

REPORT TO: Safer Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 7th February 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director, Community & Green Spaces

PORTFOLIO: Community Safety

SUBJECT: Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence

WARD(S) All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence service and the activities being supported across the Borough.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Further to the report received in July 2022 by the Board, the domestic abuse service has transferred to direct delivery from the Borough Council as of 11th January 2023. There are three elements to the services:-

- Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA's)
- Domestic Abuse Accommodation Service
- Listening Ear Domestic abuse service for children, young people and families

3.2 Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA's)

The team consists of five members of staff whom are now employed directly as local authority employees.

The main purpose of independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA) is to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members to secure their safety and the safety of their children.

Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans. They are pro-active in implementing the plans, which address immediate safety, including practical steps to protect themselves and their children, as well as longer-term solutions. These plans will include

actions from the Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) as well as sanctions and remedies available through the criminal and civil courts, housing options and services available through other organisations.

IDVAs support and work over the short- to medium-term to put them on the path to long-term safety. They receive specialist accredited training and hold a nationally recognised qualification. Since they work with the highest risk cases, IDVAs are most effective as part of an IDVA service and within a multi-agency framework. The IDVA's role in all multi-agency settings is to keep the client's perspective and safety at the centre of proceedings.

Studies have shown that when high risk clients engage with an IDVA, there are clear and measurable improvements in safety, including a reduction in the escalation and severity of abuse and a reduction or even cessation in repeat incidents of abuse.

3.3 Domestic Abuse Accommodation Service

The service has been awarded to SHAP (SHAP is a charity that has provided housing and support to young and vulnerable people across Merseyside for over 40 years) who took over this element of the service on the 11th January 2023. This forms part of a whole system response to reduce the impact of domestic abuse on individuals, families and the community. This will enable people of all ages affected by domestic abuse to be safe/r, to cope and to recover. SHAP will be provide specialist support that:

- Is focused on maintaining and/or developing service user's independence;
- Allows the routes back into mainstream provision to be used as quickly as possible;
- Provides refuge accommodation;
- Provides dispersed properties, to increase the resources available to all victims of domestic abuse;
- Works with local Registered Social Landlords and provides ongoing support to victims who would benefit from additional support, delivering services within the parameters of the House for Life model; and
- Provides resettlement support.

SHAP have a proven track record of service user involvement in shaping how local services meet the needs of this client group and will be providing ongoing meaningful dialogue as part of their duties within the Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, and offering support in order to develop and contribute to the authentic service user voice agenda.

3.4 **Listening Ear Domestic abuse service for children, young people and families**

Responding to children and young people who have been impacted by domestic abuse, the service will contribute to a co-ordinated approach to children and families affected by domestic abuse by providing a 'DiAmond', a therapeutic service for children, young people and families where domestic abuse has been an issue within 12 months of the referral. This is an enhanced service offer in Halton and includes therapeutic interventions and counselling for children and young people affected which commenced on the 9th January 2023. Eligibility is for Children & Young People who reside in Halton and for those aged up to 25 years if they have additional needs. Referrals will only be accepted via the online referral form <https://listening-ear.co.uk/refer/counselling> The referral pathway comes via MARAC, Integrated Contact & Referral Team (ICART) screening and domestic abuse supported accommodation requests. The key deliverables of the offer are:-

- Once referred to Listening Ear, contact will be made with the referring agency as well as the referred child/ family within 3 working days to inform them of next steps.
- If a child/ young person has a lead worker, the allocated counsellor would contact them to introduce themselves and let the lead worker know when the first session is going to be offered. The counsellor would also contact the parent/carer to offer an introduction, go through contract and confidentiality and clinical outcome measures. If there are any problems with contacting the parent/carer, then the counsellor would contact the lead worker to see if they could assist. If there is no lead worker, then Listening Ear would liaise with the person that made the referral.
- Listening Ear will deliver 6- 8 structured therapy sessions with children and young people.
- The first session will begin within 7 working days of Listening Ear receiving the referral. At the end of therapy, the counsellor would contact the lead worker to inform them that counselling has been completed and the child/ young person outcomes following the intervention and submit the individual outcome star scores from beginning and completion of intervention.
- There will be no waiting list as part of the service.
- Outcomes to be achieved are:
 - Improve mental health and wellbeing of non-abusive adults, children, young people and families affected by domestic abuse, evidenced through age-appropriate clinical outcome tools
 - Support improved mental health and wellbeing through trauma-informed support, promoting healthy relationships and breaking the cycle of abuse
 - Increase resilience, life chances, confidence, and self-

- o esteem for victim survivors of domestic abuse
- o Ensure victim-survivors are listened to and the service they are offered is in line with expressed needs.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 A saving of £39,605 has been achieved in the Domestic Abuse service arrangements.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

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

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Domestic abuse has a detrimental impact on employment. Among employed women who suffered domestic abuse in the last year 21% took time off work and a further 2% lost their jobs (Walby and Allen 2004). The impact of Covid linked to unemployment, furlough programs and redundancies and extended periods being locked down in abusive relationships is yet to be understood.

The services aims to enable individuals to optimize their potential and manage their circumstances, including access to appropriate supportive advice services assisting victims to develop better financial management skills and to address debt through appropriate sign posting.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The services support individuals and families impacted by domestic or sexual violence which impacts directly on their health. Providing appropriate support, accommodation and access to therapeutic services for Halton's young people will aid and improve individual and family resilience and outcomes.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

The services provide protective and supportive measures that strive to reduce the level of domestic violence incidents and the subsequent potential impacts for victims, families and Halton's communities. The services also strive to mitigate potential crime and anti-social behavior in Halton.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The accommodation service has physical assets that will be reviewed along with wider consideration of appropriate estate that supports the service users.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None to report.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 No known effect on environment at this stage, this will be further understood as we develop our accommodation offer for victims of domestic abuse.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.