

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 2ND MARCH 2022

SUBJECT OF REPORT: DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VAWG CRIME

TOWN OR PARISH: N/A

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: HOWARD POTHECARY (COMMUNITY SAFETY MANAGER) & HANNAH GRAY (DOMESTIC ABUSE & VAWG LEAD)

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the panel notes:

The ongoing implementation of the statutory duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and provide feedback on our plans for future development in tackling domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an opportunity for the Panel to review the work led by North Somerset Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Team in partnership with other agencies to meet the statutory requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and on local service developments to support survivors of domestic abuse and VAWG.
- 1.2 The report provides an opportunity for the Panel to feed into the future priorities and planned actions for the development and future funding of the council's response to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

2. POLICY

- 2.1 In April 2022 a new North Somerset Safer Communities Partnership Plan was published in which tackling Anti-Social Behaviour with a focus on key hotspot locations was highlighted as a key priority for the partnership.
- 2.2 The North Somerset Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 identifies the following three priorities:
 - A thriving sustainable place
 - A council which empowers and cares about people

- An open and enabling organisation
- 2.3 Domestic abuse and VAWG crime impacts on each one of these. Effective partnership working to tackle crime and disorder is crucial in creating vibrant, accessible, and safe places to live and visit. Community safety work programmes contribute to a range of public health outcomes including in relation to substance misuse, domestic abuse, violent crime, and re-offending.
- 2.4 The Joint Police and Crime Plan between Avon & Somerset's Police and Crime Commissioner and North Somerset's Community Safety Partnership identifies the following four objectives which our work around domestic abuse feeds into:
- Building strong resilient communities
 - Tackling crime and improving outcomes in priority neighbourhoods
 - Supporting vulnerable victims
 - Working together effectively

3. DETAILS

DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 3.1 The Domestic Abuse Act came into force on 29 April 2021. (*Home Office factsheet on the Act can be found in background papers*).
- 3.2 Statutory duties placed on local authorities by the Act include:
- Formation of a Local Strategic Partnership Board
 - A full domestic abuse needs assessment to be undertaken;
 - Domestic Abuse Strategy to be published in draft by end of October 2021
 - Safe accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse
 - Other support for survivors and children within the safe accommodation
- 3.3 The work we are doing in response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is being supported by partnership working with local agencies as well as Next Link, our commissioned specialist support service.
- 3.4 Next Link is the current provider of the North Somerset Domestic Abuse Services, taking over from Gemini in April 2020. They are commissioned to provide a range of domestic abuse services including:
- Single point of contact and helpline which receives all incoming referrals and enquiries from service users and professionals;
 - IDVA support working with high risk survivors in the community;
 - Floating Support working across North Somerset with survivors who are assessed as standard and medium risk
 - Safe House Services for women with children, single women, men and women with complex needs.
 - Children's support services working with high risk children and those living in the safe houses or in the community

- Community based Group Work interventions e.g. Freedom Programmes, Recovery tool kit, CRUSH- for young people, wellbeing support groups
- Next Link are responsible for administration and coordination of MARAC on behalf of North Somerset Council.

3.5 During the past 12 months, we have expanded the support Nextlink can offer to survivors and their children in North Somerset. This includes:

3.6 Using the DHLUC funding in relation to the Part 4 accommodation duties placed on North Somerset Council by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. We have funded:

- Housing Specialist IDVA – to support the housing teams, local organisations with specialist advice and support.
- Flexible Funding Pot – this enables an emergency one-off non-means tested grant to survivors to for purposes such as rental deposits, emergency accommodation costs and any other reasonable item or service, which support removal of barriers to safely leaving a domestic abuse situation.
- Male Support IDVA – we are currently recruiting for a worker to support male survivors within our safe house provision.
- Specialist Play Worker – based within the refuges to support children and young people through play and other trauma-informed work.

3.7 In order to expand our reach and continue to support survivors and children in North Somerset, we have also successfully secured funding from the Ministry of Justice to create 5 new IDVA posts, which are hosted by Next Link and include:

- Senior IDVA – she works with high-risk cases and has a smaller caseload as she supports the team and the manager.
- Complex Needs IDVA - she works with complex high risk cases.
- Rural IDVA - she works with high risk and medium assess cases within the rural community of North Somerset.
- Weston General hospital IDVA – to work in Weston hospital, currently working with the IDVA team in the BRI and supporting high-risk cases with the other North Somerset IDVA staff.
- Children & Young People IDVA – supporting anyone affected by domestic abuse up to 24 years of age.

Violence Against Women & Girls/Wider Work

3.7 Following the Government's publication of the new VAWG strategy in early September, North Somerset Council sought a number of funding opportunities and projects, which will allow greater understanding and response to this crime (see *background papers for further information*).

3.8 We have secured joint funding with Somerset County Council under the Safer Streets 3 and 4 initiatives. This has a focus on tackling violence against women and girls in public places as well as the night-time economy. The funding has enabled us to create a Safe Haven scheme, educational programmes in schools, mobile CCTV cameras and a targeted communications campaign to raise awareness and challenge attitudes and behaviours around VAWG.

- 3.9 North Somerset Council is working in partnership with local business owners to implement the 'Ask for Angela' scheme within all the larger entertainment venues in the County such as The Grand Pier, Tropicana and Popworld.
- 3.10 The 'Caring Dads' domestic abuse perpetrators programme has been introduced and implementation to commence shortly in North Somerset. This programme has been funded by the Violence Reduction Unit and supported by existing North Somerset Council Social Care staff.
- 3.11 North Somerset Council are about to submit a pan authority application together with Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council to expand the DRIVE Partnership programme across the 3 areas. This is a high risk perpetrator programme, which will be supported heavily by partnership working with local agencies and police and offers both disruption and behaviour change programmes as part of the pilot. Further details to follow and we will be notified of the outcome of this application in April 2023.

Challenges

- 3.12 One of the biggest challenges we face is sustainability. Both the Ministry of Justice and DHLUC funding streams have been confirmed to 2025. Following this, we are uncertain as to the level and types of funding that will be made available for these services. We will also be going out to re-commissioning around this time when the existing contract with Nextlink comes to an end.
- 3.13 Domestic abuse is still very under-reported as a crime. We are working in partnership with other agencies to increase public confidence in reporting and ensuring perpetrators of domestic abuse are held to account.
- 3.14 The data held on domestic abuse incidents is only part of the picture and does not always accurately represent survivors in terms of demographics or community. We are therefore working hard to ensure the voices of all survivors and children are heard in our service development.

Our vision going forward

Funding

- 3.15 One of our key priorities for the Domestic Abuse Act implementation is to ensure effective continued use of the funding we have received for this purpose from the Department for levelling up Housing & Communities (formerly MHCLG). This will secure and maintain funding levels in future years.
- 3.16 We will continue to meet with the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership Board to ensure continued success in meeting the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act as well as seek other avenues of funding to support the work we are doing around the wider safety issues for women and girls in North Somerset.
- 3.17 Our work supporting Domestic Homicide Reviews has thankfully been minimal in recent years. However, we know cases are rising nationally and we will therefore be looking to our partner agencies to continue joint funding for this purpose to ensure we can meet our obligations in relation to DHR's going forward.

Staffing

- 3.18 We have expanded the staff team supporting delivery of the domestic abuse work to include a DAHA Lead and a Project and Engagement Officer. Both these roles will support delivery of our statutory duties and will ensure survivor voice is embedded in all our service development and policy.
- 3.19 The Safer Streets 4 initiative funding includes provision for a coordinator to oversee this project and we have Project Officer currently seconded into this point on a part-time fixed term basis.

Improving the awareness of domestic abuse

- 3.20 We have identified that there is a need to improve the awareness and education in relation to domestic abuse. Particularly among younger people in the County. To address this, we plan to launch a number of awareness raising campaigns to improve awareness and begin challenging attitudes within the community. This will include expanding our existing 'Healthy relationships' workshops in secondary schools to include topics such as domestic abuse and misogyny.
- 3.21 In line with Section 75 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Government's 'Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan', which specifies the need for pursuit of perpetrators who commit domestic abuse. (see background papers). We are looking to expand our focus onto those who perpetrate domestic abuse and VAWG crime and are working with Business Intelligence colleagues on the creation of a domestic abuse perpetrator dashboard. This will enable us to gather data from local agencies to develop our profiling of DA perpetrators.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with key stakeholders throughout the process of creating our North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023.
- 4.2 Members have been consulted through the Community Safety Working Group and ad hoc information update meetings with Councillors and interested representatives.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. The activities referred to within the report are accommodated within existing approved budgets and resources.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 N/A

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 There is a risk that services and support for domestic abuse survivors cannot be sustained going forward. This risk is being mitigated by the Safer Communities Team through identifying short-term and long-term funding to ensure the sustainability of local services and support.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Being safe and feeling safe affect some communities disproportionately (including those with protected characteristics). For example, some members of the community are more at risk of being the victim of crime – particularly some types of crime. We are working in partnership with local agencies and directly with community representatives to ensure their experiences are considered in service design and development. Domestic abuse is complex and no two experiences are the same.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 This report sets out work being done to sustain and develop our response to domestic and sexual abuse as well as violence against women and girls, which contributes to corporate priorities.

11. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 11.1 A range of options have been considered in terms of the most effective initiatives and funding sources to sustain and develop our strategic work in this area. This includes engagement with partners and stakeholders to jointly deliver our statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

AUTHOR

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APPENDICES

North Somerset Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023

<https://saferstrongerns.co.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/30852%20Domestic%20abuse%20Strategy%20ACC%200622.pdf>

Strategic Action Plan - <https://saferstrongerns.co.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/DA%20Strategy%20Plan%20on%20a%20Page.pdf>

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Government's Violence against Women & Girls Strategy

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan>

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Factsheet

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

Local Joint Crime Plan for North Somerset

<https://www.avonandsomersetplan.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/avon-and-somerset-police-local-crime-plan-north-somerset.pdf>

MAVISbus Website

www.saferstrongerns.co.uk/mavisbus