

Minutes

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK & FINISH GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK & FINISH GROUP HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER 2011, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL,
AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 1.25 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 2.50 PM.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs M Aston, Mr N Brown, Mrs L Clarke (Chairman), Ms R Vigor-Hedderly and Julia Wassell

CO-OPTEEES PRESENT

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs L Ayres, Mrs K Sutherland, Ms M Thorpe and Ms S Yapp

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Peter Hudson, Arif Hussain and Tom Hunter-Watts. The Chairman asked if the Policy Officer could write to Doug Anson to check if he wished to be included in the Task and Finish Group, as he had not attended the first two meetings.

Action: Policy Officer

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Margaret Aston and Ruth Vigor-Hedderly declared that they were Spokespersons for Community Engagement, which includes the Community Safety team, who are responsible for Domestic Violence.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2011 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

Madeleine Thorpe, Policy Officer, took members through the proposed evidence gathering programme which would concentrate on three main themes – identifying victims of domestic



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



violence, what services were in place and do they meet the needs and the impact of domestic violence on children and young people.

As part of the evidence gathering a simple online questionnaire would be distributed to all county councillors, district councillors and parish councillors to identify the level of general awareness of domestic violence in the community. A member commented that it was important to encourage all councillors to respond. The Chairman asked if it was possible to monitor who had responded, but members were advised that the survey had to be anonymous.

A member commented that the domestic violence presentation at their Local Area Forum (LAF) was very well received and thought-provoking. The Chairman agreed and suggested that the findings of the review and the new domestic violence strategy should be reported back to the LAFs.

5 POLICING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Chairman welcomed DI Chris Inness of Thames Valley Police (TVP) to the meeting. The DI had been asked to brief members on the recording arrangements used by TVP. During the briefing and subsequent questions from members the following points were noted:

- A central call centre takes all TVP calls and all incidents and crimes are recorded on the CEDAR database. The system will then flag if the reporter or victim is a repeat caller or has been identified as a high risk victim.
- A crime will then be allocated for attendance - if a crime is in action, there is immediate attendance and an incident of domestic violence (DV) is guaranteed attendance within 20 minutes.
- A member asked if police officers attending a DV incident would utilise blue lights and sirens, as this could alert the perpetrator. DI Inness advised that whilst sometimes the police would use a silent approach, the blue lights and sirens could sometimes be useful, because if the perpetrator flees the scene it can prevent a DV incident escalating.
- All frontline staff are trained to recognise and deal with DV incidents. DI Inness commented that training provision had really improved over the last five years and especially during the past 2 years with support of partners. Members were interested in content of the training and DI Inness agreed to share the Power Point presentation with members.

Action: DI Inness

- The recording of incidents is scrutinised by performance monitoring teams to ensure compliance with central police recording standards. Also three referral and assessment centres have been opened in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire during 2011 to improve partnership working.
- Officers attending DV incidents use a Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment form to make an initial assessment. A standard risk level would be an incident not likely to cause serious harm. A medium risk level is an incident where there could be a risk of serious harm with a change in circumstances and a high level risk is where indicators suggest a risk of serious harm at any time.
- The DASH form is intelligence led and encourages positive interaction, often leading to arrest of the perpetrator. Officers were encouraged to always consider arrest and if they choose not to arrest then they would need to get this decision signed off by their supervisor.
- A member asked how the Police would know if a woman had been granted a safe haven in her own home by a judge through the civil courts, if the Police had had no previous involvement in the case. DI Inness advised that TVP were reliant on solicitors informing them of civil court orders. There is a new National Centre for Domestic Violence database which records non-molestation orders but TVP had to be proactive

in checking it. Often with civil court orders the first the Police know about it is when they attend a DV incident, whereas the communication between the Police and criminal justice colleagues is very good.

- A member asked how Thames Valley Police could increase the reporting of DV incidents. DI Inness explained that part of their training strategy included raising awareness throughout the Police, partners and local businesses. It was important to emphasise that DV can be emotional or financial control, not just violent. The Police know that DV is massively underreported and really want to see an increase. Susie Yapp, Safer Bucks Partnership Manager, added that under the last Local Area Agreement (LAA) one of the targets was to increase reporting of DV, which had acted as a real driver to improve this.
- A member commented that it would be useful if the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAG) would feature DV on their agenda, rather than continually focussing on parking and speeding issues. DI Inness said he would feed this back. Suzie Yapp commented that if a NAG chose to put DV as one of their priorities, then this would be a positive reflection on the work of Police and partners in raising awareness of this issue.
- It was noted that DV is particularly underreported in BME groups. A member asked how DV within the gypsy/traveller communities would be handled? DI Inness explained that this would be approached in the same way as any other incident, by working closely with partners. TVP have dedicated Traveller Liaison Officers who would work with DI Inness' team. Women's Aid provide support to DV victims from all communities.
- A member asked if frontline police officers would be aware of the background of individuals in their area. DI Inness explained that neighbourhood teams are used by the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to monitor and engage with high risk victims in the community. High risk victims feature on a daily briefing slide given to police officers to enable them to carry out a monitoring function. For example, if someone who had been jailed for DV offences was about to be released then local officers would be informed.
- If a woman packed up and left her home to escape DV and presented at a refuge, how would the Police help to support this person and catch the perpetrator? DI Inness explained that unless the victim wanted to report to the Police, then the refuge would not report the incident, as this would break down trust in their services.
- A member commented that he had heard that the Police can now take a case forward without a statement from the victim, if they had collected evidence from others. DI Inness advised that often victims would engage with the Police initially and then withdraw. Officers are trained to gather evidence from others, but things have to be handled sensitively as sometimes a police presence can escalate matters.
- A member advised that it can be a difficult call if you are aware of DV in your community. As a councillor and a corporate parent, your instinct is not to keep quiet, especially if there are children involved, but there is a concern that reporting to the Police could make the situation worse. DI Inness said that he would always encourage reporting to the Police and emphasised that information given would be handled sensitively. Where victims fail to engage, the Police take a positive approach towards children's safety, working closely with Social Care to arrange for assessments to take place.
- A member asked if children can give evidence against a perpetrator. DI Inness advised that if possible, and if proportionate, children's evidence can be used but they would need the parent's permission, unless the child was under a care order. This can also have severe implications for the relationship of the child with their parent, so this has to be weighed up.
- A member gave an example of someone who they believed was suffering with DV and asked for advice on how we can all reach out and support victims in coming forward. DI Inness said it was really important to raise awareness of DV as an issue and to ensure that victims were aware of the support networks which are available. The

Government have been trying to raise awareness through a TV advertising campaign and White Ribbon week has also been running for a number of years. At the moment the significance of the White Ribbon may not always be recognised but it was hoped that over time, the White Ribbon for DV would be as recognisable as the Pink Ribbon for Breast Cancer Awareness.

- A member suggested that it might be useful to produce white wristbands with DV helpline numbers on them that could be distributed in the street. It was also suggested that 'No excuse for Domestic Abuse' and the national helpline number could be included on BCC's headed notepaper to help to raise awareness.
- Susie Yapp added that often lots of people would not even recognise that they are victims of DV, when in fact it is quite prevalent and in Thames Valley there have been some terrible cases at the MARAC including murders. Lynda Ayres, Children and Young People's Commissioner, had previously worked as a Health Visitor. She advised members that when she delivered training to her colleagues there was always someone who knew of someone or who had themselves endured abuse in the past.
- In terms of supporting DV victims, Lynda Ayres commented that it sometimes helped to try and keep a log of incidents, although this needed to be kept securely where the perpetrator would not find it. In addition, some victims found it useful to plan an escape, although it was often at the point of escape that victims were most vulnerable.
- Susie Yapp suggested that it might be useful to offer some member training or debate on DV. Members agreed that this would be useful and suggested that including district colleagues would raise awareness even further.

The Chairman thanked DI Inness for his contribution to the meeting. It was noted that some members of the Task and Finish Group would be observing MARAC meetings prior to Christmas and others would visit Women's Aid refuges in the New Year, as part of the Group's evidence gathering.

6 COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Chairman welcomed Susie Yapp, Safer Bucks Partnership Manager and Lynda Ayres, Children and Young People's Commissioner to the meeting. Susie Yapp took members through her report proposing a more integrated approach to commissioning for Domestic Violence and Abuse. The proposal recommended using the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board, in conjunction with the Adult's and Children's Safeguarding Boards, to develop an overarching Domestic and Violence Abuse Commissioning Strategy with aligned budgets.

Members believed that this was a sensible approach and were happy to consider recommending aligned budgets and commissioning processes. Susie Yapp and Lynda Ayres were asked to provide specific points that could be covered in such a recommendation.

Action: Susie Yapp/Lynda Ayres

A member asked what services were commissioned by Children and Young People's services currently. Lynda Ayres explained that Children and Young People's Services commission Aylesbury and Wycombe Women's Aid to provide services. Women and children who are supported by the Aylesbury and Wycombe refuges may not be Bucks residents as it may not be safe for local women to be accommodated in Bucks. Refuges across the country have reciprocal arrangements to accommodate women from out of area.

Aylesbury and Wycombe Women's Aids have separate management structures but work closely together. Services commissioned include support services for children in the refuges, such as therapeutic play sessions. Further therapeutic play sessions are also held at Children's Centres for children not resident in the refuges – referrals may be from Health Visitors and the Women's Aid outreach service.

The Freedom Programme is offered to women who are victims of DV. This looks at protective behaviours for the future and helps to build their self-esteem. A member asked if women from Bucks who go to refuges in Hertfordshire or other local authorities would receive comparable levels of service. Lynda Ayres explained that the Freedom Programme was a national initiative and Women's Aid run refuges nationally. There is also an Adolescent Freedom Programme for girls aged 13 or over who have experienced domestic abuse within their homes and/or in personal relationships, which aims to prevent repetition of this in their own relationships in future. At BCC, 'This is Abuse' website (www.thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk/spot-the-signs) is being promoted to young people and staff within Children and Young people's services, to help young people identify abuse and understand what a healthy relationship should be.

Susie Yapp advised members that a new elected post of Police and Crime Commissioner was to be introduced in 2012. The Police and Crime Commissioner will be responsible for Community Safety funding. Susie Yapp is participating in a Thames Valley wide needs assessment with Police and other partners to ensure that priorities are identified and presented to the new Police and Crime Commissioner with a collective voice.

The Chairman thanked Susie Yapp and Lynda Ayres for attending the meeting.

7 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 18 January 2011, 2pm, Mezzanine 1, County Hall, Aylesbury

CHAIRMAN