

Public Report
Improving Lives Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Lives Select Commission – 27 October 2020

Report Title

Domestic Abuse Strategy Review

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
Sam.barstow@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides an overview in relation to key achievements and gaps in delivery, relating to Rotherham's Domestic Abuse Strategy. The strategy is developed and overseen by the Safer Rotherham Partnership and runs from 2017 to 2020, with a new strategy currently under development. The current strategy was endorsed by the Council's Cabinet in 2017.

Recommendations

1. That feedback be provided on the review of the current Domestic Abuse Strategy in order to inform future key objectives

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Domestic Abuse Strategy

Background Papers

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Domestic Abuse Strategy Review

1. Background

- 1.1 The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Rotherham contains the following vision:
In Rotherham we do not tolerate domestic abuse and as agencies, we will consistently identify risk, work to protect victims and address offending behaviour. In communities, we will promote the value of positive relationships and identify need, in order to focus on preventing conflict and abusive behaviours. Our services will work together, be responsive, evidence based and informed by those affected. Rotherham's approach seeks to focus on improving the quality of relationships in the borough, whilst working to protect and support those already affected by domestic abuse.
- 1.2 Within the strategy the vision was further broken down into a range of key objectives. In order to inform future steps required of the refreshed strategy for 2020 – 2025, a review of each of the objective areas has been undertaken in order to reflect on progress and identify any continuing gaps and this will be detailed further within the body of this report.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 **Aim 1:** Support cohesive, shared assessment processes that enable services to understand need and embed the message that domestic abuse is unacceptable and that perpetrators of domestic abuse crime will be brought to justice and offered intervention to change behaviour to prevent reoffending.
- 2.2 Under this aim, the partnership has continued to promote the consistent use of the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) assessment which is now well embedded and routinely applied across the Council and partner agencies. Of the 6,815 police incidents over the previous year, 12% were assessed as 'high' risk, 23% 'medium' risk and 65% as 'standard' risk. Consistent use of this assessment framework ensures that regardless of the agency which victims present to, they are assessed consistently and offered appropriate support or referral into a service.
- 2.3 Partners have also launched a Smart-Water initiative in partnership with the Police which offers further protection for victims by deterring further offences. It also offers evidence in the event there is a breach of any relevant order designed to protect the victim from contact with the abuser. 72 victims have been provided with this additional measure since its launch in 2019. Police satisfaction has also increased over the previous year with the latest quarterly rate at 81% satisfied with the way their case was handled.
- 2.4 With the standard assessment process now in place, partners are further considering the implications in relation to domestic abuse for those with complex or chaotic lifestyles. These issues are often a mixture of issues such as mental ill health, alcohol or substance misuse and co-abusive relationships. Concerningly these types of issues have been identified within the most recent Domestic Homicide Reviews conducted within the Rotherham area and is therefore a clear area of focus moving forwards. It has also been a challenge to

reduce the number of repeat 'high' risk victims, though this is in the context of rising demand for support services. During 2017, 36% of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals were repeats. This was the same in 2018 (36%) with a slight reduction in 2019 at 34%. This is also likely to require specific focus in the refreshed strategy.

- 2.5 **Aim 2:** Focus on the provision of services that support positive relationships through early identification of need and addressing conflict before abusive situations occur and impact negatively across communities.
- 2.6 A key achievement under this aim is the establishment of the South Yorkshire-wide Perpetrator Programme called Inspire to Change, which has now been in place for almost three years, with further funding in place for an additional three years. During 2019/20 Rotherham made 582 referrals into this service. This type of service takes place prior to individuals being found guilty of an offence and seeks to address negative and potentially abusive behaviours before they develop. Where individuals are found guilty of an offence separate and mandated perpetrator programmes exist within probation services. Increasingly services find individuals who want to stay together and therefore this type of support is crucial to helping develop healthy relationships.
- 2.7 Other initiatives, such as Operation Encompass have also been developed and delivered in the Rotherham area. This operation seeks to provide enhanced support for young people who may live within abusive households and ensure that schools are aware of initially high-risk incidents of domestic abuse. Latterly the scheme has expanded to include all types of domestic abuse incidents. This is not necessarily for any direct intervention by the school but to support the informed provision of pastoral care for the young person if required and appropriate.
- 2.8 Whilst services have improved provision up in this area, increasingly trauma is being recognised as contributing factor to abusive relationships and further opportunities exist to embed a trauma informed approach across services. This would support continued early identification and prevention efforts.
- 2.9 **Aim 3:** Review the system and redesign the adult pathway, replicating best practice
- 2.10 Over the course of the strategy, the partnership has engaged in two extensive reviews. Firstly, in an independent peer review by partners at Bradford City Council. This review provided broad overall assurance, but also highlighted the need to further clarify pathways and seek to better link support services across the whole range of statutory and third sector partners. The second review was a whole system review which sought to engage providers, workers and victims to understand the existing gaps and gather feedback as to how to improve the system. The key outcomes of this review are listed below and will be used to inform the specification of the new service, as Domestic Abuse services are to shortly be recommissioned:

- One integrated domestic abuse service that will ensure a seamless service for victims and their families across all levels of risk.
 - It is key that the IDVA Service and wider domestic abuse workforce are integrated. Not only will this avoid handovers between the services, it will enable systemic practice and key worker relationship building and will capitalise on the skills and expertise of both workforces. The integrated service will combine a range of provisions; have an extended helpline and digital offer, and responsibility for workforce training and development. This model could be delivered to varying degrees through integrated working, secondment or full integration.
- Maintaining refuge provision that meets the needs of a range of victims and family members, providing a whole family approach.
- Greater focus is required in relation to prevention through education and engagement.
- A clear offer of support for victims in co-abusive relationships.
- A diverse offer of provision which meets the needs of victims, particularly those with protected characteristics.
- A training offer needs to be considered as part of any new integrated domestic abuse model to ensure consistency, upskilling of services, awareness raising and accountability. Following this it is likely that there will be an increase in referrals at an early prevention stage and from hard to reach communities.

2.11 **Aim 4:** Make every contact count (MECC), wherever people access support, providing effective support.

2.12 This aim is linked in a number of ways to Aim 1 and relies on effective and consistent assessment across agencies, informing appropriate support referrals. In order to ensure a level of awareness and consistency, the partnership has continued to offer free training to a large array of professionals, including those from statutory agencies, but also extending to place like banks, hairdressers and dentists. The partnership has also established a framework to monitor training across the statutory agency workforce in order to hold agencies to account on their commitment to domestic abuse training and awareness raising. The Council and its partners have also delivered various communication and engagement campaigns relating to domestic abuse using themes such as Safeguarding Awareness week to promote positive messages. Finally, the partnership has been able to enhance the digital offer within services through additional funding to the commissioned service, Rotherham Rise.

2.13 **Aim 5:** Identify lessons, listen to victims, promote challenge and respond as a partnership

2.14 This aim seeks to ensure continued learning and development in response to Domestic Abuse. Aside from the review processes listed in section 2.10, this Aim

includes learning from tragedies such as deaths or suicides linked to domestic abuse, along with the commissioned review process referenced above, near miss investigations by the partnership, and the review of research and learning from our regional partners. During the lifetime of the current strategy, two Domestic Homicide Reviews have taken place, one of which is currently published and relates to a death that took place in 2017, with the second relating to a further death in 2018. The latter is currently with the Home Office for agreement for publication. In addition, a further five 'near miss' reviews have taken place over the previous two years. These are not statutory but are undertaken by the partnership in cases where serious injury has or was likely to occur and ensures that lessons are learnt at every available opportunity. Common themes arising from this work again relates to co-abusive relationships, mental health issues and/or substance misuse. This work continues to be used to inform immediate actions and strategic objectives.

- 2.15 **Stalking and Harassment** has been a key issued identified by Improving Lives Select Committee in previous discussions relating to domestic abuse and as a result the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP) have undertaken further work and additional monitoring. It is important to understand that stalking and harassment is often a part of a pattern of abusive behaviours in cases of domestic abuse. As a result, stalking and harassment is part of the standard assessment framework and a key part of the safety planning work undertaken by statutory and commissioned services. Protection from this form of domestic abuse runs through all of the services and is apparent in initiatives such as the Smart Water initiative referred to above, along with the use of powers such as Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders. Further work has also been done to establish the nature of any stranger related stalking and harassment and whether this should be an area of further concerns. This has primarily involved quarterly monitoring of any repeat stalking and harassment cases related to stranger stalking only throughout 2019. No cases were identified in that period from Police data. The SRP also developed a clear stalking pathway in order to provide clarity in terms of the support offer for victims of stranger stalking and this is attached as appendix B. This is thought to be the only such pathway across South Yorkshire and may now be adopted across the region.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The current Domestic Abuse Strategy concludes at the end of 2020. A further strategy is proposed for the period 2020 – 2025. This will enable the partnership to take a longer-term approach to the issues identified and is a natural progression from the position of services three years ago and the requirement at that time for a short and focussed strategy. The key issues that have been identified over the lifetime of the current strategy are as follows:
- Deliver an integrated domestic abuse support service through the recommissioning of contracts, as legally required
 - Further work to identify and address co-abusive relationships
 - Continue to focus on prevention and early intervention
 - Strengthen the response to complex cases of domestic abuse

- 3.2 Further work will also be undertaken to explore the potential to focus on both Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences, with the two often linked and the responses often involving the same or similar practitioners and professionals.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 Extensive consultation has been undertaken throughout the lifetime of the strategy, as referenced in section 2.10. The partnership will also be launching an extensive engagement and co-production process with providers of domestic abuse services in order to design the specification of future services for victims of Domestic Abuse in the Rotherham area. Finally, the review of the strategy has taken place in partnership with key service providers across the Police, Health, commissioned and non-commissioned services. The future strategy will be designed by a similar cross sector partnership of practitioners and professionals.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 As noted, the current strategy concludes at the end of 2020 and therefore a new strategy is to be designed and agreed at the December meeting of the Safer Rotherham Partnership.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications brought about as a result of this report. Financial implications in relation to recommissioning of services will be detailed within the relevant report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 Whilst statutory processes such as Domestic Homicide Reviews are referenced the report overall does not present any legal implications for consideration.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct HR implications as a result of this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 All victims of Domestic Abuse and their families could be classed as vulnerable. Issues relating to the provision of services and support are dealt with directly within the paper.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Equalities implications are routinely considered in terms of engagement in any consultation, monitoring of any statistics in relation to services users and access to services.

11. Implications for Partners

- 11.1 Domestic Abuse is managed through a partnership priority group, under the leadership of the SRP Board. As a result, partners are thoroughly engaged in the work relating to the strategy.

12. Risks and Mitigation

- 12.1 There is limited risk associated with the review and development of future strategy. The strategy seeks to prevent risk by guiding services in relation to key priorities.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Sam Barstow, Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services