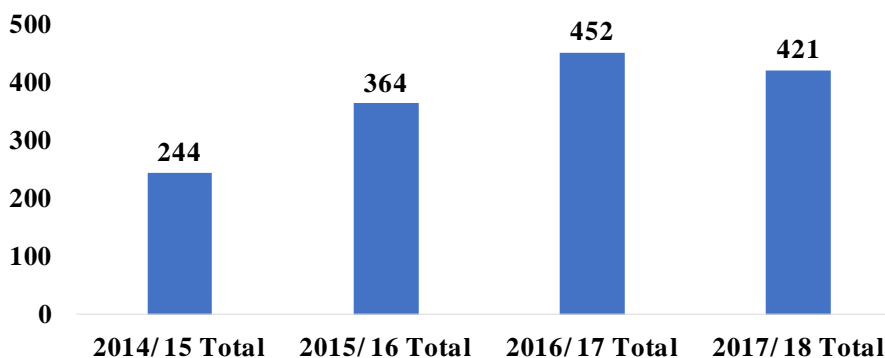
The first quarter of 2018/19 (April to June 2018) has shown a continuing upward trend with a 18% increase in Domestic Abuse incidents recorded by police – (1038 recorded in 2018/19 compared to 878 the previous year). It should be noted that these figures have been impacted by concerted efforts in the past 2 – 3 years by police around both their identification of Domestic Abuse incidents and how they are recorded. There has also been a priority for all partner agencies to increase confidence in victims coming forward to report abuse to police.

Domestic Abuse Incidents Reported to Police in North Somerset 2014/15 to 2017/18



Since 2014/15 there has also been a 73% increase (177 more) referrals to the high risk victims Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA) service.

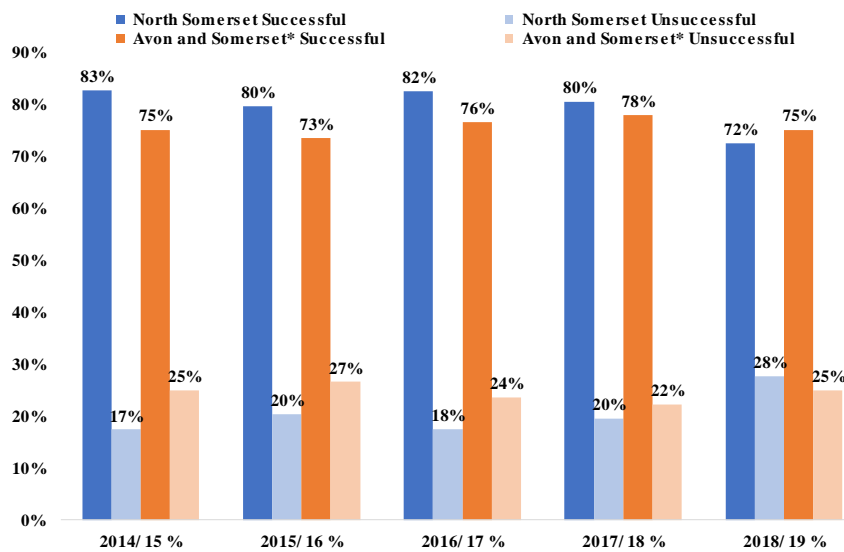
Referrals to North Somerset IDVA Service 2014/15 to 2017/18



In 2017/18 there were 215 prosecutions for domestic violence in North Somerset, 173 were successful. These figures are very similar to 2016/17 (217 prosecutions, 179 successful).

As already stated the number of Domestic Abuse crimes recorded by police has increased substantially since 2014/15 but the volume of perpetrators brought to justice has not. In 2014/15 there were 190 prosecutions in North Somerset out of 1231 Domestic Abuse crimes recorded (15% with 13% successful) but in 2017/18 there were 215 prosecutions out of 2300 crimes recorded (9% with 7.5% successful).

Outcomes of Prosecutions for Domestic Abuse in North Somerset 2014/15 to 2018/19



3.2 IMPLEMENTING A MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

The multi-agency Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (DASG) is accountable to the North Somerset People and Communities Board and also reports to the Safeguarding Boards. The DASG is facilitated by the Council’s Safer and Stronger Communities Service and includes representatives from Gemini Services, (the domestic abuse support service commissioned by the Council), Addaction, Supporting People, adult and children’s social care, health visitors, the hospital, mental health services, Police, Probation and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

The DASG is responsible for developing and implementing the local multi-agency response to domestic abuse. To facilitate the work of the DASG, the Council’s Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator works with colleagues to gather data on multi-agency domestic abuse reports and responses which is fed into an annual needs assessment. This information is collated alongside learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews and regular consultation with survivors and practitioners to inform the commissioning and delivery of services.

Current work also includes multi-agency training, awareness raising, production and dissemination of information on referral pathways, reviewing the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) processes as well as identifying and applying for external funding. In addition, the group is supporting the One Front Door initiative which is a new multi-agency triage system for domestic abuse referrals involving children and which involves co-location of key workers including an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) and representatives from the police, health and children’s social care.

Below are some examples of issues which the DASG has identified and responded to;

The issue: under-reporting of domestic abuse

Based on estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2016, 6,732 adults aged 16 to 59 in North Somerset are likely to be victims of domestic abuse in any year. However, only 3,855 domestic abuse incidents were reported to the police last year, which demonstrates that a lot of victims live with domestic abuse, suffering its ill effects without seeking support.

The response: Led by the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Service, a range of activity is in place to improve the community's awareness of domestic abuse including:

- Production and dissemination of business card sized concertina leaflets which give an outline of what domestic abuse is as well as a list of contacts for support. These were co-designed with survivors of domestic abuse
- Production and dissemination (placing extra focus on target locations e.g. doctors surgeries, hospitals, children's centres) of posters, leaflets and flyers across North Somerset as well as facilitation of awareness events
- Production and distribution of a Friends and Families Guide to recognising domestic abuse and supporting someone affected by it

The outcome:

Although, as above, reports to the police concerning domestic abuse remain lower than actual incidence, the rate of reporting has increased considerably in recent years with a 29% increase in police reports since 2014/15 (this equates to an increase from: 2987 reports in 2014/15 to 3855 in 2017/18).

The issue: increasing demands on support services

The successful work to improve reporting described above has led to an increased demand for support services. There has been an 85% increase in referrals to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) service which supports high risk cases since 2014/15. This equates to an increase from 244 referrals in 2014/15 to 452 referrals in 2017/18. This has been accompanied by a 37% increase in referrals to the Gemini Service outreach team which supports medium risk cases.

In addition to the above increasing volume of referrals, there has also been an increase in the complexity of individual cases, for example, those involving service users with mental health and/or substance misuse and/or alcohol issues.

The response:

- I. The Safer and Stronger Communities Service has worked with partners from the DASG to seek funding opportunities to increase capacity. This has resulted in an additional £303,750 government funding being obtained for domestic abuse support in North Somerset in the last 3 years. £200,000 of this funding was obtained to develop best practice responses to individuals with complex needs. The substance misuse and domestic abuse complex needs project developed with some of this funding was described as "an outstanding initiative" by the Care Quality Commission and 2 further bids have recently been submitted for similar best practice projects; the outcome of these is awaited.
- II. A People and Communities Board working group was set up in 2018 to consider options to respond to the increasing referrals to the specialist support service delivered by Gemini Services. This group concluded that the above additional

complex needs funding would provide some additional capacity in the short term which would enable future commissioning plans to be developed.

- III. Development of peer support - sometimes survivors of domestic abuse need support around issues related to their experience of domestic abuse, such as social isolation and low mood or self-esteem. It is important that survivors are supported around these issues as not providing support may result in them returning to their abuser or entering another abusive relationship. However, it may be possible for support to be provided by friends, family or another group or agency and often the outcomes of this non-specialist support are extremely positive. Therefore, the Safer and Stronger Communities Team obtained £90,000 of government funding to work with Gemini Services and survivors to develop drop-in sessions where survivors can provide and receive peer support from others who have experienced domestic abuse. A Survivors' Handbook which provides tips and guidance for people affected by domestic abuse has also been produced.

Outcome:

Feedback from drop-in participants has been extremely positive; with one participant commenting that "it made me more confident, I finally get it figuring out this is how I want to be". A friends and families guide is available to help people support a friend or family member affected by domestic abuse. Successful funding bids have enabled these approaches to be developed and have resulted in increased capacity in specialist services.

The issue: re-procurement of domestic abuse services

The previous service provider (Salvation Army Housing Association) declined proposed contract extensions for provision of low to medium risk support, accommodation and training, high risk IDVA service and peer support. This meant that there was a risk of vulnerable victims being left unsupported at the end of the contract.

The response:

The Council's Safer and Stronger Communities and People and Communities Commissioning teams worked closely together to carry out an emergency procurement exercise followed by management of the transfer of the service to Live Well South West (formerly known as Liverty Housing Association).

Outcome:

The new contract commenced on 1 August 2018 achieving continuity of service for service users. Initial feedback from partner agencies and service users is positive.

The issue: the need for support for children and young people affected by domestic abuse

The long term health and social impact of living with domestic abuse as a child is well documented in research on Adverse Childhood Experience. Local survivors of domestic abuse repeatedly highlight their wish for additional support for their children who have lived with domestic abuse. In addition, they highlight the need for teenagers to be given information on domestic abuse in order to prevent them from entering into abusive relationships. Witnessing domestic abuse is a Children's

Safeguarding issue and over half (56%) of all referrals to Children's Social Care refer to domestic abuse.

The response:

- I The Safer Stronger Communities Team has worked to identify and apply for funding opportunities to provide additional specialist domestic abuse support for children and young people. As a result, partnership and government funding has been obtained to provide a support worker within Gemini Services to work closely with children within the refuge and with children in the community whose parent is being supported by the service.
- II In 2016 and 2017 a Gemini Services worker was commissioned by the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities service to engage with schools in North Somerset to encourage and help them to facilitate healthy relationships sessions. This project engaged with all schools in the district which delivered a range of programmes on the issue. Last financial year, the worker was commissioned by the Council's Strategy and Policy Development Team, as part of the DASG, to write a Healthy relationships programme which can be delivered by others.
- III The Council's Strategy and Policy Development Team also obtained funding to train professionals from a range of agencies to deliver the NSPCC's Domestic Abuse Recovering Together (DART) programme which consists of facilitated groupwork sessions for children affected by domestic abuse and their non-abusive parents. The team also obtained funding for Talking to Children about Domestic Abuse, a booklet aimed at parents and other adults who want to support children affected by domestic abuse.
- IV The DASG facilitated the development of My Kids and Me, a groupwork programme for mothers to help rebuild their relationships with their children after domestic abuse. This course was written by a partnership of professionals from Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services, Children and Young People's Services and Alliance Homes. It is delivered by Gemini Services and feedback is extremely positive.
- V The Safer and Stronger Communities Team worked with a group of Weston College students who produced a short film on domestic abuse. This film was launched at an awareness event for survivors of domestic abuse and has been disseminated to partner agencies to widespread acclaim.
- VI Two current funding bids relate to additional support for young people - the outcome of these bids is awaited
- VII The One Front Door will triage all domestic abuse referrals received by the police where there is a child affected. This will enable professionals from partner agencies to identify the best support for the children and will also provide data to inform future development of services and support future funding bids.

Outcome:

Additional support for children and young people is in place as described above.

The issue: the need for support for abusers who wish to change outside the Criminal Justice System

There is no robust evidence base for what works when trying to change domestic abuse perpetrators' abusive behaviour. There is currently no specialist service which works with perpetrators outside the criminal justice system and it is difficult to develop a service or find funding for one in the absence of evidence of what works

The response:

- I The DASG is supporting a Randomised Control Trial currently being carried out by Bristol University into community based perpetrator programmes. North Somerset agencies are referring offenders into this study; some of whom are randomly assigned to a support group. The results from this study are awaited and, together with results from a Safelives project being carried out in other areas in the UK, will help build a credible evidence base for work with perpetrators.

The issue: Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)

There is a statutory requirement for Community Safety Partnerships to facilitate a DHR when there is a local death resulting from domestic abuse. The review must be carried out according to Home Office guidance which includes that it must be Chaired by an independent expert and supported by agencies which had contact with the victim and/or perpetrator.

The response:

Sadly, since the requirement to carry out a DHR was enacted in 2011, the Safer and Stronger Communities service has facilitated 3 full DHRs with a 4th currently underway in North Somerset. It has also carried out 2 lessons learned reviews and supported a further 1 following suicides where domestic abuse was a factor. Findings from these reviews have been disseminated and action plans implemented from the recommendations.

Outcomes:

The statutory duty to carry out DHRs has been fulfilled and actions identified in local DHRs have been completed e.g. additional resources have been secured to support individuals with complex needs including substance misuse.

3.6 PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE WORK

The Safer and Stronger Communities Team and DASG have identified the following priorities for the multi-agency response to domestic abuse:

- I. Review service capacity to inform a re-commissioning plan and develop solutions to current capacity issues.
- II. Develop health based support (as identified in DHR action plans)
- III. Continue to facilitate the DHR currently underway, facilitate any others which may arise and develop action plans in response to recommendations
- IV. Continue to seek funding opportunities to increase resources for domestic abuse support, in particular support for children and young people affected by domestic abuse and work with perpetrators

- V. Continue to identify best practice multi-agency working in response to domestic abuse; including developing an action plan to continue the MARAC beyond April 2019 when current administration arrangements are due to end.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Survivor consultation is an integral part of the development of partnership responses to domestic abuse:
- Survivors are consulted as part of the annual needs assessment.
 - Individual interviews are carried out and focus groups facilitated when new developments are being considered.
 - Peer support initiatives such as drop-ins and handbooks have been developed in partnership with survivors. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government comments that the North Somerset Delivering Differently in Neighbourhoods initiative was “a good example of co-design to create support opportunities for survivors” and “the only case study which really highlighted the contribution made by service users”
- 4.2 The DASG is a multi-agency response to domestic abuse and ensures that partner agencies are involved in identification of priorities and the development of all multi-agency responses to domestic abuse
- 4.3 Partners of the People and Communities Board receive regular updates on domestic abuse priorities and responses.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
- 5.2 The Home Office calculates that the cost of domestic abuse to the district is £19,347,889 per annum¹, this includes costs to social services, health services and lost economic output.
- 5.3 Funding bids have obtained an additional £303,750 of government funding for domestic abuse support in the district since 2015.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Domestic abuse support delivers against the following key aspects of legislation:
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
 - Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
 - Children’s Act 1989
 - Care Act 2014
 - Health and Social Care Act 2012
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Directive 2012/29/EU
 - Public Services (Social Values) Act 2012
 - The Sexual Offences Act 2003

¹ Home Office VAWG ready reckoner

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Increased demand (higher numbers and more complex referrals to services) alongside limited resources (including current use of some time-limited funding) present a risk

Attempts are being made to mitigate this through:

- continued work to identify and apply for all possible external funding opportunities,
- updates to the People and Communities Board on progress against risks
- consideration of all options for commissioning support against the available budget
- continuing to explore all opportunities to encourage community support for survivors of domestic abuse, where this is safe

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Domestic abuse cuts across social class, economic status, ethnicity and cultural background and has a social, financial and health impact on victims. ⁱ However, the risk of domestic abuse and barriers to reporting are known to be greater for some members of the community. This includes a number of groups with protected characteristics. For example:

- vulnerable older people are at risk of abuse by carers and may face barriers to reporting abuse,
- women in younger age groups, in particular, in those aged 16–24 years are at greatest risk. Most cases are perpetrated by men against women
- “being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (Barter et al. 2009; Browne and Lim 2008; Home Office 2010)” are identified as factors associated with being a victim of domestic violence
- people with long-term illness or disability are identified as an at-risk/ elevated group.

9. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This report sets out key work areas, which contribute to corporate priorities.

10 OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 10.1 A range of options are considered when developing responses to domestic abuse which are identified through the multi-agency partnership approach.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

ⁱ (information from National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Centre for Public Health, Equality Impact Assessment PH50 Domestic Violence and Abuse: *How social care, health services and those who work with can identify, prevent and reduce domestic violence and abuse 24/2/14*)