

TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday 16 October at 4pm in Meeting Room 3, the Ground Floor, The Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting which can be found at www.portsmouth.gov.uk).

Present

Councillor Caroline Scott (Chair)
Ken Ellcome
Phil Smith
Sandra Stockdale

Also Present

Sharon Furtado, Hidden Violence Manager
Ex-Service User.

17 Apologies for Absence (AI 1).

Councillors Robert New and Les Stevens sent their apologies.

18 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2).

No interests were declared.

19 Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 September 2013 (AI 3).

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September were not available.

20 Review of Domestic Abuse (AI 5).

In response to questions, Sharon Furtado, Hidden Violence Manager explained the following points:

- The Early Intervention Project (EIP) deals with honour-based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic abuse. As part of this team, the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) Service works with survivors of domestic abuse who are at 'high risk' of serious harm.
- A risk identification checklist of 24 questions is used for people suffering from domestic abuse who are at high risk of serious harm. This is produced by Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA), a national charity. Clients who score 14 or more are referred to MARAC and those with a score of 8 to 13 are referred to an advice and support service.
- The voluntary agency Aurora New Dawn provides funding for ½ IDVA post for Portsmouth.
- The police refer cases to both the council and Aurora New Dawn.
- The EIP works closely with the housing department and refuge. Referral to the refuge is a short-term solution and is not always appropriate. The refuge accepts women and their children except for boys of 14 or over. Clients who are misusing drugs or alcohol can only be accepted if they are

on a treatment plan. Many domestic abuse survivors misuse these substances as a coping mechanism.

- It is very difficult for a woman to relocate her family to a new area or town without a plan in place as she may not have access to finances and will have to consider schooling arrangements for children.
- Clients may want to apply to court for residency or non-molestation orders but as there is now limited access to legal aid most will be liable for the fees which are approximately £1,000.
- The IDVA support clients to write their own briefs for non-molestation orders. IDVAs receive training from local solicitors and have access to the council's legal services. However, they are not legal advisors and the client might have literacy issues. The judges are very strict regarding the format of the briefs and will not always allow the client to have someone to speak or accompany them.
- Staff in the EIP attend the fortnightly Multi-Agency-Risk-Assessment Conference which formulates action plans for approximately 30 cases per meeting.
- The courts do not always seem to take into account the impact that witnessing domestic abuse has on children.
- The Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service has a high eligibility threshold for access (i.e. you must be seriously affected before you will be accepted) and has a waiting list.
- The EIP is not able to provide support for children.
- The Butterfly programme is a 14 week group work programme for survivors of domestic abuse. One of the issues explored is the impact on children.
- The funding for the IDVA with responsibility for children and young people's funding was not renewed.
- It can be difficult to refer clients to the appropriate service as often clients downplay the violence and fear that social services will remove the children.
- One in six domestic abuse victims are male. It is often difficult for them to access services due to fear that they may not be believed. There is one refuge for men in Wales.
- The Portsmouth Clinical Commissioning Group provided funding for IRIS a primary care domestic violence programme. The IRIS steering group meets every two months.
- The Youth Offending Team stopped running the Cookie Crew when it was integrated into the ITY Service. This weekly project encouraged children who have witnessed domestic abuse between 5 and 11 to express themselves. There is currently no similar service available.
- Two part time Advocate Educators provide training for Portsmouth GP staff so that they are able to identify patients who may be experiencing domestic abuse. Surgeries only permit training sessions on Wednesday afternoons, so there is a lot of competition from organisations for that slot. Research shows that women want to be asked about potential problems at home. The Clinical Commissioning Group recognises the importance of identifying cases of domestic abuse as early as possible in terms of benefits to the patient and to the potential long term savings.

- There is level 1 and 2 free training available for statutory agencies and voluntary organisations.
- There are currently no programmes for perpetrators but EIP has received some funding (from whom?). The probation runs some programmes for convicted perpetrators. If it is not voluntary, it is less likely to succeed.
- Raising awareness of front line professionals is essential to ensure that they know where to signpost people who disclose. Key individuals within many council departments have been trained as domestic abuse to support colleagues.
- Parents and children can be both perpetrators and victims. It is difficult for a parent to seek help with a child that is abusive because the other children may be removed by social services.
- Some organisations are not politically neutral and this may deter people from accessing them. It is good that the council does not express any political views.
- The EIP advises other departments about cultural issues.

Councillors Ellcome and Smith informed the panel that they are members of the Safer Portsmouth Partnership which is involved in MARAC.

Witness A gave an overview of her experience of using the domestic abuse support services:

- She was in and out of an abusive relationship between 2004 and 2010. The violence started after about six months.
- Her mother was supportive but her friends did not understand her situation.
- She was reluctant to seek assistance because she feared that social services might take her children into care.
- The Cookie Crew which provided services for children between 5 and 11 was very useful for her children.
- The lack of evidence of sexual violence meant that the police were not able to prosecute. Society's attitude towards marital rape is that it is not serious.
- Her GP did not know how to deal with her problems.
- She was able to access the EIP as and when she wanted to over a number of years. It provided an excellent service and supported her when she applied for injunctions, reported crimes to the police and appeared in court. The service is now accessible at the weekend.
- It was disheartening that after receiving a one year suspended sentence, the perpetrator could breach the conditions with impunity.
- A so-called 'minor' attack just before Christmas was the turning point for her and she sought an injunction but found the judge unsympathetic.
- Representing herself at court was an intimidating experience.
- A child support worker used to work at the refuge but does not anymore.
- She wrote to the Prime Minister to ask why in cases of domestic abuse the victim and children often have to leave the family home and not the perpetrator.
- Witnessing domestic abuse has a significant impact on children's development and behaviour such as bedwetting, aggression or passivity.

- After she moved out, the council's social service team organised contact between the children and their father.
- She suffered long term health damage and her children are on the at-risk register.
- Two women a week die as a result of domestic abuse.
- The effects of emotional abuse can be longer lasting than physical violence.
- There are several books that explore the reasons why perpetrators commit domestic abuse including 'Why does he do that?' by Lindy Bancroft and The Charm Syndrome by Sandra Horley.
- The Butterfly Programme was very empowering.

Actions

The following information will be sent to the panel:

- Details of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum which is held every two months.
- Details of domestic abuse awareness training.
- The reasons why the Cookie Crew stopped running.

Everyone agreed that more could be done to raise awareness of domestic abuse. Locations for advertising could include:

- Flagship (the council's residents' magazine)
- Community centres
- GP surgeries
- Pharmacies
- On the Big Screen
- The TV screen on the ground floor

The panel discussed the following ideas for improving domestic abuse services:

- Lobbying the government to extend the eligibility criteria for legal aid.
- Employing a solicitor to support domestic abuse clients applying for injunctions, non-molestation orders etc.
- Providing a support service for children who have witnessed domestic abuse.

The meeting closed at 5.45pm.