

#### RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

highlighting what services are available for victims, but also to assist Elected Members and frontline services/staff who may be approached by victims of domestic violence, to signpost victims

Notes of meeting held on: 14th January 2013, 5.00pm

**Present:** Cllrs David Errington, Elizabeth Gibson, Barry Curran, Anne Lawson, George Thompson, John Wiper.

Helen Lancaster (HL), Louise Preece, and Kelly Henderson (KH) (Principal Policy Officer for People & Neighbourhoods - Domestic Violence)

# Apologies: Cllr Dennis Richardson and Cllr John Scott. Action **Welcome and Introductions** Cllr Errington welcomed everyone to the Panel and introductions made. **Declarations of interest** 2. Cllr Errington asked Members to declare any interests. Only declaration was from Cllr Errington who declared a personal interest in item 3 if the TPCT was discussed. 3. Policy Review 2012/13: Domestic Violence Scoping Report HL advised on the approach of the policy review of Domestic Violence and, outlined the term of reference and overall aim of the review. Various methods of evidence gathering for the Policy Review were discussed and highlighted in section 6 of the report, which included: A variety of people giving evidence which could include key Formatted: Indent: Left: 8.5 pt, Tabs: 26.5 pt, List tab + stake holders, such as the Chair of the Safer Sunderland Not at 72 pt Partnership, representatives of Northumbria Police, service providers such as Impact Family Services and WWIN, Sunderland Domestic Violence Court, Sunderland TPCT and service users and: A site visit to a refuge HL asked Members to advise if they felt that there were any areas of evidence gathering missing from the above, that could help form part of the review. Cllr Thompson asked for clarity about what was meant by raising awareness of domestic violence and what services are available to victims. KH responded by advising the Panel that one of the overall aims was to raise awareness of domestic violence along with

into the right support networks for help.

Cllr Wiper asked if the review would include looking at the impact that domestic violence has on children within the household.

Cllr Lawson also suggested that maybe the Panel needs to look at families to assess the impact on them.

HL advised that this would potentially cross over with the scope of the Children's Services Panel, and there was a need to ensure the review remained focused and able to deliver a detailed piece of work within the three month schedule.

The Panel agreed to a suggestion from Cllr Thompson that Vera Baird the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner be invited to give evidence, given that one of her key priorities is likely to be domestic and sexual violence.

The Panel agreed the scope of the review.

4. Policy Review 2012/13:Domestic Violence – Setting the Scene KH provided a short presentation to the Panel, giving current statistics and information on domestic violence.

KH advised that in March 2013 the Government's definition of domestic violence (slide 1) will be widened to include those aged 16+, and extended to include psychological, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.

Domestic violence isn't just physical. The perception of domestic violence is that it only happens in more deprived communities and to those more troubled families, but the evidence shows it cuts across those from all walks of life.

Cllr Curran commented that it would often be very difficult to identify or in fact prove those types of domestic abuse where there were no physical signs. In particular, the victims themselves may not consider themselves to be so. KH commented that it was often down to the way in which cases were viewed by the Police and other agencies.

Cllr Thompson enquired as to whether Northumbria Police were ready for the change to the domestic violence definition in terms of recording the different types of abuse in order to gain a better understanding of domestic violence in the city. KH advised that she was aware the systems were being developed and that they would be robust and breakdowns of age, gender etc would be made, although there was sometimes a disparity in the way the Police recorded domestic violence incidents. The Police can explain this further when they attend Panel. Cllr Thompson noted

that systems were only as good as the people using them.

Whilst there is a specialist Domestic Abuse and Rape Team covering the Sunderland area, Northumbria Police are also training specialised officers to become a single point of contact who will work within the various Neighbourhood Teams across the force area to deal with victims of domestic violence.

Current statistics provided in slide 2 show 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% of women victims of serious sexual assault were assaulted by their partner or ex-partner

Slide 3 also provided some further statistics and information on the impact of domestic violence.

Information and statistics shown in slide 4 show the local picture of domestic violence and what services are available to help victims. Locally the number of incidents have decreased from 6,092 in 2011 to 5,980 in 2012. Local services available include:

## **Specialist Domestic Violence Court:**

This court is specialised trained and only deals with domestic violence cases.

## Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC):

This deals with safety planning for victims of domestic violence and links in with partner agencies such as LMAPS to provide information on both victims and perpetrators.

### **Refuge Accommodation:**

There are currently 3 refuges based across the City in the Coalfield, Washington and City Centre.

# **Independent Domestic Advocates (IDVA):**

These are specially trained and provide a much needed support for victims which includes helping them prepare for court etc. This can increase convictions as the victims are less likely to retract during the process.

Cllr Lawson enquired as to whether IDVAs worked voluntarily.

KH advised these were paid mainstream council employees that whilst Sunderland allocates £40k (with 20k additional from WWIN)

HL/KH

KH

Sunderland has less IDVAs, than recommended by guidance. This may well be something the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner looks at in terms of standardising the approach.	
Home Security and Sanctuary Scheme (HSSS): This scheme provides information and security improvements to victim's homes.	
Domestic Violence 24 Hour Helpline: 24 hr helpline (0800 066 5555) run by volunteers from Wearside Women In Need.	
Perpetrator Work: Specialist teams work with Perpetrators as a group or on a one-to- one basis.	
Cllr Thompson referred to the slight drop in recorded crimes in domestic violence from 2011 to 2012 and commented that this was one of the only crimes in which we would like to see a rise in recorded crime as we know this issue is largely hidden.	
Cllr Gibson commented that previously this had been a hidden issue, but that more recently there was a definite improvement in the awareness of the Police in responding the crime.	
Cllr Curran asked about the length of sentences perpetrators receive and was advise that this varied widely and would be determined by the seriousness of the abuse/violence.	
KH advised the panel that she would provide further information relating to domestic violence where necessary and throughout the review.	
New Issues from the Scrutiny Committee	
No new issues to report.	
Issues to feedback to next Scrutiny Committee HL reported this is a regular item on the agenda, allowing members to raise areas of concern or issues to be reported back to the Scrutiny Committee.	
HL advised that Cllr Errington would be presenting the Panel's final report on Reducing Re-offending at the Scrutiny Committee on 17th January. After this the report will go to Cabinet on 13th February and the Safer Sunderland Partnership in March. As part of the Cabinet present the relevant Piresterntes will have to	

of the Cabinet process the relevant Directorates will have to produce a detailed action plan which outlines how they intend to achieve the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel. HL

will ensure the Panel receive this.

HL

5.

6.

	Cllr Errington suggested that the tight timescale to complete two reviews should be feed back to the Scrutiny Committee be discussed to see if this was being experienced by other panel's.	
7.	AOB/Member items	
	None	
8.	Date of future meetings	
	HL to circulate future Panel dates to members.	