

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Lives Select Commission – 18 June 2020

**Report Title**

Domestic Abuse Services Update – Covid-19

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

**Report Author(s)**

Sam Barstow, Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

This report has been drafted at the request of the Improving Lives Select Commission and provides an update in relation to the response of Domestic Abuse (DA) services to the current Covid-19 pandemic. The report also provides information in relation to planning for any potential increases in demand, or an extended period of operating in a different way, as a result of the pandemic.

**Recommendations**

1. Members of the committee are asked to note and provide comment on any element detailed within the report.

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

[Domestic Abuse Strategy for Rotherham](#)

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

**Council Approval Required**

No

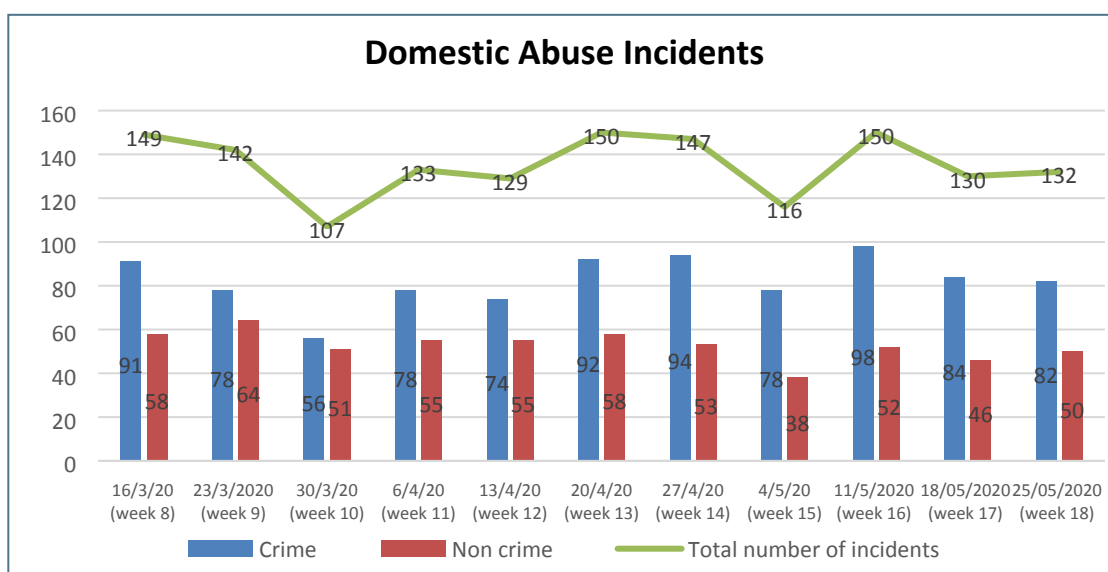
**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

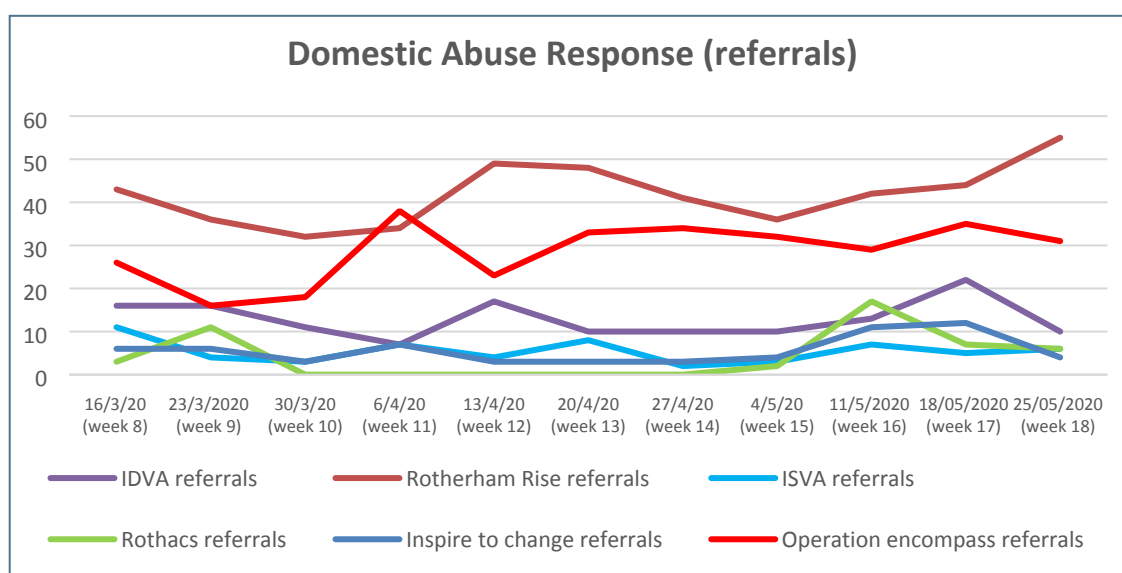
## Domestic Abuse Services Update – Covid-19

### 1. Background

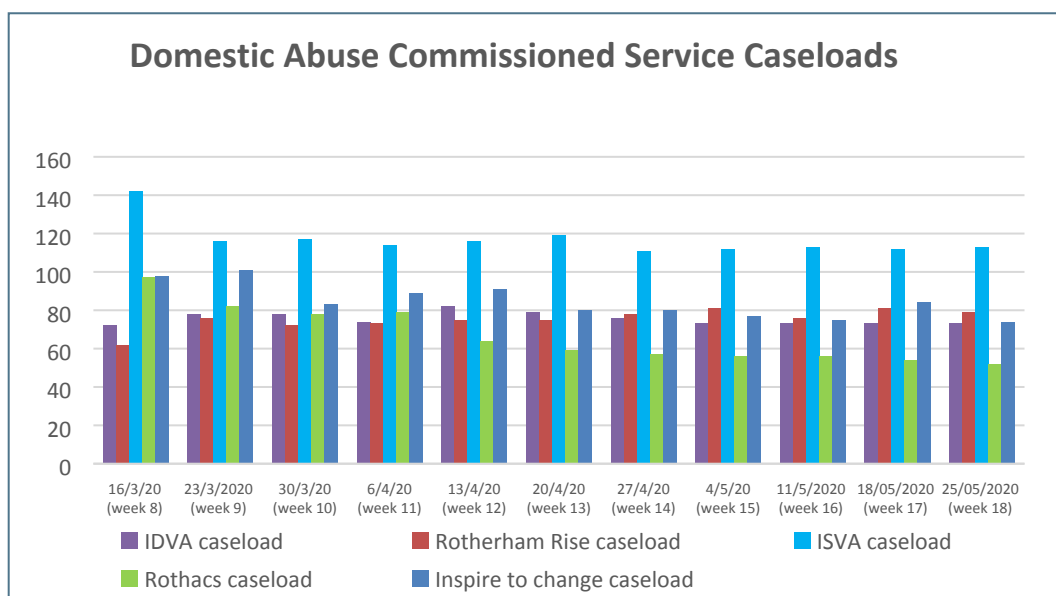
- 1.1 This report has been drafted at the request of the Improving Lives Select Commission and provides an update in relation to the response of Domestic Abuse (DA) services to the current Covid-19 pandemic. This report also provides information in relation to planning for any potential increases in demand, or an extended period of operating in a different way, as a result of the pandemic.
- 1.2 The DA Priority Group, which reports to the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP), has continued to meet during the current pandemic and has stepped up engagement to fortnightly meetings to ensure continued delivery and management of risk. The partnership has also continued to monitor Domestic Abuse both in terms of demand for Police service and demand for support services.
- 1.3 In relation to policing, Domestic Abuse service have been prioritised and maintained but, in some circumstances, have necessitated the use of phone contact where appropriate. In recognition of the individual challenges created by the pandemic South Yorkshire Police quickly established a dedicated online reporting tool for DA and the details can found on the following link:  
<https://www.reportingcrime.uk/SYPDA/>.
- 1.4 The level of incidents and crimes have remained broadly consistent over the previous 10 weeks, as described in the chart below. Some reduction in demand was experienced during the initial weeks of the pandemic but this appears to have returned to pre incident levels. Despite the challenges, arrest rates have remained at a strong level and above 70% based on a 12-week average. Whilst often DA cases will result in charges (around 20%) the partnership will seek out the most appropriate disposals to support the victim, ensure engagement and minimise any future risk to victim e.g. use of Cautions, Restorative Justice (in appropriate circumstances) and Domestic Violence Protection Notices/Orders.



- 1.5 Domestic Abuse support services have also rapidly adapted to change through increasing phone contact and diversifying their online offer; some of which has been supported by SRP funding.
- 1.6 In relation to high risk support, provided by the Council's in-house Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) services, provision has continued for all contacts. The service has also increased its offer through extended provision to include weekend support within current staffing levels.
- 1.7 In relation to standard and medium risk victims, who are offered support through the Council's commissioned service, the support offer through Rotherham Rise has been able to increase through partnership funding and to diversify through the creation of an online offer. At the outset of the pandemic, recognising the challenges presented by the restrictions in relation to accessing support, Rotherham Rise quickly established an online support offer for victims to speak to workers.
- 1.8 The chart below shows the level of demand for domestic abuse support services over the previous ten weeks. As can be seen, demand for support services remained broadly static however, during recent weeks, there has been a slight uplift in support provided to medium and standard risk victims.
- 1.9 Inspire to Change, is a programme for men and women who have been abused, controlling or violent towards their partner. Operation Encompass, which enables schools to connect with the Police to support children and young people who have been subject to or have witnessed domestic abuse. Rothacs provide counselling services for children and adults who have suffered a form of abuse at any time in their life.



- 1.10 The caseloads of domestic abuse agencies have also remained broadly static, as can be noted from the chart below.



1.11 In relation to homelessness, the number of DA applicants presenting and accommodated by the homelessness team during Covid-19 has increased. The Council is tracking daily homelessness presentations including those presenting due to Domestic Abuse. Since the 30 March 2020 the Council has received 272 new homeless presentations, and 53 of these are due to domestic abuse. This equates to 19.5% of all new applications due to domestic abuse.

1.12 In order to complement the response to the demand the Council has recently supported a successful bid of £98,000 with Rotherham Rise for emergency accommodation relating to DA. Rotherham Rise partnered up with Target for 5 ringfenced domestic abuse temporary accommodation properties in Rotherham and an a full time DA support worker, funded until October 2020. The funding bid also provided an opportunity for Rise to seek funding to cover any additional refuge costs due to Covid 19.

## 2. Key Issues

2.1 The first key issue in terms of the response to Covid19 has been to ensure a diversity of service offer, which is responsive to the current needs of victims. Practically, when people are restricted from normal movements, when the offices of support services are closed and, when contact with families or friends are limited, there is less opportunity to speak out or to find support for a variety of issues, including domestic abuse. As can be seen in the information above, both support and enforcement services have adapted to maintain delivery in this critical area. To further support the Council's commissioned domestic abuse support service, the Safer Rotherham Partnership has provided an additional £12,000 of funding to expand the online and telephone contact offer and to ensure provision is delivered outside of normal office hours. This has been supplemented with a targeted campaign on social media to raise awareness of the new online support.

- 2.2 The second key issue is that whilst demand did, for a time, fluctuate downwards, it is clear that in some cases it is stabilising and has returned to pre-covid levels. There is broad concern that the pandemic and related restrictions will have created further pressures within the home and that in some cases, this may lead to increased levels of domestic abuse. Furthermore, with limited access to services, some victims or perpetrators, who may have come forward, may either not have had the opportunity to do so, or not felt that they could come forward. Both of these elements present a concern in relation to a potential surge in demand for domestic abuse services as restrictions lift. In the light of this risk the SRP has again been working on developing partnership planning around increases for services. Whilst, broadly, statutory services are able to withstand limited increases, commissioned or voluntary sector organisations may not be able to, and the SRP is therefore exploring options to offer increased support.
- 2.3 The Ministry of Justice has recently announced funding to support domestic and sexual abuse support services, through Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). The fund has resulted in £474,000 being allocated to the South Yorkshire PCC. The funding will be distributed as follows:
- DA abuse services that are already commissioned by PCCs (total amount available £237,000)
  - SV services that are already commissioned by PCCs and those that are not currently funded by PCCs (total amount available £118,500)
  - DA services that are not currently commissioned by PCCs (total amount available £118,500)
- 2.4 The partnership is currently developing a bid across support agencies in order to support increased capacity. The bid will also seek to ensure that, should restrictions be sustained, local services can respond through providing a safe and compliant space to submit video evidence to court.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 Members of the committee are asked to note and provide comment on any element detailed within the report.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 This paper has been shared with relevant colleagues for comment however does not present a decision and is provided as an update.

### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 As noted above, this paper is provided for information only and does not propose a decision.

### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 As noted above, this paper is provided for information only and does not propose a decision.

## **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 As noted above, this paper is provided for information only and does not propose a decision.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 As noted above, this paper is provided for information only and does not propose a decision.

## **9. Implications for Partners**

- 9.1 Detailed within the body of the report.

## **10. Risks and Mitigation**

- 10.1 As noted above, this paper is provided for information only and does not propose a decision.

## **11. Accountable Officer(s)**

Sam Barstow, head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services

*Report Author: Sam Barstow, Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services*

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).