

Final report of the Scrutiny Members' Domestic Violence Working Group

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Executive Summary

Domestic violence is an extremely serious issue that blights the lives of thousands, most of whom are women, and their families. As a Council we devote considerable services and resources to tackling its effects. In November 2000, a Members' seminar received a presentation from members of the Rotherham Domestic Violence Forum. From this meeting it was suggested that a working group be established with Members from each of the Scrutiny Panels. The working group was set up in March 2001 and agreed to look at the impact of domestic violence in Rotherham and identify ways in which the Council could address the issue.

The aim of the review was as follows:

- **To formulate a proposed corporate domestic violence policy and strategy and to consider what measures should be put in place to effectively implement these.**
- **To examine funding issues relating to domestic violence projects in Rotherham**

In doing this we wanted to identify and document:

- Existing services in Rotherham and where there are gaps in funding provision;
- Examples of good practice from other local authorities and relevant agencies in the region in relation to project funding (including reference to the recent 'Review into Funding of Voluntary and Community Groups'); and
- Working with Officers' Domestic Violence Working Group, examples of good practice in relation to the development and implementation of a Council domestic violence policy.

Who was involved?

Each Scrutiny Panel nominated at least one Member to participate. In addition, in order to broaden the working group's base, we co-opted members from appropriate community organisations to sit on the group and contribute to the discussions.

Representatives were co-opted from:

- Rotherham Domestic Violence Forum;
- Furniture Plus; and
- Rotherham Disability Network

As part of the review Members invited representatives from the following agencies: Community Safety Unit, South Yorkshire Police, Apna Haq, Choices and Options and Rotherham Women's Refuge. Additional contributions were received from the Chief Executive and officers from different Programme Areas.

The Review Group also considered relevant legislative and policy initiatives; namely

- Rotherham Strategy to Reduce Crime and Disorder (1999 – 2002);
- 2001 Crime and Disorder Audit; and
- "Living without fear" an integrated approach to tackling violence against women.

Summary of findings

- a) We wanted to oversee the development of a Domestic Violence Policy and respond constructively to the concerns raised about funding. In meeting these aims, we wanted to send out a clear message that domestic violence is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- b) It is clear that despite the worrying statistics, levels of domestic violence in Rotherham are no better or worse than comparable areas. We received evidence that demonstrated that there has been a long commitment by some organisations in the Borough to tackle domestic violence effectively. However, historically this has lacked co-ordination
- c) It is clear that a great deal of good work is taking place in Programme Areas and officers should be commended for this. However, there is still a task ahead to ensure that frontline staff are aware of the policy and have appropriate training to make sure they are able to do their jobs effectively.
- d) We heard from the representatives from the domestic violence service providers that funding uncertainties place great pressure on their organisation and we sought assurances that systems would be in place to improve this. We welcome the moves to more robust and longer term budgetary planning. Equally, we hope that the priorities of the Safer Rotherham Partnership are reflected in appropriate resourcing of services from our partners.
- e) The working group recognised that the network of domestic violence services providers in Rotherham deliver essential support to women and children experiencing domestic violence. We had concerns however, that they are unable to meet the demands placed upon them because of lack of staffing and other essential resources.
- f) We are concerned that the lack of bi-lingual staff or integrated and co-ordinated translation services for people (and especially women) who do not have English as a first language, has meant on occasion that family members or other members of their communities are used to translate. This could have implications for safety. There are also long term planning issues with the increase in numbers of asylum seekers, some of whom will inevitably experience domestic violence.
- g) Because the review was time limited, we were unable to give full consideration to the issue of how disabled people experiencing domestic violence access services and would suggest that further deliberation be given to this in the future.
- h) During the course of the review, we came across some very positive examples of multi agency working. We welcome the work that has taken place to improve the access of women leaving the refuge to community care grants. We hope that this example can be built on.

Recommendations

What has become apparent through this review is the ongoing need for 'joined-up working' and we commend the partnership work that is being undertaken to make our communities safe. It is with this in mind that we make the following recommendations to the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee to take to the Council and the SRP.

- I. The Corporate Management Team is urged to address the issue of sustainable funding for the domestic violence co-ordinator's post and for the Women's Refuge as a part of the budget process.
- II. That CMT should explore whether Service Level Agreements (or initiatives such as Supporting People) between the Council (or partner organisations) and service providers will provide a more secure basis for future funding.
- III. That the monitoring of progress of the 'Review into Funding of Voluntary and Community Groups' takes account of the specific concerns raised in this report.
- IV. The Domestic Violence Policy is fully implemented across all Programme Areas and its progress monitored through the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.
- V. Work is undertaken to develop a staff welfare policy for employees experiencing domestic violence, drawing upon good practice from other Local Authorities.
- VI. Consideration is given to developing appropriate interpretation and translations services across all Programme Areas. This could include facilities such as 'Language Line'. Similarly, the use of appropriate communication services for deaf/hearing impaired people (for examples minicomms, and 'typetalk') should be explored.
- VII. Work should continue to take place in consultation with relevant groups, to ensure that services are accessible and appropriate to the needs of disabled women and Black and Ethnic Minority women.
- VIII. That Social Services consider whether the designation of 'Children in Need' in the family support strategy can be extended and if appropriate, Choices and Options and/ or other agencies make referrals to the relevant agencies as part of their preventative work.
- IX. That the payroll-giving scheme is endorsed and implemented at the earliest opportunity.
- X. That Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee, with its power of health scrutiny, gives consideration to examining how domestic violence is addressed by health service providers.
- XI. The Council as a key player in the SRP, should continue to encourage the development and review of domestic violence policies and procedures across the other agencies.

Cllr GA Russell
Chair of Members' Domestic Violence Working Group

Original Concerns – why Members wanted to look at this issue

- 1.1 Domestic violence is an extremely serious issue that blights the lives of thousands, most of whom are women, and their families. As a Council we devote considerable services and resources to tackling its effects. In November 2000, a Members' seminar received a presentation from members of the Rotherham Domestic Violence Forum. The presentation aimed to outline the extent and nature of domestic violence and also what services were in place to address the issue in the Borough.
- 1.2 A number of concerns were raised at the meeting. It was recognised that it is difficult to address the issue of domestic violence because the crime often takes place behind closed doors and frequently there are no adult witnesses. We wanted to know how our services responded to victims and what role we could play in raising awareness and changing attitudes as part of a long-term strategy to reduce the incidents of domestic violence. Members looked at the cost of domestic violence to the economy of Rotherham as a whole and we were keen to explore what commitment and practical support the Council could give, especially in light of our responsibilities under Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- 1.3 From this meeting it was suggested that a working group be established with Members from each of the Scrutiny Panels. The working group was set up in March 2001 and agreed to look at the impact of domestic violence in Rotherham and identify ways in which the Council could address the issue.

2 Terms of Reference

The working group discussed the concerns raised at the Members' seminar and at an Area Assembly meeting and from that determined what our terms of reference would be. We started to meet at the same time as an Officers' working group and we were keen that the work of the groups complemented each other. We decided to focus on two major areas. The first is the development of a Domestic Violence Policy for the Authority and the second around funding issues for domestic violence projects.

- To formulate a proposed corporate domestic violence policy and strategy and to consider what measures should be put in place to effectively implement these.
- To examine funding issues relating to domestic violence projects in Rotherham

2.1 Scope

To identify and document:

- Existing services in Rotherham and where there are gaps in funding provision;
- Examples of good practice from other local authorities and relevant agencies in the region in relation to project funding (including reference to the recent 'Review into Funding of Voluntary and Community Groups'); and
- Working with Officers' Domestic Violence Working Group, examples of good practice in relation to the development and implementation of a Council domestic violence policy.

Members had great concerns about the effects of domestic violence on children. Unfortunately, as the review was time limited we were unable to look at what work

was being undertaken in schools, particularly around protection and prevention. We hope that this important issue will be taken up by scrutiny in the future.

3 Who was involved?

- 3.1 Each Scrutiny Panel nominated at least one Member to participate. In addition, in order to broaden the working group's base, we co-opted members from appropriate community organisations to sit on the group and contribute to the discussions.

Representatives were co-opted from:

- Rotherham Domestic Violence Forum;
- Furniture Plus; and
- Rotherham Disability Network

- 3.2 As part of the review Members invited representatives from the following agencies: Community Safety Unit, South Yorkshire Police, Apna Haq, Choices and Options and Rotherham Women's Refuge. Additional contributions were received from the Chief Executive and officers from different Programme Areas.

The Review Group also considered relevant legislative and policy initiatives; namely

- Rotherham Strategy to Reduce Crime and Disorder (1999 – 2002);
- 2001 Crime and Disorder Audit; and
- "Living without fear" an integrated approach to tackling violence against women

- 3.3 The **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** places a statutory duty on local authorities and the police to develop local partnerships to reduce crime and disorder. These partnerships will bring together all the relevant agencies, including those dealing with domestic violence and its survivors. A main duty of the partnerships will be to conduct an audit of local crime and disorder problems, including the nature and profile of domestic violence.

- 3.4 The document "**Living Without Fear - an integrated approach to tackling violence against women**" (available on the Women's Unit Website) was published in June 1999. This document sets out the Government strategy framework in relation to violence against women and offers examples of good practice from around the country.

The Government strategy sets three specific goals¹

- To provide timely support and protection to victims;
- To bring perpetrators of violence to justice; and
- To prevent violence happening in the first place

4. What do we mean by domestic violence?

- 4.1 Although we all agreed that domestic violence is a crime, it is not a specific statutory offence. The term is used to describe a range of criminal offences - and sometimes sub-criminal behaviour - occurring in particular circumstances, usually in the home.

¹ *Living Without Fear - an integrated approach to tackling violence against women* Home Office 1999

Consequently, there are many different definitions of domestic violence used by many different organisations. We decided to use a Home Office definition, as did the Officer working group and the Crime and Disorder Audit, because we thought it was important to identify a **common** definition or understanding, so that we were all clear about what we mean by domestic violence.

4.2 The definition is as follows:

“Domestic Violence includes all kinds of physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse within all kinds of intimate or family type relationships. Abuse can include harassment which can be actual, threatened or attempted. The most common abuse is carried out by men against female partners, but abuse can also occur by women against men, within same sex relationships as well as by in-laws and within the extended family.

People experience domestic violence regardless of their social group, class, age, race, disability, sexuality, lifestyle, religion or culture. The abuse can begin at any time, in new relationships or after many years spent together.

Domestic Violence can take many forms such as physical assault, sexual abuse, rape and threats. In addition destructive criticism, pressure tactics, disrespect, breaking trust, isolation and harassment. “

(adapted from Domestic Violence Break the Chain – Home Office 1999²)

5 Counting the cost

5.1 National context

“Domestic violence is rarely a one-off event. One violent incident tends to lead to another, and such incidents often increase in frequency and severity over time, sometimes only ending when someone is killed.”

The Rt. Hon Paul Boateng MP³

5.2 We wanted to get a picture of what is happening nationally and locally, however, we recognised that it is difficult to obtain truly accurate statistics. There are a number of reasons for this. Many agencies and the Police say that there is a massive under-reporting of incidents with the 2000 British Crime Survey estimating that less than one in three (31.3%) victims of domestic violence actually reported the incident to the police⁴. There are also inconsistencies in the way that agencies record incidents. Some agencies (such as social services, for example) may not record incidents as domestic violence if the initial referral is for some other reason (such as mental health). Undoubtedly, this will be repeated across the range of public services.

5.3 The following statistics are intended to give a flavour of the extent and nature of the problem.

- more than 1 in 10 women experience domestic violence each year⁵
- 2 women per week are murdered by their partner or ex-partner⁶

² Home Office Leaflet, “*Breaking the Chain*”, 1999

³ Home Office ‘*Multi Agency Guidance for Addressing Domestic Violence*’, 1999

⁴ 2000 British Crime Survey, Home Office

⁵ Women’s Unit & Home Office - “*Living without fear*” 1999

⁶ Homicide Figures 1998 as quoted in above

- domestic violence costs Hackney Social Services and Housing Departments in excess of £2.6 million per year⁷
- Domestic violence accounts for a quarter of all recorded violent crime⁸. In a recent survey by police forces, over 80% of all calls for help were attacks on women by male perpetrators. Approximately 8% were attacks on men by female perpetrators⁹

5.4 We were shocked at what we found; domestic violence is extremely common yet its effects remain largely hidden from view. As Council Members we were also alarmed by the potential costs to Local Authorities. We looked at the research 'The Day to Count' and received figures from the 'Counting the Cost'¹⁰. Both highlighted that the effects of domestic violence place a huge burden on services – not just in terms of obvious service provision such as housing and homeless services, but also in terms of schools, child protection, the number of children looked-after, mental health services, adult protection etc. We have a duty to consider these financial costs as well as trying to lessen the devastating impact of domestic violence on the lives of our citizens.

5.5 **Local context**¹¹

The following statistics give an indication of the scale of the problem. The first demonstrates that domestic violence is a major element in *recorded* violent crime in the Borough. The second example shows that significant Council resources are dedicated to providing services as a *result* of domestic violence. The third shows the response from service providers from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

- In Rotherham there were 2023 incidents of domestic violence reported to South Yorkshire Police Domestic Violence Officer during the period April 2000 – March 2001. 10.9% of these were repeat incidents.
- Rotherham MBC Housing and Environmental Services' records for the period April 2000 to March 2001 showed that 23.3% of all the homeless applications they accepted were due to domestic violence.
- In an audit of services in Rotherham carried out by the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator in August – December 2000, 73% of respondents gave information on how domestic violence impacted on their service users including:-
 - family breakdown
 - homelessness
 - mental and physical health problems
 - psychological and emotional harm
 - financial hardship
 - impact on children and young people's development
 - substance misuse and self harm
 - isolation from family, friends and support networks

⁷ Stanko, E., Crisp, D., Hale, C. and Lucraft, L (1998) *Counting the Costs: estimating the impact of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hackney*. Bristol Crime Concern - a report into the selected costs of domestic violence on public services, including health police etc indicated that in excess of £5 million was spent in Hackney in 1996. The costs to housing and social services constituted over half of this.

⁸ Kershaw, G., Budd, T., Kinshott, G., Mattinson, J., Mayhew, P., & Myhill, A. (2000); *The British Crime Survey 2000*, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 18/00

⁹ Stanko, E., Crisp, D., 'Day to Count' 2000

¹⁰ *Counting the Costs* as above

¹¹ taken from *An Audit of Crime and Disorder – 2001* Rotherham Community Safety Partnership

- impact on employees in terms of stress, sickness and absence

6 How does the Local Authority respond to domestic violence?

- 6.1 We were aware from the feedback from the Officer working group that many of our programme areas provide considerable support and services to people experiencing domestic violence. Anecdotally, we heard that it was overwhelmingly women who experienced violence from men they knew and in a significant proportion of cases, these women had children. We were aware that the violence was rarely a one-off incident, and often women experience frequent and severe attacks over some length of time before seeking help from agencies. We also received evidence that showed that men can also experience abuse within their relationships, but research suggests they are less likely to report being hurt, frightened or upset by what has happened. They are also less likely to be subjected to a repeated pattern of abuse¹².
- 6.2 There are two main ways in which the Council provides support to people experiencing domestic violence. The first is through direct service provision in housing, social services, youth and community work etc. The second is through supporting specific projects with funding applications or through grants.
- 6.3 The working group asked for an overview of Council services. All Programme Areas were contacted for information in mid 2001. We have highlighted some of the areas covered but it is worth stating that this is by no means an exhaustive list:

Social services

- Compulsory child protection training for all social workers. This training includes a component on domestic violence.
- Adult protection procedures for vulnerable or elderly people
- Developing strategies to support mental well-being for women experiencing domestic violence

Young People's Services

- Addressing domestic violence as part of the youth work curriculum
- Providing specialist support services to Asian families (Apna Haq)
- Providing centres and workers with training and information on domestic violence services and issues. Qualifying workers also have specific sessions to raise awareness of domestic violence.

Education

- Education Welfare Officers offer support to families where children and young people are having difficulties at schools
- Information has been provided to schools highlighting issues for children who are affected by domestic violence

Housing and Environmental Services

- Specific provision for people made homeless due to domestic violence

¹² Mirrlees-Black, Catriona (1999) *Domestic Violence: findings from a new British Crime Survey self-completion questionnaire* Home Office Research Study 191 Home Office

- Formal monitoring of domestic violence referrals

Social Inclusion

- Community Development Team has a named link worker with 'Choices and Options'

Human Resources

- Have developed an employee helpline in partnership with 'Westfield'. Advice is given on a range of issues including domestic violence.

6.4 It is worth noting that Housing and Environmental Services and Social Services both make a significant financial contribution to the Refuge's running costs. In addition, these programme areas, alongside Education, Culture and Leisure, also contribute towards the cost of the Rotherham Domestic Violence Forum Co-ordinator's post.

7 What other services are available in the Borough?

7.1 Whilst acknowledging that the Local Authority provides extensive services, it is worth noting that we are not the sole deliverer of services. The Community Safety Officer gave an overview of the range of both general and specialist services in the Borough. These include:

- Women's Refuge
- Apna Haq
- Choices and Options
- NSPCC Domestic Violence Family Support Project
- South Yorkshire Police
- Youth Start
- Victim Support

7.2 We also received a presentation from a Domestic Violence Officer from South Yorkshire Police. She outlined how South Yorkshire Police respond to incidents of domestic violence. There are currently two officers within the Rotherham area that deal specifically with domestic violence incidents, although at the time of the review, one had been absent for some time. The Police Officer briefly highlighted joint initiatives to improve security in the home that have taken place with Housing Associations and Housing and Environmental Services. We asked her about how incidents were monitored and recorded and it was highlighted that limited resources had been given to this function. However, it was hoped that with the introduction of new technology it would be easier to monitor details.

The Police Officer gave some details of the training that police receive to enable them to deal with incidents sensitively and appropriately. Whilst improvements had been made to the way incidents are dealt with, there were concerns expressed that some cases of domestic violence were not being recorded as such. Officers were attending scenes and crimes were being recorded as assault or public order offences for example. This means that the true extent of domestic violence may be under-recorded.

- 7.3 During the course of talking to the various witnesses, we posed the question were services improving? We were heartened that most reported positive developments, however, there were uncertainties about what progress was being made by health service providers (although the Domestic Violence Forum Co-ordinator reported that awareness training was being delivered to midwives). We were unable to explore this further but we consider that this warrants future attention. We were also only able to get a snapshot of work undertaken by the police. Because of time constraints, we were unable to highlight in any depth how they address domestic violence and make comparisons with some of the good practice undertaken by other forces in the Region (for instance West Yorkshire Police).

8 Why develop a Domestic Violence Policy?

- 8.1 Notwithstanding the excellent work that is taking place in many of the programme areas, we had very real concerns that there was a lack of co-ordination across the Council. What became clear during this exercise was, with the exception of Housing and Environmental Services and to a lesser extent Social Services, that there was a lack of written protocols and procedures across the Council and that further work needed to be done to develop formal monitoring systems.
- 8.2 We were also aware that the 'Strategy to Reduce Crime and Disorder (1999-2002)' had as a priority a commitment to ensure that key agencies develop written policies and procedures. Clearly, this target had slipped, as many of the key agencies, including the Council had not yet completed this task.
- 8.3 With this in mind, we asked the Officers' domestic violence working group to begin formulating a corporate policy. We were aware that a number of Local Authorities around the country had developed their own policies and we asked Officers to incorporate relevant good practice from these policies. Following concerns raised at our surgeries about the risk of information being shared inappropriately, we were particularly anxious that the policy should be accompanied with guidelines on confidentiality. We were pleased that comprehensive guidance notes were produced that highlighted what safeguards should be put in place. Throughout the process we received regular updates from officers and we value their input and hard work in developing the policy.
- 8.4 The full policy has been subject to wide consultation. Officers circulated the draft to the Domestic Violence Forum for their comments. Additionally, each of the Programme Areas had the opportunity to contribute to the policy and guidelines. The policy is to be presented to Cabinet and Council in the summer of 2002.
- 8.5 The Policy provides guidance on what we can do as a Council and how services can be improved. However, we recognise that whilst we can do much to improve service delivery *in-house*, the success of the Domestic Violence Policy is also dependant on external provision, much of which is delivered by voluntary sector partners. As Members, we believe the Domestic Violence Policy offers a real opportunity to deliver co-ordinated and effective services to one of the most vulnerable groups in the Borough and we are hopeful that the policy can provide a helpful model for other services across Rotherham. Because we recognise that domestic violence occurs across all sections of our communities some of our employees may have experienced or be affected by domestic violence. With this in mind, we acknowledge the duty of care that we have towards our employees and

commend the work that is taking place to develop a welfare policy for staff. We look forward to its completion and implementation.

- 8.6 During the course of the review a number of additional issues were raised. Concerns were raised by the Women's Refuge that highlighted that some of the women and children leaving the Refuge to take up permanent tenancies granted by the Council are incurring rent arrears.

In some case, although women have signed up to the tenancy, they are unable to move into a council property immediately as they need a Community Care Grant (CCG) to purchase essential household items such as beds, bedding, fridge, cooker etc. CCGs cannot be applied for until the address of the new tenancy is known and claims at that time were taking up to 4 weeks to be assessed.

We heard that women were staying in the Refuge until they were able to purchase essential items and because of this, were liable for rent on both the Refuge and their new tenancy. The Housing Benefit Department were unable to pay for benefit on 2 homes due to Government regulations. This leaves the woman with up to 4 weeks rent arrears before she has actually moved into the property. The Refuge had concerns that women were returning to violent partners rather than moving into unfurnished properties or incurring rent arrears.

- 8.7 We received evidence from Housing and Environmental Services and benefits workers from Corporate Finance. It became clear that we were unable to intervene in the payments of benefits as these were strictly regulated. However, we looked at whether greater co-ordination between the various agencies could improve this situation and we asked the Officer working group to set up a meeting between the relevant parties to look at whether a more 'flexible' approach could be taken. We are extremely pleased that following this work, it was agreed to allow a rent-free period for women leaving the Refuge to take up a Council property. There were also positive developments in prioritising claims for Community Care Grants and housing benefits that should be noted. In addition, 'Furniture Plus' (a voluntary sector group providing low-cost furnishing and household goods) agreed to look at their delivery system and whether improvements could be made to this. As Members, we consider that these developments can make a significant impact on the lives of vulnerable women and we thank our Cabinet colleagues, Officers and other partners for their assistance.

9 What are the funding issues?

- 9.1 During the consultation on the Domestic Violence Policy, many groups expressed concerns about whether the policy would generate an increased demand for services that could not be met with existing resources. These echoed the discussions of the initial presentations to the Members' seminar and Area Assembly, that acknowledged that voluntary sector organisations were unable to deal with all the referred cases because they were already working to full capacity. The various service providers highlighted the need for better and longer-term funding for those organisations providing help and support for victims of domestic violence.
- 9.2 Understandably, the service providers were reluctant to raise expectations about a range of services that may not be able to be met. Whilst we are keen to make sure that the Domestic Violence Policy is effective, as Members, we recognised that this

cannot be done without the contributions from our partners in the voluntary sector who are providing front-line services. We wanted to find out what the particular concerns about funding and their capacity to deliver services were. We invited representatives from the Women's Refuge, Choices and Options and Apna Haq to speak to the Review Group. It is worth noting that all three groups have different funding sources. The Refuge receives grants from the Local Authority and other revenue is generated through rents. Choices and Options is funded through the Safer Rotherham Partnership and Apna Haq is located in the Young People's Service and also generates funds through external bids.

9.3 Women's Refuge

- Rotherham Refuge accommodated up to 4 women and 6 children at any one time
- referrals are made mostly through agencies - self referrals were not encouraged
- each client's needs are assessed and plans developed accordingly
- 3 members of staff employed, two Development Workers and a Manager, whose role is to provide support, and co-ordinate volunteers' recruitment and training
- if the Refuge is full then women can be referred to a refuge in other parts of the country through the Women's Aid Federation.

9.3.1 The Manager outlined that the Refuge cannot meet current demand and had been full since November 2001. Over 120 women and 180 children had been referred to the Refuge for places over the past 12 months but only 26 women and 26 children have been able to be accommodated. The remainder had been referred to alternative provision in the surrounding area or in some circumstances in other parts of the country. It was cited that some women were reluctant to leave their families and may return to dangerous situations rather than moving from the area.

9.3.2 The Manager stated that current funding can only support basic running costs and they struggle to cover the costs of essential existing services on the grants received. They said that although the Refuge was very small, it would be difficult to expand services because salary costs etc cannot be covered. Whilst they had attracted external funding, this was only available for 'new' projects rather than core services. There was a general discussion about the difficulties in planning services when projects are given little notice about grants. This means that services are not always sustainable in the long-term and it may create difficulty in recruiting and retaining paid staff.

9.4 Choices and Options

9.4.1 Choices and Options provides confidential support and advocacy for women experiencing domestic violence in Rotherham. The service is independently funded through the Safer Rotherham Partnership. Since April 2001, the agency had worked with 55 women and 112 children. Referrals come from a variety of sources including the Homeless Section. The Manager did raise concerns about lack of referrals from Social Services, although this may be due to a lack of awareness about what Choices and Options did. We hope that the Domestic Violence Policy will address this and appropriate referrals will be made using the guidance outlined in the policy.

9.4.2 Although the funding stream was different for Choices and Options, there were shared concerns about resources and being unable to meet service demands. The Manager gave an example of this, stating that at present there was no dedicated children's worker, although a significant proportion of women referrals had children

who had witnessed or had been affected by domestic violence first hand. She cited evidence that indicates there is a high incident of neglect and abuse in families experiencing domestic violence. She identified a potential change to the way children are designated to be “in need” as one way of addressing this. As with the Refuge, Choices and Options reported significant concerns about sustainable funding.

9.5 **Apna Haq**

9.5.1 Apna Haq was established at the same time as Choices and Options. Both projects were funded through South Yorkshire Police’s Community Initiative Programme and were located in the Young People’s Service although Choices and Options has since gained independent status. The project has evolved from being solely a provider of support advice services to Asian women & children facing domestic violence issues to also developing training & development initiatives for this client group. The Young Peoples Service provide the office accommodation, phone and direct line management, and contribute towards staffing although this is minimal i.e. 3 ½ hours per week project worker time. The project is reliant totally on external funding for the rest of its major staffing and resource costs. The project work with Asian women has been cited by the Home Office as an example of good practise.

9.5.2 The workers gave an outline of the service they provide and raised some of the issues that Asian women were facing in particular. We heard that it was often difficult for any women to access support or advice but for Black or Asian women this could be more difficult because of language/ cultural barriers. It was highlighted that there was a lack of bilingual interpreters employed by the Council and other essential services. Not only does this mean that vulnerable people are not accessing services but has led on occasions, to family members being used inappropriately to interpret.

On a related note, the working group also raised that communication support was also needed for some disabled people, particularly deaf people and individuals with speech impairments, and the absence of this support, may prevent them from accessing appropriate services.

9.5.3 It is hoped that the Apna Haq will become independent in the long-term and it has set up a steering group to begin work on this. The project has been successful in attracting external funding, however, this activity takes up a substantial amount of the Co-ordinator’s time. A number of bids for funding have been made through SRB6, Objective 1 and HAZ. As with other projects, Apna Haq reported that there was a gap between funding streams, and gave examples of financial support for part of the project ending before the next funding commences.

9.6 We were aware that the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel had commissioned a ‘Review into Funding of Voluntary and Community Groups’. Rather than duplicating their efforts, we thought it would be helpful to look at their findings to inform this part of our review. Members supported the following recommendations of the ‘Funding Review’ in respect of domestic violence projects:

- Acknowledge the need for further work to be carried out to assess the contribution of funding activity towards the achievement of the Council’s aims.
- Ask the Executive to consider the development of a corporate approach to grant funding which addresses the identified inconsistencies.

- Recommend that the External Funding Manager (when appointed) identify sustainable alternative external sources of funding.

Additionally, Members of the working group identified the need for the process to be transparent with clear notice of grants being given to organisations to assist them to plan services.

9.7 We invited the Chief Executive, Ged Fitzgerald to seek clarification about the funding situation in his role as Head of Paid Service and Chair of the Safer Rotherham Partnership. In particular, we wanted information on these issues:

- The difficulties of planning long-term domestic violence services because of the lack of notice given by the council about whether voluntary sector organisations will receive grants;
- Given the Crime and Disorder Audit has suggested a priority of ‘securing long-term funding to ensure sustainability of front-line services’, what is being done by the council (as part of the Crime and Disorder partnership) to address this?

9.8 He explained that it was an aim of the Council to move towards a three year budget strategy that would mean that the Council would be able to plan its priorities longer term, and additional pressures could be looked at annually. In parallel with this, action had been taken to improve funding to voluntary groups on a multi year basis, which may address some of the issues identified as part of this review. In addition, service level agreements were being explored between the Council and service providers. He outlined that discussions about developing a compact were underway between the Council and other partners and gave assurances that things would improve in the future.

9.9 We were aware that the formal review of the Crime and Disorder audit and setting of priorities for the Safer Rotherham Partnership had yet to be completed. We were told that the Council had a long-term aim to integrate community safety into service planning and there were positive examples of this currently in Programme Areas (for instance, ‘Risky Business’ in Education, and the provision of furnished emergency accommodation for homeless people). While this is a positive development, we were concerned that there should be a commitment towards mainstreaming funding across all the partners.

9.10 We were keen to explore whether we could assist in a practical way with fundraising with the Refuge (the only local domestic violence organisation with charitable status). We asked officers to explore whether it would be feasible to set-up a ‘payroll giving scheme’. At present discussions are underway with the Corporate Management Team to move this forward. We are hopeful however, that council employees will be able practically to demonstrate their support for addressing an important social concern and Council priority through payroll donations.

10 What are our conclusions?

a) The working group set itself some clear tasks. We were keen to find out about the extent and nature of the problem and we received verbal and written evidence from a variety of sources to give us better picture. We wanted to oversee the development of a Domestic Violence Policy that could deliver tangible service improvements. We also wanted to respond constructively to the concerns raised by the service providers about levels of funding. In meeting these aims, we wanted to

send out a clear message that domestic violence is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

- b) In achieving our aims, we first looked at what was happening in the Borough. It is clear that despite the worrying statistics, levels of domestic violence in Rotherham are no better or worse than comparable areas. That is not to say that we can be complacent. Clearly, there are hundreds, possibly thousands, of people (mostly women) who will be experiencing domestic violence in Rotherham. We received evidence that demonstrated that there has been a long commitment by some organisations in the Borough to tackle domestic violence effectively. However, we think it is fair to say that historically this has lacked co-ordination and therefore, the services have often been provided on a somewhat piecemeal basis. The Safer Rotherham Partnership now gives us the opportunity to organise activities and develop policies and procedures with the Council and our partners.
- c) It is clear that a great deal of good work is taking place in Programme Areas and officers should be commended for this. We are hopeful that the Domestic Violence Policy will give opportunities for greater co-ordination at a strategic level and we are pleased that the Officer's group has made some headway in this area. However, there is still a task ahead to ensure that frontline staff are aware of the policy and have appropriate training to make sure they are able to do their jobs effectively.
- d) We heard from the representatives from the domestic violence service providers that funding uncertainties place great pressure on their organisation and we sought assurances that systems would be in place to improve this. It is difficult to plan services without sustainable funding and clearly, the year-on-year budget rounds are not helpful, either to the groups or the Programme Area. We welcome the moves to more robust and longer term budgetary planning. Equally, we hope that the priorities of the Safer Rotherham Partnership are reflected in appropriate resourcing of services from our partners.
- e) The working group recognised that the network of domestic violence services providers in Rotherham deliver essential support to women and children experiencing domestic violence. Without their input, it is likely that more people would face considerable hardship. We had concerns however, that they are unable to meet the demands placed upon them because of lack of staffing and other essential resources. The Refuge has only 4 beds at present and many more women seek assistance than can be accommodated in Rotherham. Similarly, the outreach services provided by Apna Haq and Choices and Options are struggling to meet the demands placed upon them.
- f) The presentation by service providers also brought to our attention issues around appropriate translation and interpretation services. We are concerned that the lack of bi-lingual staff or integrated and co-ordinated translation services for people (and especially women) who do not have English as a first language, has meant on occasion that family members or other members of their communities are used to translate. This could have implications for safety. There are also long term planning issues with the increase in numbers of asylum seekers, some of whom will inevitably experience domestic violence.
- g) On a related theme, we also had concerns whether disabled people, particularly if they were deaf or hearing impaired, could access services in the Borough. Because the review was time limited, we were unable to give full consideration to

the issue of how disabled people experiencing domestic violence accessed services and would suggest that further deliberation is given to this in the future.

- h) During the course of the review, we came across some very positive examples of multi agency working. We welcome the work that has taken place to improve the access of women leaving the refuge to community care grants. Whilst there is clearly much work to be done, we consider that this is a practical demonstration of agencies to working together and making a difference. We hope that this example can be built on.

11 Recommendations

The Review Group recognises that the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP) is key to developing co-ordinated strategies to address some of the issues highlighted in our report. Others are clearly within the remit of the Council and its Programme Areas. What has become apparent through this review is the ongoing need for 'joined-up working' and we commend the partnership work that is being undertaken to make our communities safe. It is with this in mind that we make the following recommendations to the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee to take to the Council and the SRP.

- I. The Corporate Management Team is urged to address the issue of sustainable funding for the domestic violence co-ordinator's post and for the Women's Refuge as a part of the budget process. The process should be transparent with clear notice of grants being given to organisations to assist them to plan services.**
- II. That CMT should explore whether Service Level Agreements (or initiatives such as Supporting People) between the Council (or partner organisations) and service providers will provide a more secure basis for future funding.**
- III. That the monitoring of progress of the 'Review into Funding of Voluntary and Community Groups' takes account of the specific concerns raised in this report and appropriate assistance should be given to domestic violence service providers to identify sustainable alternative external sources of funding.**
- IV. The Domestic Violence Policy is fully implemented across all Programme Areas and its progress monitored through the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.**
- V. Work is undertaken to develop a staff welfare policy for employees experiencing domestic violence, drawing upon good practice from other Local Authorities.**
- VI. Consideration is given to developing appropriate interpretation and translations services across all Programme Areas. This could include facilities such as 'Language Line'. Similarly, the use of appropriate communication services for deaf/hearing impaired people (for examples minicomms, and 'typetalk') should be explored.**
- VII. Work should continue to take place in consultation with relevant groups, to ensure that services are accessible and appropriate to the needs of disabled women and Black and Ethnic Minority women. This should be co-ordinated through the SRP, Officer Working Group and Domestic Violence Forum. Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel should monitor this progress.**

- VIII. That Social Services consider whether the designation of 'Children in Need' in the family support strategy can be extended and if appropriate, Choices and Options and/ or other agencies make referrals to the relevant agencies as part of their preventative work.**
- IX. That the payroll-giving scheme is endorsed and implemented at the earliest opportunity.**
- X. That Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee, with its power of health scrutiny, gives consideration to examining how domestic violence is addressed by health service providers.**
- XI. The Council as a key player in the SRP, should continue to encourage the development and review of domestic violence policies and procedures across the other agencies. Progress on this, and whether the priorities of the SRP in respect of domestic violence are being met, should be reported through the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.**

**Cllr GA Russell
Chair of Members Domestic Violence Working Group**

12 Thanks

Our thanks go to the following for their contributions to our review:

- Women's Refuge
- Apna Haq
- Choices and Options
- PC Diane Southall
- Tim Hawkins
- Kerry Byrne
- Roxanna Bann
- Angela Smith
- Rebecca Slack
- Ged Fitzgerald
- Caroline Webb

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