

REPORT TO: Children Young People and Families
Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 2 September 2015

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children and Economy

SUBJECT: Domestic Abuse Family Support Service
Update

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the activity from the Domestic Abuse Family Support service during its first year. T

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- i) The positive developments in the Domestic Abuse Family Support service are noted;**
- ii) To explore options to continue with the commissioned service for 2016 onwards.**
- iii) To note the potential cost effectiveness of the DA service in diverting children from care.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 In November 2013, Halton Borough Council commissioned Core Assets Children's Services to deliver a new domestic abuse service for children, young people and families experiencing domestic abuse to ensure a co-ordinated approach for families.

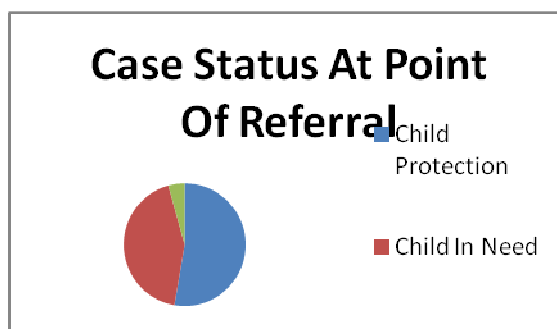
3.2 The service provides information, advice and direct support to families in a variety of methods. It works directly with parents to reduce the impact of domestic abuse on parenting capacity, helping them to understand and address the impact on the child's behaviour, both individually and in groups. It affords children and young people who have lived/ or are living with domestic abuse opportunities to share their feelings in an environment which is safe, through a discreet Art Therapy service as well as within Child Safety Planning work. The service also supports HBC Children's Social Care with the Cheshire and Merseyside Local Authority Pre-Proceedings Protocol.

3.3 The staff team consists of a Manager/Contract Lead, 2.5 FTE experienced children and family support workers and a 0.4 FTE Art Therapist. In addition, male sessional staff have been utilised which has proved useful in being able to offer positive male role models to children and young people.

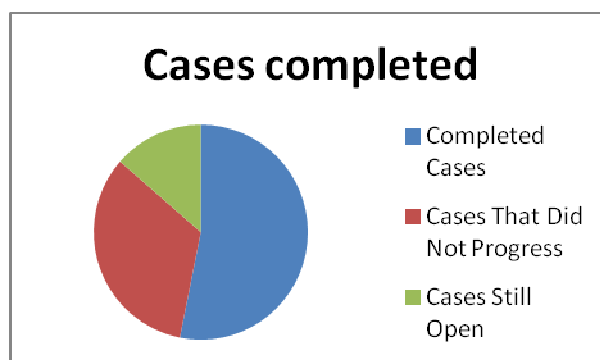
Overview of Activity

3.4 When the service started, cases were accepted at all levels – Pre-Proceedings, CP and CIN level. However, it was noted that some cases in pre-proceedings would benefit from more intensive interventions from the service. This led to adapting the service to meet this identified need and monitoring caseloads of the small team very closely.

3.5 The chart below highlights the case status at the point of referral since the service began. The majority of cases were open to Children’s Social Care at a CP level. 22 of those were in pre-proceedings. There were also a small proportion of families where the children were living with family members or foster carers temporarily due to the presenting concerns at that time.



3.6 To date the service has received **96 referrals**. Seven of the referrals did not progress due to not meeting the criteria of the service, for the following reasons: living out of area, when the presenting concerns are not domestic abuse related, the children being in foster care with no plan of returning them to the care of parents and when the intervention is inappropriate for the family at the time of referral.



3.7 The chart above indicates that **51** of the cases completed all actions on their Family Action Plan, which acts as a sub-plan to the statutory plan. **32** of the families failed to complete the full programme, however it must be highlighted that where parents may have failed to engage, where appropriate, work was still completed with the children or other family members. In one case where maternal grandmother had the care of the children, she was offered a place on

the parenting group where mum had failed to engage. **13** of the cases are still currently open to the service.

- 3.8 Due to the complexities and dynamics of an abusive relationship, the service often works with families who are challenging to engage. When this has been the case the service has made avid attempts to engage families through joint working with other agencies including children's social care, changing lives, health visitors and schools. By utilising an already established professional network, the service flexibly approaches service users to promote engagement. For example, the service has met victims whilst dropping the children off to school or nursery. This means service users can access the programme whilst still in relationships with abusive partners without any change to normal daytime routines which keeps the programme as discreet as possible.
- 3.9 One of the most significant factors for families who do not complete the programme is that when on high level statutory plans, there is an expectation that families will work with a wide range of services. This can often feel overwhelming for parents, especially as parents have previously had difficulties engaging with services. The work the service undertakes involves reflection on difficult experiences service users have faced and unfortunately it is not always an appropriate intervention at that time.
- 3.10 Currently the service has offered **608** direct sessions with **97** parents. 96 of these parents have been female. The service has worked with one male parent.
- **50** children/young people completed one to one support aged **3 to 17**
 - **228** sessions have been offered to children/young people on a one to one basis
 - **245** group sessions have been offered to parents.
 - **171** sessions of Art Therapy have been offered to parents and children providing direct recovery work to deal with the trauma of domestic abuse.
 - **2** court reports have been requested by social workers
- 3.11 The service has offered a flexible approach to its delivery, offering sessions at different times of the day (including early mornings, evening and weekends) allowing to meet the needs of families and to support routines and boundaries for children and young people.

Challenges to the service

- 3.12 Activity within the first quarter was slow. One of the main issues around this was an unclear communication pathway between social care and the service. To address this, the service attended Children's Social Care meetings to illustrate the referral process for social workers. This happened on a fortnightly basis over the two localities.
- 3.13 Early on the service found it was receiving a number of inappropriate referrals, mainly due to general parenting needs where no domestic abuse was present. To address this, a clear service criteria was devised whereas there must be:
- There must be either DA present or it has been present within the last 12 months, and/ or
 - There is an identified need that the family require both parenting and child safety planning support within the household.

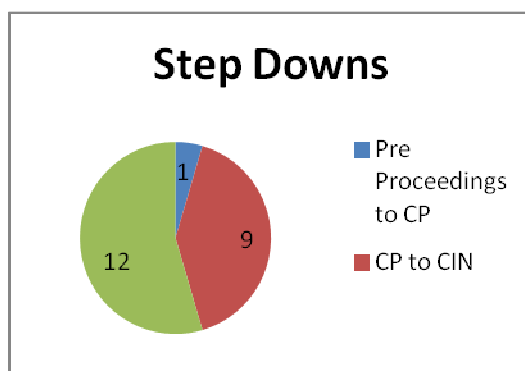
3.14 During 2014 and into 2015, the service has been working at capacity and has had to stop receiving referrals at times. The service does not hold a waiting list due to the levels of risk. As a result of the demand on the service, the criteria were further reviewed to work only with families who are open to Children's Social Care at a pre-proceedings level. This change both gave the service some capacity back as well as offering more scope to be able to attend professional meetings and become a more integrated part of the professional network.

Performance and Outcomes

3.15 There is a clear performance framework in place that records all raw data and output activity as well as outcomes for individuals and families. This includes hard measures – e.g. number of step-downs, number of parents entering employment, education and training, as well as Distance Travelled measuring the use of strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs), Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and the DASH as nationally recognised tools for measuring well-being and risk.

3.16 During the life of the service, **twenty two** step downs have been achieved. This reflects the positive outcomes of the service, and its contribution to both better outcomes for families as well as relieving pressure on public services.

3.17 **Appendix 1** demonstrates the potential cost effectiveness of the domestic abuse interventions from the service. This is based on ensuring that children and families are referred into the service to achieved particular outcomes which means that the children and families are more likely to 'step down' into less intensive , lower cost services. Further work on this needs to be developed to understand the needs of remodelling the service and the wider impact from a prevention angle.

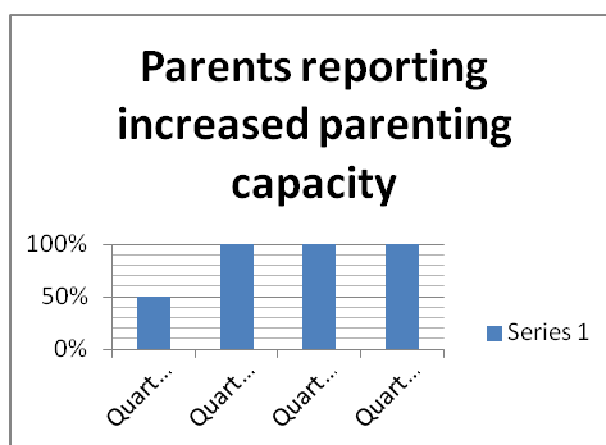


3.18 **100%** of children/young people who accessed one to one support reported feeling safer following completion of the work. **100%** of children/young people reported that they feel more able to live at home safer following the one to one work. **100%** of children/young people report that they feel that their home is a better and safer place to live following the involvement of the service. The service gave the children/young people who have lived with domestic abuse opportunities to share their feelings and have their voice heard in a safe environment.

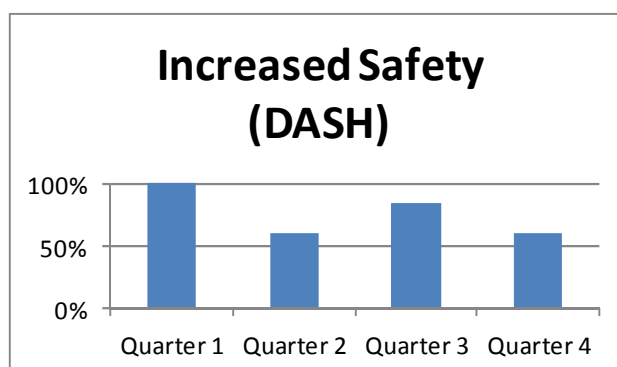
3.19 It is not uncommon for children where domestic abuse is a presenting concern to have low attendance or underachieve academically. The service promotes a safe and stable home life where children are able to attend school and feel safe doing so. There are 32 children the service has supported through safety planning who have closed to the service with improved attendance or attainment. This is monitored within statutory plans and alongside partners in education during network meetings.

3.20 The service has worked with more than one child from the following schools: Secondary Schools - St Peter and Paul's, The Heath, St Chad's and Primary Schools- Simms Cross, St Basil's, Halton Lodge, St Gerard's All Saints.

3.21 The graph below indicates the percentage of parents who have self-reported that following the completion of the work with Core Assets Children's Services, they feel more confident as a parent and feel that their parenting capacity has increased as a result of the intervention:



3.22 The graph below highlights the percentage of improvements in safety. The data was captured through the completion of the DASH risk assessment before the intervention and at the closure point of the case. This illustrates the families who closed in that quarter and the reported increase in safety levels using the DASH. Please note each quarter indicates a different cohort of families.



3.23 A positive working relationship has been built between the service and Changing Lives and a clear Information Sharing Policy has been agreed between the two services to allow appropriate safeguarding of the service users. **27** of the cases have been co-worked between the two services.

- 3.24 The service has become a regular contributor to Halton MARAC, supporting the safeguarding of high risks families in Halton and has built positive working relationships with the professional network.
- 3.25 At the beginning and end of each intervention, service users complete a wellbeing scale. The improvements are noted below:

Quarter 2 – 43%

Quarter 3 – 14%

Quarter 4 – 9%

Although improvements are not as high as the service would have liked to have seen, it has to be noted that all results are self-reported and given that in quarter 4, families were at a pre-proceedings stage, results are expected to be at a lower level due to the intervention being at a higher level and the needs of the families being more entrenched/complex.

- 3.26 **35** adult victims/survivors have self-reported that following the intervention with the service, they feel more confident to access employment, education or training, with **18** of those people actually returning to either employment, education or training, a very positive **51%** success rate.
- 3.27 To date **19** families have achieved a Criminal Justice outcome whilst working with the service, mainly related to charges being made against the perpetrator. This indicates an increase in a victim's confidence to report abusive behaviour and have the confidence to progress with the criminal justice system.

Feedback

“Social Worker - “Excellent communication between myself and staff, able to come together with clear objectives and how these can be met with a timely manner producing positive outcomes for the family and in this case the work completed assisted with the risks to the child being reduced as the child status went from Child Protection to Child In Need”.

Social Worker – “Thank you for all your help; mum has reported how much she has enjoyed her sessions”.

Social Worker – “The mother in this case is very complementary of the worker Michelle Grimshaw and reports an excellent working relationship. As a result of this she intends to maintain her involvement with the service. Excellent rapport between HBC and CACS staff, joint visit takes place once referral has been accepted and roles and objectives clearly implemented from the start, full engagement from staff at meetings and reports received when they have not been able to attend. Clear, time focused and meaningful interventions with families which assists in bringing about change”.

Parent – “I realise that nobody is out to get me or remove my children. I understand that people want to help me move forward”.

Parent – “Feel more confident and do not feel scared. Previously when he has hit me I have panicked, but now I know what to do and I feel more confident in doing it. Can see my child is happier”.

Parent – “They have helped me and my family in every way. I thought at the start I didn’t need it, but I have realised that I really did as I now know that domestic abuse has affected my child. But with help from Michelle and Becky I now have a relationship with my son again and enjoy our family time”.

During a parenting group, mum had taken the content of session 1 home to read over. She returned to session 2 and reported that after reading over the content, she had realised that her previous 9 year marriage (before the abusive relationship) had actually been an abusive relationship. She had realised this after looking at the characterising and behaviours of an abusive partner, which she had not realised before. She believed that an abusive relationship was all about the violence and not the coercive or controlling behaviour.

Young Person – “Taught me to keep safe and helped me”.

Young Person – “Yes I feel safe at home”.

Young Person – “Yes I will feel safer at home. I know if I feel unsafe I can grab my phone and dial 999. If someone is hurt or there is a fire or someone is fighting I can call 999. I feel safe at home and know what to do if I don’t”.

Young Person – “Now I will know what to do if anything happens in my house in the future”.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The cost of the current contract is £148,500 per annum. Executive Board agreed to the extension of the current contract arrangements from November 2015 to the end of March 2016. The extension was agreed to avoid disruption and allow time to respond to the issues highlighted in the by OFSTED following the inspection in 2014.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

This service directly relates to improving the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. The service supports key elements within Halton’s Safeguarding and Children and Young People’s Plans.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills In Halton

A lack of sufficient service provision is likely to impact adversely upon children and young people with emotional health needs, which will subsequently impact upon their learning and future employment and skills development.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

The service support people to minimise reduce the risks of harm, and access relevant services to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5.4 A Safer Halton

The service provides support to vulnerable children, young people and families to assist them to access appropriate service provision within their local communities. This links to satisfaction with services and overall perception of the area in which people live.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 Failure to have a service in place will lead to vulnerable children, young people and families and services being placed under increased pressure.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 The service contracts specified within this report relate to the needs of individuals and families with protected characteristics as defined within the Equality Act 2010.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Equality Impact Assessment (2011)	Contracts & Commissioning Team 2 nd Floor Rutland House,	Lorraine Crane Divisional Manager IYSS & Commissioning
Report to Executive Board – 2 nd July	as above	as above

Appendix 1 Examples of Cost Avoidance from diverting young people from Care

Case ID	Date referral received	Divert from care narrative	Care plan - drop down	Cost per year	Cost weekly	Number of weeks since referral	Avoided costs coming into care (max 52 weeks)
W004	17/02/2014	The case came to the service on a Pre-Proceedings level due to the risk towards the child due to domestic violence. One to one support was offered to mum over a 16 week period. The case then was de-escalated to a CIN level before being closed to Children's Services on 23/11/2014	Foster care	£18,827	£362	72.00	£18,824.00
R005	02/12/2013	The case was referred to the service at a pre-proceedings level. One to one support was offered to mum and the young person accessed one to one Child Safety Planning. The entire intervention lasted for a period of 19 weeks. The case was reduced to a CIN level before being closed to Children's Services on 25/09/2014	Foster care	£18,827	£362	83.00	£18,824.00
W016	01/04/2014	The case was referred to the service at a proceedings level. The case was subject to direction to court proceedings in respect to three children. Core Assets Children's Services worked with the family for a period of 25 weeks in total. This included one to one support with mum, Child Safety Planning with the young person and mum also accessed the parenting group element of the service. Core Assets Children's Services also supported Children's Services with the court report process. The case has now been reduced to a CIN level.	Foster care	£18,827	£362	65.86	£18,824.00

Appendix 2 Case Study

The family became open to the service following an incident where the perpetrator forced his way into the home, broke the mother's arm and caused damage to her skull. The children were in the property at the time of the assault. The perpetrator was charged for assault but continued to contact the mother, breaking the conditions of his bail and the non-molestation order. Both children were on a Child Protection plan under the category of Emotional Abuse.

The mother of the family had an extensive abusive relationship with the perpetrator and father of the children since her teenage years. There are two children aged 2 and 3 years old. The children reported confusion to the service and lacked an age appropriate understanding of the situation. The service equipped the mother to understand the impact of the abuse on the children and supported her to put in appropriate strategies to manage this sensitive subject. The mother then ended the relationship following many reports of domestic abuse.

The perpetrator continued to contact the mother following the relationship ending which included abusive and threatening messages. The mother was very low in confidence and found it hard to communicate with others, showing as withdrawn and made limited eye contact.

The mother reported rape, emotional abuse and infidelity. The perpetrator was said to be controlling and jealous. This had a huge impact on the mother's parenting capacity, so the maternal grandmother became her support network. Though the grandmother lacked an understanding of abusive relationships and encouraged her to get back with the perpetrator. The mother failed to engage with other professionals on many occasions.

The service worked with this family to increase the mother's understanding of domestic abuse and to help her understand how to keep the children safe. Direct work was also undertaken to support giving evidence in court and the service supported her to attend court. The service also became a key member of the professional network, contributing to Core Group meetings. The mother attended the parenting groups which covers the Freedom Programme and Triple P Positive Parenting. Therapy was also provided so that the mother could talk through her traumatic experiences and build confidence levels.

The service continued to support the mother and the family subsequently moved into a refuge. The mother built up key knowledge of the characteristics of an abusive partner, the impact domestic abuse can have on children and her parenting capacity increased. The mother started to input into parenting groups and even challenged others within the group at appropriate times when discussing characteristics of abusive partners, evidencing a firm understanding.

The mother was then supported to attend court following the adjournment and gave evidence in court against the perpetrator. This resulted in the perpetrator being found guilty of assault.

The maternal grandmother was also invited to attend the parenting groups as she was an important figure for this family, helping her understand what her daughter

and grandchildren had experienced would ensure she could support them appropriately. This illustrates the holistic, whole-family approach the service has.

The mother remains in contact with the service, following a closure from Children's Social Care due to the improvements made. She reports as confident and explains she and her family are thriving. The mother has started to re-build her network of support following this breaking down when in the abusive relationship. The mother and the children have also returned to the family home.

The perpetrator was charged with a 26 month custodial sentence that has been suspended for two years. He is required to report on a weekly basis to probation and complete all of the courses with them. The mother was given a two year restraining order, meaning that the perpetrator is not allowed to contact her or be within 100 meters of her home address.

During a one to one session, this comment was made:

"It's mad because if you look back to this time last year I never thought I would be as strong as I am now to deal with this"

This is significant because this comment was made with confidence, sustaining eye contact and whilst smiling. The mother now acts as a mentor to families who have just been referred to the parenting groups.