

Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel Policy Review 2012/13: Domestic Violence

Final Report

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FOREWORD



I am pleased to present the findings and recommendations of the Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel's second policy review of the 2012/13 municipal year, which looked at the issue of domestic violence in Sunderland.

The Panel was keen to look at how domestic violence is being tackled in the city, given the significant social and economic effects of this often hidden crime. Domestic violence can have catastrophic consequences for victims and their families and the complex issues involved in can make it a difficult crime to detect and gain a conviction. Despite tremendous progress in changing attitudes, awareness and behaviour, it remains largely hidden from view and is thought to affect one in four women and one in six men.

The Panel considered the role of the Safer Sunderland Partnership in reducing domestic violence and was pleased to find that in the main there is a genuine partnership approach to collaborating and sharing information to reduce future harm to victims and secure convictions against perpetrators. We believe that discussions about the way in which the approach to domestic violence is coordinated can only strengthen this further.

The prevention of domestic violence was continually highlighted throughout the review as being the only truly effective way in tackling this issue in the longer term, therefore the work carried out in schools to teach young people about healthy relationships is crucial.

Of course, when domestic violence does occur, frontline staff and ward councillors have a vital role to play in signposting victims to appropriate services to access help. We found that training and an effective information resource is required to assist us all in doing this.

The Safer Sunderland Partnership already has a comprehensive delivery plan in place to tackle domestic violence and many of the findings of the Panel in regard to prevention, information sharing and gaining a deeper understanding of the issues in Sunderland to inform future service delivery are already priorities for the Partnership over the coming years.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who contributed to a revealing policy review. In particular the Panel members; the Chair of the Safer Sunderland Partnership, the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner, domestic violence service providers, Northumbria Police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the officers who supported us in carrying out the review. I would however, like to give a special thank you to those women who spoke to us about their experiences of domestic violence, which gave us insight we would not otherwise have had.

Councillor David Errington
Lead Scrutiny Member for Responsive Services and Customer Care

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel's Policy Review 2012/13: Domestic Violence.

2. AIM OF THE POLICY REVIEW

- 2.1 To evaluate the approach to reducing the number of victims of domestic violence; through awareness raising, increasing the reporting and detection of domestic violence and supporting victims of domestic violence.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1 The agreed terms of reference for the review were:-
- (a) To understand the extent of domestic violence in Sunderland and the approaches being taken to tackle this issue;
 - (b) To measure the general success to date in regard to reducing domestic violence, with a particular focus on awareness raising and reporting and detection rates; and
 - (c) To examine how the Safer Sunderland Partnership, statutory bodies and other service providers in the city are supporting victims of domestic violence.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 The membership of the Responsive Services and Customer Care Panel consisted of Councillors Errington (Lead Scrutiny Member), Curran, Gibson, Heron, Kay, Lawson, Richardson, Scott, Thompson and Wiper.

5. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

- 5.1 The following methods of investigation were used for the Review:
- (a) Desktop research;
 - (b) Evidence from service users
 - (c) Evidence from the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner
 - (d) Chair of the Safer Sunderland Partnership
 - (e) Evidence from domestic violence service providers;
 - (f) Evidence from the Northumbria Police;
 - (g) Evidence from the Crown Prosecution Service;
 - (h) Evidence from Sunderland PCT; and
 - (i) Evidence from officers of the City Council.

6. FINDINGS OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

- 6.1 Sections seven to eleven outline in detail the findings of the Policy Review into Domestic Violence.

7. SETTING THE SCENE

- 7.1 Domestic violence is a largely hidden crime, which happens in all sections of society regardless of social group, ethnic background, age, disability, sexuality or religion. Domestic violence occurs in a range of relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships, and also within extended families.
- 7.2 In monetary terms, CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Violence) estimates domestic violence costs the tax payer approximately £3.9bn per year, with high risk abuse making up nearly £2.4bn. The wider costs include £1.3 billion to employers and £17 billion in human suffering.
- 7.3 In social terms, the long term effects of domestic violence, both physical and emotional to victims and their families can be harmful and even catastrophic. It is seen as one of the root causes of many other social problems including mental ill health, child abuse and neglect, substance misuse, homelessness, sexual exploitation, adolescents displaying violent behaviour as well as the ultimate issue of increased homicides. Often where a family is experiencing domestic violence it will often display a range of other complex needs.
- 7.4 In real terms, CAADA states that:-
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic violence in their lifetime
 - 2 women every week are murdered in England and Wales by a current or former partner
 - The police receive a domestic violence call every minute in the UK
 - 54 per cent of female victims of serious sexual assault were assaulted by their partner or ex-partner
 - 76 per cent of all domestic violence incidents are repeat incidents
 - Victims of domestic violence are more likely to experience repeat victimisation than victims of any other types of crime
 - Women experience an average of 35 incidents of domestic violence before reporting an incident to the police
- 7.5 CAADA also reports that the majority of victims are women aged 21 to 40 with young children. On average victims are in a relationship for five years before seeking and finding help. Three quarters of victims experience multiple types of abuse and 70 per cent experience at least one form of severe abuse such as strangulation, rape or threats to kill.
- 7.6 Starkly, evidence also suggests that when there are children in the household, the majority witness the violence, and in 80 per cent of cases, they are in the same room or in the next room. In about half of all domestic violence situations, the children are also subjected to abuse themselves.

National Context

- 7.7 The Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls action plan was published by Government in 2011 and supports the overarching *Call to End Violence Against Women*

and Girls strategy published in 2010. The plan sets out key objectives and actions cutting across governmental departments and is based around the following key principles:

- (i) Preventing violence against women and girls from happening in the first place by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it;
- (ii) Providing adequate levels of support where domestic violence occurs;
- (iii) Working in partnership to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families; and
- (iv) Taking action to reduce the risk to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought justice.

7.8 From March 2013, following extensive consultation; the Government will widen its definition of domestic violence to include:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality”.

7.9 This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:-

- Psychological;
- Physical;
- Sexual;
- Financial; and
- Emotional.

Local Context

7.10 Northumbria Police recorded 5,980 domestic violence incidents in 2012 in Sunderland compared to 6,092 the previous year. Repeat victims fell from 2034 to 1668 in 2012 (366 fewer victims – an 18% fall) and the percentage of incidents that results in arrest increased from 25 per cent to 29 per cent.

7.11 The Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) has two high level priorities:

- Reducing crime and disorder and improving feelings of safety
- Preventing and reducing harm to our most vulnerable people and places.

The Board agreed eight key work areas to focus upon within these priorities for 2013/2014 including domestic violence and other violent crime. Improvement activities that support the priorities for the city are detailed within the Safer Sunderland Partnership Delivery Plan. Within the structure of the SSP, the Sunderland Domestic Violence Partnership meets to drive strategic change and promote best practice in tackling domestic violence.

8. TACKLING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Council Resources

- 8.1 Sections nine and eleven of this report highlight the services and approaches in place to address issues of domestic violence in the city. It was reported to the Panel that the Council has consistently prioritised domestic violence, demonstrated in the fact that there have been no domestic violence homicides in the city for many years (homicide of a partner or spouse).
- 8.2 The Council plays a key frontline role in tackling domestic violence, both in terms of safeguarding vulnerable children and adults, providing housing advice and guidance, and working with victims of domestic violence through the Anti Social Behaviour Team. It also contributes funding towards domestic violence services in the city. In terms of the strategic delivery of domestic violence, the Panel was informed that in 2011 a specific Policy and Strategy team was created within the Office of the Chief Executive to lead policy and strategy development around a range of areas including Children, Adults and Families, Communities and Equalities, Health and Wellbeing and Community Safety. This People and Neighbourhoods Policy team is part of the wider Strategy, Policy and Performance Management (SPPM) service. This was one part of many changes to the Council's structures to cope with the significant reductions to its budget.
- 8.3 The service adopts an approach where staff resources and expertise can be utilised from across the service to undertake work where required. In relation to domestic violence, a Principal Policy Officer works predominantly on domestic violence policy and for the purposes of the Safer Sunderland Partnership and Council acts as a single point of contact for domestic violence development work and general queries. Other officers also lead on work in relation to Domestic violence Homicide Reviews, and have supported specific domestic violence marketing and communications work. In this way, the wider resources of the SPPM service can be utilised.
- 8.4 The Panel recognised the necessity of adapting the Council's structures to streamline and improve services, particularly at the current time. It did however consider it important that in doing so, the Council maintains a dialogue with partners to address any potential issues as they arise and work together to create solutions.

Community Safety Funding Arrangements

- 8.5 The Police and Crime Commissioner now controls a one year Community Safety Fund of around £2.8 million for the Northumbria area. This fund is made up of a number of previous sources of funding. The funding, which is around 80% of the 2012/13 levels, will be passported back to Sunderland as follows:
- £100,800 Community Safety Partnership Funding
 - £185,680 Drug Intervention Programme
 - £42,247 Young People's Substance Misuse Grant
 - £30,000 Youth Offending Service
- 8.6 The Commissioner indicated that these funds have been reduced by the Home Office for 2013/14 by around 17 per cent from current year levels and there is an intention to top slice a sum across the force area which will in effect mean a 20 per cent reduction on funding from 2012/13 levels. The Commissioner is keen to passport the bulk of the

funding to Community Safety Partnerships to meet priorities. In addition the Commissioner is asking for proposals on what the Safer Sunderland Partnership would like to fund. The ring fence on this funding from the Home Office will be removed in 12 months and thereafter be subsumed into the main policing grant therefore any allocations will be at the discretion of the Commissioner from 2014/15 onwards.

Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan

- 8.7 The Commissioner must publish a five year Crime and Policing Plan by April 2013. This Plan will contain national Policing objectives set by the Home Secretary for all Forces together with local priorities set by the Commissioner. These priorities must have regard to local Community Safety Partnership priorities and vice versa.
- 8.8 A number of draft priorities have been set out for the Police and Crime Plan, one of which is Domestic violence and Sexual Abuse, the detail of the intentions are given as follows:-
- As Northumbria's Commissioner, I will take an active personal lead on this issue
 - Within my first year of office I will develop an integrated strategy on all aspects of violence against women and girls and will also ensure that the minority of victims who are men suffering from these crime are equally supported
 - Police will do all they can to make reporting of domestic and sexual abuse as straightforward as possible. All frontline and specialist officers will have training led by survivors;
 - Police will listen to victims and take action to support them and to help make them safe, even when no crime has been committed or when no prosecution is wanted. This will include offering to connect them with a local independent specialist support group;
 - Offer an experienced Independent Domestic/Sexual Violence Adviser as a supporter and advocate to each high risk complainant;
 - All incidents of domestic and sexual abuse and violence will be investigated. Police systems will ensure that repeat victims and perpetrators are identified and response officers are fully informed of the history; and
 - Work with the public and other authorities to make early intervention the norm and to change attitudes and behaviour.
 - Pilot preventative projects to promote active monitoring of perpetrators
- 8.9 The Plan contains a pledge to appoint a person to lead on Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse within the first year. The Commissioner stated she is the best person to lead on this and give it the high profile it needed. She informed the Panel that she would also be joining the Police and Crime Commissioners from Durham and Cleveland in a joint approach to this issue ensuring that best practice and success stories can be shared region wide.
- 8.10 The Commissioner also gave her views that joint working across the Northumbria Force area and the sharing of best practice would be vital to making further progress in a range of community safety issues including domestic violence. In the future this could mean

that where appropriate, community safety partnerships are actively encouraged to undertake delivery of services jointly in order to maximise the funding available.

9. REPORTING AND CONVICTION RATES

Reporting of Domestic Violence Incidents

- 9.1 As referred to in section seven of this report, the number of domestic violence incidents in 2012 fell slightly from the previous year. As is widely reported, domestic violence is a largely hidden crime therefore the Panel was cautious about what the reduction in reporting actually revealed, as it viewed domestic violence as one of the only crimes (alongside hate crime and sexual abuse) in which reports should rise year on year. This would indicate increased awareness of domestic violence and an increased public confidence in contacting the Police.
- 9.2 It was however made clear to the Panel throughout the evidence gathering that domestic violence is taken very seriously by the Safer Sunderland Partnership, Police and Crime Commissioner and Northumbria Police in terms of encouraging the reporting of domestic violence. Both within the Protecting Vulnerable People Team and at a Neighbourhood Policing Level it was reported that front-line officers are fully supported by senior officers to systematically record and investigate domestic violence offences/incidents.

Assessing Risk

- 9.3 When a domestic violence incident is reported a police officer(s) completes a risk assessment form which is used to categorise the victim as standard, medium or high risk. This rating system decides what course of action will be taken.
- 9.4 A score of 14 and above is seen as a high risk case; a safety plan is drawn up and might include the need to re-house the victim and instigate a restraining order for the perpetrator. Each high risk case is discussed at a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), nationally regarded as best practice in addressing high risk cases of domestic violence. A MARAC allows agencies including the Police, Children Services, Access to Housing, Probation, Health, Education (where relevant) and the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service to identify the very high risk domestic violence cases and for the identified risk to be managed through a multi-agency forum. Representatives of other statutory or voluntary agencies may also be invited to the meeting depending on whether those agencies have (or may have) any specific involvement with any of the subjects, for example the Youth Offending Service, Community Psychiatric Nurse, Housing Providers and the NSPCC. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences provided safety plans for 317 high risk domestic violence victims and 507 children. Repeat victimisation for this group is currently 22% (in 2012/13 up to 09.01.2013)
- 9.5 Those cases deemed to be medium or standard risk are now referred to the Community Policing Team for ongoing monitoring. Once assessed, victims are screened to the Neighbourhood Policing Team Inspector who allocates an officer to visit the victim and develop a safety plan. As with high risk cases this may include discussions around housing, the bail conditions of the perpetrator, any forms of Protective Legislation that can be put in place (Non-Molestation Orders etc), and practical safety measures.
- 9.6 Whilst the Panel was pleased that all high risk victims would continue to be allocated an IDVA under the Police and Crime Plan, it commented that lower risk victims do not have

this level of support. The Commissioner informed the Panel that ideally the same level of support would be given to all victims however this was not feasible given the continued budget reductions to public services. One way in which a difference would be made is through improvements to the training of frontline staff in identifying and responding to signs of domestic violence. Victims will be signposted and also accompanied to support organisations by officers.

Domestic Violence Convictions

- 9.7 The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for prosecuting perpetrators of domestic violence; deciding whether a suspect should be charged by considering whether there is a realistic prospect of conviction beyond reasonable doubt.
- 9.8 Gaining sufficient evidence in domestic violence cases can be difficult to achieve as often the violence has taken place behind closed doors.
- 9.9 Perpetrators of domestic violence appear before the Sunderland Domestic Violence Court (SDVC), held one morning per week at the Magistrates Court. This provides a specialised multi agency approach to domestic violence cases, with involvement from the police, prosecutor, magistrates, court staff, probation and witness support, who have all undertaken specialised training to deal with domestic violence cases. An Independent Domestic violence Advisor (IDVA) is also appointed to support the victim.
- 9.10 The IDVA service in Sunderland is partially funded by the Safer Sunderland Partnership at a cost of £40,000, along with a contribution from Wearside Women in Need (WWIN) and works with people who are assessed to be at high risk of harm from domestic violence. The IDVA works with victims to explore and identify risks, and developing a care package of services to implement a safety plan. The IDVA also supports victims of domestic violence through any police investigations and subsequent court hearings in relation to the abuse. This service supported 274 domestic violence victims in 2011/12.
- 9.11 The Commissioner reported that in her view the IDVA should be that of a 'befriender' as well as having a thorough understanding of public agencies to act as a liaison between the victim, the police and the court, and provide support and advice around a whole host of issues such as housing, childcare and benefits. Assurances were given to the Panel by the Police and Crime Commissioner that the funding for the IDVA service had been secured as it was deemed to be crucial that victims get such support straight away.
- 9.12 The Panel learned that demand for the IDVA service was generally high therefore other agencies will often step in and provide similar levels of support to victims. For example, Gentoo provide support to its tenants and Victim Support will provide support to victims when the IDVA service was at capacity. Victim Support will generally withdraw support and close the case when the IDVA service is available to a victim and Gentoo works with its tenants, leaving the IDVA service to work with non-tenants. Both of these methods ensure there is no duplication of service. The Panel believed this demonstrated a willingness among agencies to work together to provide the best service for victims.
- 9.13 Members of the SDVC hold bi-monthly multi-agency meetings which identify, track and risk assess domestic violence cases. The Panel was informed that these meetings are also a way of working with the IDVA to support the victim to ensure that they remain engaged with the criminal justice system throughout the process. This way of working also increases the likelihood of a conviction which will lead to the perpetrator receiving a

sentence which will protect the victim and any children and reduce the likelihood of re-offending

- 9.14 Despite the extensive measures in place to encourage victims, the drop off rate is around 25-30%. The Panel was concerned at this high number but all of the evidence it gathered suggests that conviction rates will remain low due to the highly complex personal circumstances affecting victims and the pressures they face in giving evidence against a perpetrator. The Panel fully supported the SDVC approach in maximising the likelihood of a conviction, but also as a means of encouraging victims of domestic violence to come forward by ensuring they have a positive experience of the process.
- 9.15 The group of women the Panel spoke with stated that experiences of the court process had been largely positive. The discussion centred around the IDVA Service and also support from WWIN, without which many of the women felt they would not have been able to give evidence in court as it gave them the '*courage to go through with it*'.

Information Sharing

- 9.16 The evidence the Panel gathered indicated that on the whole there was excellent partnership working and a good level of information as demonstrated through the MARAC and SDVC processes; however it was reported by the witnesses the Panel took evidence from that it can be particularly difficult to get some health services to co-operate in information sharing.
- 9.17 To address this issue the Safer Sunderland Partnership are now working with City Hospitals and other health services to establish what data is required and how this can be shared more effectively. The Panel deemed this an area in which progress must be made, due to the very obvious benefits effective information sharing can bring in managing the risk posed to victims and reducing domestic violence overall.

10. AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 10.1 Domestic violence is often an unseen and under reported crime and people are reluctant to talk about it and discuss it openly. The Panel believed that talking about the issues and raising awareness to be the only way in which it can be effectively tackled. Great progress has been made over the years but a stigma and shame remains attached to being a victim.
- 10.2 The Panel was concerned that as frontline councillors, issues of domestic violence in wards are not routinely raised. For example, victims did not present at ward surgeries and crime figures relating to domestic violence were not presented alongside other crime statistics at local community meetings or Area Committee meetings. It was reported that Northumbria Police were currently looking at this with the Council and that this was potentially an action that could be included as part of the Safer Sunderland Partnership Delivery Plan.

Prevention

- 10.3 The continued difficulties in encouraging victims to report domestic violence and carry the complaint through the court process to secure a conviction, emphasised the need for the city to increase the work it does with young people and adults regarding healthy relationships to reduce those subject to domestic violence. This was echoed by the Police and Crime Commissioner, who is particularly interested in looking at how to

engage schools in influencing the next generation to change attitudes to domestic violence.

- 10.4 None of the women the Panel spoke to as part of the small focus group had been given any information on healthy relationships and all strongly felt it was a gap, the focus being too much on teenage pregnancy. There was a view that work should begin with children at primary school age.
- 10.5 The Panel understood that an offer of core topics including healthy relationships was now available to schools through Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) lessons. It is up to the individual school as to how much of this they provide but more of this work is now being undertaken with children and young people.
- 10.6 As part of improvement activity within the Safer Sunderland Partnership Delivery Plan, pupils at Farrington Community Sports College were recently supported to develop a film called "I have the right: against abuse in teenage relationship". Work is continuing on developing a learning resource pack and teaching aids to accompany the film which will be suitable for school and other youth settings. There are plans to roll the resource out over 2013. The Panel expressed its appreciation of this resource and emphasised the importance of rolling out the resource as widely as possible to young peoples services, as well as considering how agencies can engage further with school to raise awareness amongst young people.

Northumbria Police Training

- 10.7 A new domestic violence package is currently being rolled out across the Northumbria force. All new PCs and PCSOs receive this training as standard. There is also domestic violence training included in the initial induction.
- 10.8 The Panel was also informed that all PCs and PCSOs receive training when amendments are made to legislation and guidance. The training is delivered by police trainers and training packages are developed in conjunction with 'subject matter experts' from the Protecting Vulnerable People team. Uniformed officers can also be attached to the Domestic violence/Rape team to broaden their experience. General on-going training in domestic violence would be addressed during the training cycle, whereby all PCs and PCSOs receive training every five weeks on different subject matters.
- 10.9 It was also reported that front line officers need more training in domestic violence as, whilst many officers understand that positive action should be taken at domestic violence incidents, there continue to be investigative failings.
- 10.10 The Panel agreed that if domestic violence is not dealt with properly by the Police, the ramifications for the victim involved could be serious or even fatal and concluded that the ongoing and regular training of police officers was crucial, particularly in light of the change to the definition of domestic violence. The Panel noted that this had clearly already been recognised as an issue by the Police and Crime Commissioner and supported her intention for frontline officers to be better trained to deal with issues of domestic violence.

11. ACCESSING SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Services for Domestic Violence Victims

11.1 As well as the services provided by Northumbria Police and the CPS through the SDVC and MARAC, a range of services are available:-

(1) Domestic Violence Refuge Accommodation

The city's largest provider of domestic violence services, Wearside Women in Need (WWIN) invited the Panel to visit one of its refuges, which it was very impressed with.

There are currently three refuges based across the City, in the Coalfields, Washington and East areas. This supported accommodation provides a safe place of refuge and intensive support for women and children fleeing domestic violence. This accommodation is funded by the Council, through the Housing Related Support Budget, at a cost of £483,620.00.

The Panel was impressed with the living spaces at the refuge for women and their children, provision for disabled people, and the relaxed environment and the sense of community within the centre. Further detail can be found at **Appendix 1**.

(2) Children's Services

In terms of Safeguarding Children, the number of reports made to Children's Safeguarding Services by the Police in relation to domestic violence incidents was 4,779 over the course of 2011/12. The Panel learned that over 80 per cent of these do not lead to a Child Protection enquiry, although they add to the history of the family's case which can contribute to a case being escalated at a later date.

As part of the Troubled Families Programme, the Government's set criteria includes anti social behaviour, school issues and unemployment. The fourth criteria can be used to prioritise families who meet only two out of the three of the government criteria. The Sunderland Strengthening Families Board decided to include a measure of domestic violence as part of the local fourth criteria. The Police and Crime Commissioner supported this as being an ideal vehicle to tackling domestic violence within families.

(3) Home Security and Sanctuary Scheme (HSSS)

This scheme is funded by the Safer Sunderland Partnership and provides information and security improvements to the homes of high risk domestic violence victims, including lock changes, window alarms and in the most severe cases; a safe room.

(4) Domestic violence 24 Hour Helpline

This 24 hour helpline (0800 066 5555) is run solely by volunteers from Wearside Women In Need. Victims of domestic violence can use this number to gain support, information and advice about domestic violence and how to get help.

(5) Perpetrator Work

Northumbria Probation Service runs two programmes for perpetrators including a group work course and a Solo programme. Perpetrators are subject to a community order by the magistrates which includes mandatory attendance.

In a previous policy review undertaken the Panel had learnt about the negative aspect to short custodial sentences generally, in that sentences under twelve months were not subject to any community supervision or requirements to undertake training and rehabilitation upon release. It therefore agreed with the CPS that whilst perpetrators of domestic violence should be punished for their crime, a community order or suspended sentence is often more appropriate as there is a requirement to undertake the perpetrators programme which is a commitment of up to 18 months of groupwork on a weekly basis.

Wearside Women In Need (WWIN) also runs the Head Programme which perpetrators can self refer to and Impact Family Services runs a programme in South Tyneside which accepts Sunderland residents. Perpetrators who are involved with the family courts for contact with their children and there has been domestic violence will be made subject to a Contact Activity Order by the Judge/Magistrate to attend the Perpetrator Programme. The programme runs for 34 weeks in total.

(6) Access to Housing Team

One of the main causes of homelessness is domestic violence. The Council's Access to Housing Service offers support to families who have experienced domestic violence to prevent the family from becoming homeless. The Supported Housing Gateway carries out an assessment of needs and ensures that the appropriate support pathway is put in place. Since April 2012, the team has made 55 referrals to Wearside Women in Need.

In addition to the specialised services listed above, a significant contribution is made by the Council through our frontline social care services.

(7) Victim Support

Victim Support offers a free and confidential service to people who have experienced a crime and to their friends and family including:-

- Information
- Practical help
- Advocacy
- Emotional support

A gender sensitive service is offered. Once contact is made, confidentiality is explained and a needs assessment is completed. This looks at emotional support, practical help and security information.

Support is provided by a trained volunteer or staff member who will:-

- Signpost to other services such as Wearside Women in Need;
- Make the appropriate referrals to other agencies, for example a safeguarding referral, IDVA service or MARAC;
- Commission appropriate services;
- Provide safety planning informed by identified risks; and
- Develop victims to deal with a crisis, remain safe within a relationship and safe where the victim wants to leave/has left the relationship.

(8) Gentoo

Gentoo have three full time Victim Support Officers who are dedicated to providing support to victims of anti-social behaviour. Approximately 50 per cent of their caseload relates to domestic violence cases.

Over the last two years, the team have supported over 100 victims of domestic violence. In terms of improving feelings of safety, only 14 per cent of customers felt very or fairly safe at the point of accessing the service in comparison to over 80 per cent at the point of exit.

The nature of the support offered to victims of domestic violence will be tailored to the individual's requirements. Typical support measures include:-

- Providing customers with a range of information and advice about their options so they can make an informed choice.
- Providing additional property security measures such as house alarms, window locks, door locks etc...
- Regular contact with the customer at a venue determined by the customer i.e. where they feel safe.
- If the case is going to court, Gentoo's Support Officers can arrange for the customer to visit the court prior to the court date so they are familiar with the surroundings/environment.
- Use of agreed code language when telephone contact is made so the customer can communicate in a safe environment and aren't put at further risk.
- The Officers will accompany the customer to court if requested.
- Where required, the team will assist in providing practical help such as arranging transport to and from court, facilitating child care etc...

The Panel also noted the Causes for Concern programme as an area of good practice. This identifies potential victims of domestic violence at an early stage by giving staff the appropriate training to recognise repairs of a specific nature, such as bathroom door locks, broken windows, damaged internal doors etc which may be indicators of domestic violence. If three repairs requests are made within 12 months the Support and Safeguarding team investigate in respect of domestic violence.

(9) Impact Family Services

Impact offer a range of services to families in which domestic violence may be a factor. Child Contact Centres are used in some cases where there has been domestic violence and mum wanted to promote contact, or the families courts were ordering contact between dad/child. For higher risk cases, for example, where CAFCASS (Child and Family Court and Advisory Support Service) and/or family courts are involved it offers supervised contact. A Support Worker works with women who are using the child contact centres when domestic violence has been an issue and need additional support.

Impact also run a Perpetrator Programme in South Tyneside (accepting men from Sunderland) where they are going through the family courts for contact with their children. The Judge or Magistrate will make a Contact Activity Order for the perpetrator to attend the Perpetrator Programme.

A family mediation service acts as an impartial third party that help parents discuss arrangements for children post separation. In cases of domestic violence this would only go ahead if both parents wanted contact and the mediator felt that neither party was being coerced

into attending or making agreements (both parents are seen separately before a decision about mediation is taken).

Finally, a national pilot is currently being undertaken with Respect. This is an early intervention programme for young people aged between 11-14 years old who are showing signs of being violent within the family home. The pilot will commence in February 2013 and run to September 2015. The Panel highlighted this as a good opportunity to promote preventative work with young people.

11.2 Full details of services 7, 8 and 9 provided can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Experiences of Service Users

- 11.3 The Panel wanted to understand how easy it was for victims of domestic violence to access services, and was given the opportunity to speak with staff and residents at the Wearside Women in Need (WWIN) refuge. It should be noted these were all women and therefore the views of male victims are not reflected.
- 11.4 In the main the women it spoke to were unaware of the services in the city before accessing the refuge; in the majority of cases agencies such as the Police and Children's Services had made the referral or signposted to WWIN.
- 11.5 The Panel learned that experiences of professionals' attitudes to domestic violence could be 'patchy', although attitudes have changed significantly over the years. WWIN stated this was, in part, due to the enormous amount of training that had been carried out within the Council, City Hospitals and Northumbria Police over the years. Once again, reductions to public funding may cause training to be scaled back among those frontline services, and as staff leave there is a real risk the organisational 'memory' of dealing with domestic violence will be reduced.
- 11.6 Differences in the level of assistance and signposting from individual police officers and other frontline agencies were continually highlighted. Where a victim is assessed as high risk and subject to MARAC, a high level of support is provided and signposting, advice and regular follow up contact is good. Where victims are assessed as being of medium or standard risk this appears to be less so. One victim hadn't received any advice, guidance or support from the Police or health workers and hadn't known where she could go upon leaving hospital, which had been a frightening experience for her. Her parents had eventually found the telephone number for WWIN and gained help.
- 11.7 Throughout the review, BME victims of domestic violence were highlighted as often having different, more complex support needs. Language can often be a major barrier to victims understanding how and where they can access help and victims may not leave the family home very often. Where victims do seek help to leave a violent partner, they can be shunned by their families and the wider community; therefore ongoing support may be required. The Panel was unable to explore this issue in the detail needed, but deemed it important that it be given consideration by the Safer Sunderland Partnership.
- 11.8 The Panel believed that there should be better, more consistent signposting for all victims of domestic violence to the appropriate services and that this should be done as a matter of course by staff working in frontline services such as the Police and across the Council and other partners. Councillors should also be aware of the issues and promote them by discussing them openly and knowing where to signpost people who need advice and guidance.

Health Needs Assessment

11.9 In 2012, Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust commissioned a health needs assessment to explore the issue of domestic violence in Sunderland. The broad aims of the needs assessment were agreed at a meeting of the Sunderland Domestic violence Partnership in October 2012.

11.10 The aims of the needs assessment were to:

- Identify the scale of DV in Sunderland, including profiling characteristics of victims;
- Describe existing services currently provided for victims (and their families);
- Map need against existing service provision for victims and affected children to develop an understanding of gaps in provision in Sunderland;
- Consider areas where a business case may be made to support service development to improve access to and quality of care for those affected by DV, and to work toward equity of access across the city;
- Consider partnership working with regard to preventing and responding to DV and make recommendations, if appropriate, to improve multi-agency working

11.11 Police data was used to identify the amount of domestic violence in Sunderland. Around 6,000 incidents are reported to the Police each year, though it is estimated that between 11,600 and 15,600 people living in Sunderland have experienced domestic violence in the last year. It has been reported in all wards of the city, though some areas have higher rates than others. The health impacts of domestic violence on victims cover both physical and mental health, with effects ranging from injury to stress and anxiety as well as more severe psychological effects. Exposure to domestic violence can also impact on the health and wellbeing of children, negatively impacting on educational attainment and future risk taking behaviour.

11.12 The opinions of experts, from academia, service providers and commissioners, and the opinions and attitudes of service users and the wider public have also been explored. In addition, efforts were made to compare levels of need and provision in Sunderland to other areas.

11.13 Regrettably, the final findings of the needs assessment were unavailable to the Panel during its evidence gathering. There are plans in April 2013 for a group of key stakeholders to meet to discuss the findings and to shape and agree the recommendations. Once complete, the health needs assessment will be presented to appropriate boards within the Council and, where relevant, partner organisations. The Panel considered this a key opportunity to enhance the current understanding of domestic violence in Sunderland and utilise the findings and recommendations in future commissioning of domestic violence services.

12. CONCLUSIONS

- 12.1 The Scrutiny Panel has made a number of conclusions based on the evidence gathered throughout the review:-
- (a) Domestic violence has a major impact on society, both in monetary costs to the taxpayer and social costs to the victims and their families, as well as the wider community. The social stigma attached to becoming a victim of domestic violence and people's reluctance to talk about it slows progress in regard to awareness raising, reporting and conviction. The Panel concluded that there was no better place to start this dialogue than through local community forums;
 - (b) The Council has a key role in tackling domestic violence, both within frontline services and strategically. In recent years the Council has had to radically rethink the way in which it delivers all services. The Panel acknowledges the Council's efforts in working with partners to tackle domestic violence and recognises the necessity of changes to the way in which services are delivered. Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with partners about the way in which domestic violence is coordinated will be imperative in future service planning;
 - (c) An excellent level of partnership working and information sharing was identified by the Panel, particularly through the MARAC and SDVC mechanisms; however it identified some barriers in accessing information from health services. The Panel acknowledged this is currently being addressed through the Safer Sunderland Partnership Delivery Plan and health services in the city are now being engaged to improve this;
 - (d) Preventative work and raising awareness of domestic violence amongst young people at the earliest stages is key to reducing this issue over the longer term, something already recognised by the Safer Sunderland Partnership. It is therefore essential that work is undertaken in schools and youth groups. To this end, the learning resource developed from the recent work of the Safer Sunderland Partnership and pupils of Farringdon school should be utilised as widely as possible. Moreover, further ways to engage with schools should be considered to increase the quantity and quality of teaching around healthy relationships and issues of domestic violence.
 - (e) Many of the findings of the review concurred with the views of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the other agencies and services it received evidence from. This was particularly evident in the Panel's view that the ongoing training of police officers is essential in improving the support a victim receives in accessing services, something the Police and Crime Commissioner intends to commit to as part of the Police and Crime Plan. The Panel also noted that Councillors, other frontline staff working in the city and local residents should play an important role in this and believed that the Council website or other communication mechanisms could be a valuable resource in supporting them to effectively signpost to services.
 - (f) Due to the timescales involved in the Policy Review the Panel focused its attentions on female victims of domestic violence in the main. Domestic violence affects people across race, gender, and occurs in heterosexual and gay relationships. It also has a significant impact upon children. The outcome of the Health Needs Assessment being undertaken by the PCT looks at these issues in more detail and will prove a useful tool for the Council and the Safer Sunderland Partnership in understanding domestic violence in the city and mapping the services required across the city for use in future planning and delivery.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 The Scrutiny Panel has taken evidence from a variety of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Committee's key recommendations to the Cabinet are as outlined below:-

That the Council:-

- (a) Undertakes to work with partners to consider the way in which the approach to domestic violence is coordinated strategically across the city;
- (b) Considers how it can raise the awareness of frontline staff and ward councillors across the city to improve signposting to domestic violence services for victims;

That the Safer Sunderland Partnership:-

- (c) Reviews how domestic violence crime is reported to ward councillors and local people in community forums; and
- (d) Delivers the improvement activities detailed within the Safer Sunderland Partnership Delivery Plan within the specified timescales as follows:-
 - (i) Improve information sharing between healthcare services and domestic violence providers by raising awareness of domestic violence amongst a range of health professionals and strengthening the linkages between health and domestic violence
 - (ii) Engages with schools and young peoples services to improve young people's awareness of the warning signs around abuse in teenage relationships and the support available;
 - (iii) Utilises the findings of the Health Needs Assessment undertaken by the PCT to enhance its understanding of domestic violence in the city, map current provision and inform future service planning and commissioning intentions, having particular regard to the needs of BME victims.

14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 14.1 The Scrutiny Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our review. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

- Councillor Harry Trueman, Chair of the Safer Sunderland Partnership;
- Vera Baird QC, Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner;
- DI Denise Clark, Northumbria Police;
- Jeanette Smith, Crown Prosecution Service;
- Michelle Meldrum, Gentoo;
- Steve Eagles, Impact Family Services
- Clare Phillipson, Wearside Women in Need

- Fiona McHale and Laura Rutter, Victim Support;
- Glen Wilson, NHS SOTW TPCT; and
- Kelly Henderson, Sunderland City Council.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

A	Panel Agenda and Report 5 July 2012	Available
B	Panel Agenda and Reports 14 January 2013	Available
C	Panel Agenda and Reports 13 February 2013	Available
D	Panel Agenda and Reports 18 February 2013	Available
E	Domestic Violence Refuge Site Visit 18 February 2013	Available
F	Panel Agenda and Reports 19 March 2013	Available
G	Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan (Home Office 2011)	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/call-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-action-plan
H	A Place of Greater Safety – (CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic violence), 2012)	http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/A_Place_of_greater_safety.pdf
I	Safer Sunderland Partnership Single Delivery Plan – Domestic Violence Delivery Network Priorities 2012/13	Available
J	Health Needs Assessment – Background (Sunderland Primary Care Trust)	Available

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Appendix 1

WEAR SIDE WOMEN IN NEED (WWIN)

WWIN operate three refuges based across the City, in the Coalfield, Washington and East areas. This supported accommodation provides a safe place of refuge and intensive support for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

WWIN undertake an extensive level of work that had been undertaken within the community to ensure communities were comfortable with the refuges. This is an important element in improving the awareness and understanding of those residents in the local area and crucial to gaining acceptance.

Unlike other domestic violence refuges, WWIN are rooted in the community and have an ethos of maintaining the support and contact with service users when they have moved on to accommodation of their own. The organisation don't 'close cases' and many families are still in contact with WWIN, often years later.

Not all service users will go to live in refuges, many do not wish to give up their homes and outreach work is undertaken by WWIN whereby service users are provided with support to deal with the issues they have as a result of domestic violence. Women are invited to participate in group sessions and undertake the Freedom Programme. This programme deals with male violence to women and children. One woman reported that this gave her a '*much wider understanding and perception of domestic violence*'.

WWIN also provides support to service users by accompanying them to appointments and the women felt this support was instrumental in them seeking the appropriate healthcare.

Refuges offer a safe and supportive environment in which women experiencing similar sorts of issues can talk about their experiences and make friends after often being isolated in previous relationships.

The refuge staff support women to gain access to education and employment. At the time of the visit the staff reported that:

- 12 were attending various Colleges
- 2 were completing Access Courses to gain entry to university;
- Several of the refuge's BME residents were completing ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages); and
- 2 were volunteering in local charity shops.

WWIN also arranges visits to the refuge from the Department of Work and Pensions and Job Linkage, and the women are also involved in art therapy, drama and working on the latest campaigns for domestic violence.

IMPACT FAMILY SERVICES

Impact Family Services is a local charity that works with children and families around issues of family breakdown. There are two bases in Sunderland, the head office at 36 West Sunnyside and a child contact centre, currently based at Pallion. It offers a range of services to support families where domestic violence is an issue.

Child Contact Centres

These are a safe venue for children to meet a parent they no longer live with. In some cases where there has been domestic violence the centre would be used if mum wanted to promote contact or the families courts were ordering contact between dad/child. For higher risk cases, for example, where CAFCASS and/or family courts are involved it offers supervised contact whereby the session would be closely monitored and a report prepared to send back to the referrer, which helps them to address risk. The child contact centres are for private law cases only.

Women's Support Worker

A Support Worker works with women who are using the child contact centres when domestic violence has been an issue and need additional support.

Domestic violence Perpetrator Programme

This runs in South Tyneside, but men from Sunderland are accepted, where they are going through the family courts for contact with their children and there has been domestic violence and CAFCASS are involved. The Judge or Magistrate will make a Contact Activity Order for the perpetrator to attend the South Tyneside Domestic violence Perpetrator Programme. The programme consists of 4 x one to one assessment, 4 x pre groupwork sessions; 6 x 4 week modules and 1 x 2 week module, totalling 34 weeks

Family Mediation Service

A family mediator acts as an impartial third party that help parents discuss arrangements for children post separation. In cases of domestic violence this would only go ahead if both parents wanted contact and the mediator felt that neither party was being coerced into attending or making agreements (both parents are seen separately before a decision about mediation is taken).

Respect Young Peoples Programme

This is a national pilot with Respect, an early intervention programme for young people aged between 11-14 years old who are showing signs of being violent within the family home. The pilot will commence in February 2013 and run to September 2015.

VICTIM SUPPORT

Approach to Supporting Victims of Domestic violence

Victim Support offers a free and confidential service to people who have experienced a crime and to their friends and family including:-

- Information
- Practical help
- Advocacy
- Emotional support

A Risk Led Approach to Supporting Victims of Domestic violence

The CAADA-DASH (Coordinated Action Against Domestic violence - Domestic violence, Stalking and Harassment) risk identification checklist form is completed for all domestic violence referrals received. The support offered depends on risk level:

- Standard risk – a core service;
- High risk – support to victims where no specialist service is available or the available service is unable to provide a service due to oversubscription; and
- Very high risk – if there is no specialist service, we will offer a holding service until one is available or we will refer back to the original referrer

Staff and Volunteer Training

Staff and Volunteers receive training as follows:

- Core crime - training (four days) and accreditation
- Serious crime – further training and accreditation
- Domestic violence training – now CAADA accredited

Standard risk training is four days and high risk training consists of four days as per standard risk plus one day safety planning training

Referrals

Referrals are made to Victim Support from:-

- Northumbria Police;
- Self referrals;
- Other agency referrals; and the
- Initial contact from Victim Support: Victim Care Unit

Needs assessment

Victim Support offers a gender sensitive service. Once contact is made, confidentiality is explained and a needs assessment is completed. This looks at:-

- Emotional support
- Practical help
- Security

- Information

At this point the CAADA-DASH is completed.

Service Delivery

Support is provided by a trained volunteer or staff member who will:-

- Signpost to other services such as Wearside Women in Need;
- Make the appropriate referrals to other agencies, for example – safeguarding referral, IDVA (Independent Domestic violence Advisor/Advocate) service, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference);
- Commission appropriate services;
- Provide safety planning informed by identified risks; and
- Develop victims in dealing with a crisis, safety when remaining in a relationship and safety where the victim wants to leave/has left the relationship.

Standard risk support is given in relation to needs identified. This will include contact by telephone or face to face. The risk is reviewed at every contact and CAADA-DASH reviewed at least every six to eight weeks. For high risk victims where there is no IDVA service available support is given in relation to needs identified as per standard risk. Additionally a CAADA Individual Safety and Support Plan is completed. For very high risk victims, a referral to MARAC and to an IDVA is made. If the IDVA service cannot meet demand of referrals, Victim Support offer a holding service.

GENTOO

Gentoo are committed to delivering services and engaging in partnerships which will contribute towards preventing and minimising incidents of domestic violence in the City. Gentoo treat all reports of domestic violence as a category 1 case, which are the most serious cases of anti-social behaviour involving our team of specialist Community Safety resource.

Gentoo have a Domestic violence Policy. The aims are as follows:-

- Minimise and reduce incidents of domestic violence and raise awareness of Gentoo's 'no tolerance' approach to perpetrators.
- Support victims of domestic violence.
- Improve feelings of safety and security.
- Build effective partnerships.

It is important to recognise the impact of domestic violence on children and therefore Gentoo also have a Safeguarding Children Policy which links to the Domestic violence Policy and the wider Community Safety Strategy.

Supporting Victims of Anti-Social Behaviour

Gentoo have three full time Victim Support Officers who are dedicated to providing support to victims of anti-social behaviour. Approximately 50% of their caseload relates to domestic violence cases.

Over the last 2 years, the team have supported over 100 victims of domestic violence. In terms of improving feelings of safety, only 14% of customers felt very or fairly safe at the point of accessing the service in comparison to over 80% at the point of exit.

The nature of the support offered to victims of domestic violence will be tailored to the individual's requirements. Typical support measures include:-

- Providing customers with a range of information and advice about their options so they can make an informed choice.
- Providing additional property security measures such as house alarms, window locks, door locks etc...
- Regular contact with the customer at a venue determined by the customer i.e. where they feel safe.
- If the case is going to court, Gentoo's Support Officers can arrange for the customer to visit the court prior to the court date so they are familiar with the surroundings/environment.
- Use of agreed code language when telephone contact is made so the customer can communicate in a safe environment and aren't put at further risk.
- The Officers will accompany the customer to court if requested.
- Where required, the team will assist in providing practical help such as arranging transport to and from court, facilitating child care etc...

Supporting Perpetrators of Anti-Social Behaviour

In addition, Gentoo have two full time Positive Engagement Officers who deal with perpetrators of anti-social behaviour including domestic violence.

The team work with specialist organisations when dealing with domestic violence cases, in particular, Wearside Women in Need who provide services to both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Enforcement Officers

Gentoo have six dedicated Community Safety Enforcement Officers who will deal with any tenancy enforcement matters arising from a domestic violence incident.

Partnerships

Gentoo work in partnership with others in the City to address the issue of domestic violence. Key partnerships including:-

- **Safer Sunderland Partnership**

Gentoo are part of the Safer Sunderland Partnership and attend all relevant forums in relation to this. They are committed to working with others to deliver the longer term aims of the Safer Sunderland Strategy 2008-23, one of which is “levels of repeat incidents of domestic violence will be at their lowest levels”.

- **Wearside Women in Need (WWIN)**

Gentoo work in partnership with WWIN to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for the customer. The agencies also work together in relation to supporting perpetrators where appropriate.

WWIN were involved in Gentoo’s review of their Domestic violence policy and the two agencies worked together to produce innovative lip salves which provide victims with easy access to a helpline number which is embedded in the bar code.

Gentoo staff carry out drop-ins at WWIN’s refuges across the City providing housing advice and low level support.

- **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC’s)**

MARACs are part of a coordinated community response to dealing with domestic violence and involve key agencies coming together to share information. Gentoo are a core member of MARAC and provide information and intelligence to assist with determining the appropriate course of action with these cases.

- **Sunderland Safeguarding Children & Adults Boards**

Gentoo are represented on both Boards and many of the sub-committees. Domestic violence is a significant factor in relation to having a negative impact on a child’s emotional and physical wellbeing so joining up the approaches to domestic violence and safeguarding is key to ensuring successful outcomes.

Cause for Concern

This is an approach aimed at identifying potential victims of domestic violence at an early state. Gentoo’s call centre staff are trained to recognise repairs of a specific nature, such as bathroom

door locks, broken windows, damaged internal doors etc... which may trigger concern in relation to domestic violence.

If three repairs of this nature are identified within a 12 month period, a 'cause for concern' referral is made to Gentoo's Support and Safeguarding team. They will then investigate whether or not the household is known to us or other partners in respect of domestic violence.

Further actions and approaches will depend on the findings of their research. If there are no current interventions, the team will attempt to make contact in some generic guise to form a relationship with the residents and further their understanding of the situation. There have been many positive outcomes of this approach including victims disclosing domestic violence and receiving subsequent support which they otherwise may not have been aware of.

Campaigns/Awareness Raising

Gentoo have been involved in many awareness raising campaigns over the last few years including:-

Northumbria Police Christmas Campaigns

Gentoo get involved by circulating information across their 1700 staff through a range of communication methods.

"Only Losers Give Bruises"

This was a partnership campaign during the summer of 2011, led by WWIN and Gentoo with support from other Safer Sunderland partners. The campaign involved a bus visiting different parts of Sunderland with staff from Gentoo, Northumbria Police and WWIN on hand to offer advice and provide information. The campaign aimed to engage the local community, raise awareness of domestic violence and give victims the opportunity to seek advice or help.

Abuse in Teenage Relationships – 'I Have the Right'

In 2012, Gentoo worked with Sunderland Council, Farrington College and other partners to produce a DVD to raise awareness of abuse in teenage relationships which is of growing concern.