

REPORT TO : Safer Halton Policy & Performance Board
DATE : 20th September 2011
REPORTING OFFICER : Strategic Director, Communities
SUBJECT : Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
WARDS : All

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update the Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board in relation to the activities being supported across the Borough on domestic abuse and sexual violence.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION : That the PPB comment on the content of the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Domestic violence and abuse can be experienced regardless of race, gender, age, disability, sexuality and lifestyle. We know that at least 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime, whilst 750,000 children will witness it per year. In Halton we believe that tackling domestic abuse and sexual violence is vital to building stronger, safer and healthier communities.
- 3.2 Halton Domestic Abuse Forum (HDAF) has been established and is a multi agency partnership across statutory and voluntary agencies working to increase the safety of victims and take steps to reduce repeat victimisation common with domestic abuse and sexual violence and have implemented and supported a number of initiatives locally. The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety is an important member of the Forum.
- 3.3 The Halton Sanctuary Scheme aims to make it possible for victims of domestic violence and abuse to remain in their homes and feel safe. It hopes to avoid the associated traumas and inconvenience of being forced to relocate to other areas away from family networks, employment and schooling, and reduce the need for temporary accommodation. A protocol has been produced by HDAF and the Housing Partnership in association with specialist providers. It sets out how victims of domestic violence and abuse can access the sanctuary scheme and the processes to enable additional security measures to be installed in the victim's home.
- 3.4 Many victims of domestic violence are reluctant to pursue the

prosecution of perpetrators as it may put them at risk of further incidents in the future. Victims are also known to be reluctant in court because of their relationship with the perpetrator, particularly where children are involved. Many feel vulnerable and intimidated and find the prospect of going to court daunting.

- 3.5 The SDVC (Specialist Domestic Violence Court) was established to tackle the problem of low levels of prosecutions for domestic violence cases. Halton SDVC aims to provide an increased level of support to victims to address the issues of victims withdrawing for the criminal justice system. 75% of cases had successful court outcomes and the Crown Prosecution Service reports that successful prosecutions are at 81% which is higher than the 69% recorded in the same period last year.
- 3.6 On the 14th April 2011, it became a statutory duty to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR). A Multi-Agency Domestic Homicide Review process for Halton is currently in draft, this will ensure that Halton is able to respond to the need should a Domestic Homicide take place in the Borough.
- 3.7 The purpose of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC's) is to share information on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of Cheshire Police, Probation, Health, Child Protection, Housing Providers, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim, to safeguard any associated children and to manage the behaviour of the perpetrator.
- 3.8 During quarter one 42 cases were discussed at MARAC involving 31 children. Increasingly younger victims and perpetrators are coming to the attention of the MARAC, and Connexions are offering additional support to young people through the Sexual Health Team.
- 3.9 During quarter one of this year 218 incidents of domestic abuse were reported from the Halton area to Cheshire Constabulary this is a reduction of 100 when compared against the same period for 2010-11.
- 3.10 There has also been a significant reduction in the incidents of domestic sexual offences during this quarter with only one being recorded compared to 10 during the same period on 2010-11.
- 3.11 In order to work toward nationally recognised guidelines, (to increase referrals to MARAC from agencies other than the Police), DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour based Violence) training has been offered to free of charge to a number of partnership agencies and teams across Halton to raise awareness of the risk assessment tool and encourage increased usage.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 A Multi-Agency Domestic Homicide Review process for Halton is currently in draft, this will ensure that Halton is able to respond to the need should a Domestic Homicide take place in the Borough.

4.2 A draft Halton Sanctuary Scheme Policy, Procedure and Practice has been developed.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCILS PRIORITIES

5.1 Healthy Halton

To remove barriers that disable people and contribute to poor health by working across partnerships to address the wider determinants of health such as unemployment, education and skills, housing, crime and environment. For example, reducing early deaths by ensuring domestic homicides are avoided.

5.2 Children and Young People in Halton

Children and young people in Halton are emotionally, physically and sexually healthy and Children and young people will feel safe at home, in school and in their communities. For example, ensuring homes are healthy and safe environments through offering support to parents and providing access for aftercare support for victims of sexual violence whether a child or young person.

5.3 Safer Halton

To understand and tackle the problem of domestic abuse in all its forms. For example, through ensuring adult victims have access to protective and supportive measures reduces the level of domestic incidents and the subsequent impact on the environment with regards to crime and ASB.

5.4 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

To maximise an individual's potential to increase and manage their income, including access to appropriate, supportive advice services. For example, through support services assisting victims to develop better financial management skills and to address debt through appropriate sign posting.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 These are contained within the report.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The main Council funding for domestic violence services is via the Supporting People budget and Working Neighbourhood Funding (WNF).

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is in the process of being completed for the Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy.

WNF will cease on 31 March 2012 and options for alternative ways of providing services and funding existing services are being explored.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 None under the meaning of the Act