



St. Helens Council

Environment & Safer Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Review of Domestic Violence Services

March 2013

Task Group

Councillor(s) – Paul Lynch – Chairman, Alan Cunliffe, Sandra Dyer, Pat Ireland and Jimmy Jackson

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Chairman's Foreword and Acknowledgements



Councillor: Paul Lynch Chairman of the Scrutiny Task Group

The following report is the culmination of several months work by the task and finish group to review the Domestic Violence service in St.Helens.

Over the previous months, the task and finish group and I have met and discussed this issue with a wide variety of people involved with Domestic Violence services, from Merseyside Police, to Council services, Helena Housing, Addaction and St Helens and Knowsley NHS Trust, to gain a full picture of the problems and solutions in this area. We visited the Domestic Violence refuge that supports victims, spoke to the officials who punish the offenders, and have been shocked, impressed and educated in equal measure.

Domestic Violence is a vile crime, with far reaching consequences that affect every aspect of local life. It turns the home into a place of fear, not security. It turns love into hate, and living into suffering, and with the right combination of actions we can stop it. Actions from educating children and teachers to identify when Domestic Violence is happening and who to contact for help, to the best allocation of funding to achieve the most impact in support, to intervening when the problem is clear and open.

As a Local Authority, the task and finish group and I believe that we have a moral duty to provide care and support to victims, and to intervene before Domestic Violence occurs. This is a moral duty that is important now more than ever, for whilst our budgets are being cut, and less money is to be found, so too are household budgets and company budgets. Falling wages and rising prices exponentially increase personal and family stress, and violent tendencies are brought forward and incidence becomes more likely.

As councillors, we are here to serve and protect our residents from any threat we can. The task and finish group and I would urge the Cabinet to back the recommendations held within.

I would like to thank all the officers involved in the review for their time and support.

Regards

Paul Lynch,

Moss Bank Ward Councillor

1.0 Introduction and Terms of Reference

- 1.1 During the process of agreeing the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2012/2013 the Council's Environment & Safer Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at Domestic Violence (DV).
- 1.2 The aim of the review was to investigate the Council's provision of services with regards to DV and partnership working. The terms of the review were as follows:
- To consider the development of St Helens's approach to tackling DV.
 - To evaluate the impact of the current commissioned service and assess its performance as to:
 - Supporting victims of DV
 - Supporting victims through the criminal justice system
 - Engagement parameters for Priority victims
 - To assess progress towards meeting targets, including performance measures for DV including:
 - Increasing reporting and detection of DV
 - Preventing DV against young people
 - Dealing with perpetrators.
 - To consider any future plans for tackling DV and supporting victims.
 - To identify examples of best practice in St.Helens and other neighbouring authorities and make any recommendations for improvement.

2.0 Method of the Investigation

- The task & finish group consisted of Councillors Paul Lynch (Chair), Alan Cunliffe, Sandra Dyer, Pat Ireland and Jimmy Jackson.
- We also enlisted the help of Wendy Wright the Council's DV Coordinator and Rod Jones Safer Communities Manager.
- We looked at background information with regards to our DV services and that of partnership organisations.
- We meet with representatives from the partnership organisations to discuss their roles.
- The task & finish group visited the DV refuge and spoke to a victim of DV.
- We reviewed the Council's Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013.

- We considered working practices in other Local Authorities to identify any best practice.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 DV happens in all groups and sections of society, affecting all people from all backgrounds regardless of age, income, ethnicity or sexual orientation. DV isn't always violent behaviour it can include psychological, sexual, financial or emotional abuse.

The Home Office defines DV as:

“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.”

A revised definition was issued by the Home Office in September 2012 which will be implemented from March 2013 is as follows:

‘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.

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

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional*

“Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

“Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”

The government has made it clear that this definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group. The most significant difference is the inclusion of those aged 16 and 17, and the revised wording to reflect coercive control. The changes may have an impact on local services.

3.2 **St.Helens Council Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013**

The St.Helens Council Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013 has been established to reflect the Councils, local agencies and organisations aims and objectives to work effectively together to combat DV.

The aims of the Strategy are:

- Provide a concerted, coherent and co-ordinated approach by all agencies to tackle DV.
- Enable agencies to account for their work and to make a valid contribution to the 'big picture' within the agenda.
- Raise awareness of DV within St.Helens, ensuring the community, professionals and all agencies alike understand and recognise domestic abuse is as dangerous and as damaging to a victim's needs as domestic violence is.
- Improve protection for victims and their families in the Borough.
- Increase community confidence in reporting DV.
- Reduce the level and impact of DV within the Borough.

3.3 The Strategy has five key challenges:

- **Support for Victims:** To work in partnership to meet the needs of all victims in St.Helens, to enable access to specialist support and a life free from violence.
- **Children & Young People:** To recognise the needs of, and provide support for, children and young people whose lives are affected by Domestic Violence and abuse and to promote preventative approaches through early interventions.
- **Perpetrators:** To ensure individual perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse (convicted and non-convicted) recognise and understand their behaviour. We aim to provide appropriate support and personal development aimed at changing their behaviour. However, perpetrators will also face robust enforcement measures when appropriate.
- **Awareness:** To improve the awareness of the extent and impact of Domestic Violence and abuse both across the local community and within agencies.
- **Joint Working:** To continue to improve the joint working about Domestic Violence and abuse between agencies, including information-sharing and establishing robust structures, to enable a co-ordinated approach.

The St.Helens Plan 2012-2015 comments that:

'The Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy is having a positive impact on supporting victims, raising awareness of the impact of domestic violence, working with perpetrators and successfully reducing the number of repeat incidents'.

3.4 **Key Facts**

DV accounts for 25% of all violent crime across England and Wales, and on average 2 women every week are killed by a current or former partner. Although it is not just women that are victims, DV happens to men as well.

DV has the highest rate of repeat victimisation in comparison to any other crime - 35% of households have a second incident within 5 weeks of the first. There will be an average of 35 incidents before a victim calls the Police and estimates suggests that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will be a victim of DV.

Home Office data released in November 2012 showed that 10% of 999 calls to the Police were about DV, which rose to 21% within Merseyside.

In 2010 – 3,920 calls reporting Domestic Violence

In 2011 – 4,324 calls reporting Domestic Violence.

In 2012 – 4,480 calls reporting Domestic Violence in St Helens.

The Department of Health estimates that, every year, 750,000 children witness DV and that 90% of DV incidents children were in the same room or adjacent rooms.

The National Centre for Domestic Violence recently (December 2012) said it has seen just over a 19% increase in the number of cases it is dealing with over the past three years. As the rise coincides with Britain's economic squeeze, it has sparked concerns that the financial pressures families are facing could have provoked domestic abuse.

3.5 **Costs of DV**

Recent statistics (2011) show that DV costs England £5.5billion pounds each year. Breakdowns of the figures are as follows:

In England the estimated total costs of domestic violence are £5.5bn which comprises:

- £1.6bn for physical and mental health costs
- £1.2bn in criminal justice costs
- £268m in social services costs
- £185.7m in housing and refuge costs
- £366.7m in civil legal costs
- £1.8bn in lost economic output

The highest total costs in England are in the following areas:

- London (£918m)
- South east (£872.6m)
- North west (£720m)
- East of England (£590.5m)

In addition, the human and emotional costs in England are estimated to be almost £26m per day.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Funding

The Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) in the past has been sourced from the Community Safety Grant, which was received from the Department for Local Communities and Local Government (DCLG), this amounted to £106k for 2012/2013.

The Grant funding for 2013/2014 will be allocated from the Police Crime Commissioner and the Safer Communities Manager has been informed to expect at least a 12% reduction.

The current IDVA service was commissioned from monies from the 2010/2011 grant in July 2011 (£65k), the grant allocated that year was £211k and sourced one IDVA until the end of March 2013.

The reduced Community Safety Grant in 2012/13 has been used for crime and disorder analysis which allows the Community Safety Partnership to conduct its statutory requirement to complete a strategic intelligence assessment and to tackle anti-social behaviour and a range of crime and disorder priorities as evidenced in its delivery plan.

There will be considerable pressure on the Community Safety Grant fund in 2013/14 to deliver an effective programme of delivery associated with the Community Safety Partnerships priorities.

Provision for commissioning one and two IDVA's in 2013/14 is likely to be in the region of £32k or £65k per annum respectively.

We understand that the Police Basic Command Unit (BCU) Fund was introduced in 2005 to promote partnership working. The Home Office advised funding can be spent to help improve Partnership capacity. Recent examples of utilisation in St Helens in 2010 evidenced it being used under Operation Hawk-Tackling Drugs.

4.2 Referrals

DV incidents are identified by various agencies such as the Police, Doctors Education Establishments, Health Departments and Social Services. On attending an incident Merseyside Police complete a standard proforma, called a VPRF1 also known as a 'MERIT' form to document the facts regarding the case. Any agency can complete a DV MERIT referral form.

If a MERIT is completed by another agency other than the police it is sent to The Family Crimes Investigation Unit (FCIU) where the DV Coordinator and Administration Officer are based. The MERIT is then further risk assessed and unlike police referrals, on receipt it has already been scored (assessed as Bronze, Silver or Gold).

All gold scored interventions are referred to a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). As cases are referred on professional judgement or due to escalation reasons and these cases may not be scored Gold, they may

have scored Silver or Bronze but due to agencies concerns they feel the case needs to go to MARAC for those reasons stated earlier.

It is apparent from national research that the number of male DV victims who report cases is low compared to women. However, most recent figures in St.Helens suggest that 876 (19.5%) of victims who report cases of DV are men. It should be taken into account when viewing these figures that these are incidents reported under Bronze, Silver and Gold referral cases.

Figures for male victims on Merseyside stand at 3604. The male victim rate of 19.5% is very much the same across Merseyside, however further work is needed to cut through the figures to enable some clarity on this as currently it covers; same sex relationships who are in an intimate relationship, male victim female perpetrator, who again have been in an intimate relationship, then there is adult son / father relationships etc.

4.3 **DV Coordinator**

St.Helens Councils' DV team are located within St.Helens police station, which enables close working relationships and access to information on a prompt basis. The team consists of a DV Coordinator and an Administrative Officer, the team now sits under the portfolio for Children and Young People's Services.

The role of the DV Coordinator is very varied and includes, amongst others (this is not a complete list but gives some idea to the level of the role):

- ✓ Coordinating the activities of partner agencies in relation to their recognition and response to DV.
- ✓ Ensuring that effective protocols and procedures are in place with other agencies that will allow the tracking of DV cases and appropriate interventions.
- ✓ Ensuring the effectiveness of the IDVA Service.
- ✓ Coordinating the activities of St Helens DV Forum.
- ✓ Ensuring that the five key challenges of the DV Strategy remains a priority for agencies.
- ✓ Identifying cases for MARAC and attending MARAC meetings, Chairing in absence of the Detective Inspector and reviewing all MARAC cases.
- ✓ Producing statistical information for relevant third parties.
- ✓ Attending various meetings throughout Merseyside.
- ✓ Highlighting to other agencies when information comes to light that cases they may be the lead on has escalated in concerns.
- ✓ Attending CPCC and MAPPA meetings where domestic violence is recognised as a concern.

And assisting in promotional work, training to all agencies and assisting with the delivery of conference work with young people.

4.4 **Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)**

MARAC is a voluntary multi agency meeting where various partners meet to discuss the most high risk cases of DV. Information is shared amongst the key partners and a safety plan is put together to protect the victim. Published data states that following an intervention by a MARAC and an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) up to 60% of DV abuse victims report no further violence.

We attended a MARAC meeting held on 24th January 2013. This clearly demonstrated that partnership working, including the Police, NHS, Helena Housing, Social Workers and other key agencies is a key element in supporting and setting out actions for cases of DV.

Not all authorities use a MARAC as it is not currently a statutory requirement. St.Helens MARAC meets on a fortnightly basis and discusses, on average, 12 cases at each meeting. In 2011/012 MARAC heard 252 cases with 25 of these being repeat cases, this being the lowest rate in Merseyside. These figures are reported in the Performance Indicator SC-06 – *Reduction in repeat victimisation for domestic violence cases being managed by MARAC.*

The MARAC operates via a paper based system and all decisions are verbally updated to the relevant agencies. Currently there is not a stand alone system that documents all DV cases that can incorporate all relevant services.

Knowsley MBC use a software system called 'MODUS' to facilitate their DV and IDVA services. This web based system is operated via a secure site and enables clients records to be created and maintained. Each agency involved in MARAC has bought into the system and is allocated access according to their level of need. Each client is given a unique reference number and data is only ever transmitted using this reference.

Individual agencies can be allocated action plans enabling them to access information in a far shorter timescales. The system also provides a full audit trail of cases and can produce various reports.

A steering group for the St. Helens MARAC was established in Autumn 2012 and the strategic overview now lies with the Council's Safer Communities Manager.

4.5 **The Family Crimes Investigation Unit (FCIU)**

The FCIU is a special team of police officers (Detectives) who investigate reported crimes within a family context. Cases of DV, safeguarding adults and safeguarding children.

The team consists of a Detective Inspector, a Domestic Violence Sergeant and a Child Protection Sergeant. There are also Detectives, Domestic Violence office manager, Child protection office manager and three administration officers in the team.

The FCIU work very closely with a wide range of agencies, and is led by a Detective Inspector who chairs the MARAC.

The Police are currently piloting using body cameras to record their visits to incidents of DV. This is proving beneficial as sometimes victims do want to give initial statements and this way the evidence has been recorded. However, the amount of cameras is limited which will limit the opportunity to record DV incidents.

4.6 Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)

Again, not all local authorities have an IDVA service, St Helens Council has commissioned this service from Helena Partnership Extra, who provide one full time IDVA officer. This contract runs until the end of March 2013. This officer provides information to victims of DV and informs them of their choices and works closely with the Council's DV Coordinator.

They will assess risk posed to the victim, if required they will complete a MERIT and refer to MARAC. They complete safety plans with all high risk clients. If the case is going into the court arena they will also attend court and provide support, in the time leading up to trial they act as the link person, thus reducing the pressure placed on victims.

Due to there being only one IDVA currently in place and the high level of demand for the service, the DV Coordinator / Administration Officer also provide support to victims in the court arena in support of the SDVC (Specialist Domestic Violence Court model).

This support is much needed, however, due to the work capacity the IDVA who should be providing this role is unable to therefore it has been covered by the Councils DV Coordinator / Administration Officer for the past eight months.

In November 2012, Coordinated Action for Domestic Violence and Abuse (CAADA) warned that the number of IDVA's needs to increase by at least 30% in order to reach the required level of support for high risk victims, this would indicate that St.Helens should be supported by three IDVA officers.

According to their report, there are now only an estimated 500 IDVA's in post and estimates that at least 650 are needed to support all high risk DV victims. The report also highlights gaps in DV support for children and young people.

Case analysis found that two-thirds of DV victims had children living in or visiting the home, most of whom were under five. Child protection services were involved in 35% of cases. Children living with DV are at increased risk of behavioural problems, trauma and mental health issues,

The report also recommends that dedicated IDVA support should be provided for teenage victims of DV, especially given change in March 2013 to include 16 – 18 year olds in the definition of Domestic Violence, although here in St Helens we have always discussed those under 18 years of age as we believe it to be best practice.

4.7 Domestic Violence Involving Children (DVIC)

This is a fairly unique service provided by the Council whereas a qualified Social Worker is based within the FCIU and began in 2004.

Their role is to screen the cases (all incidents where the police have been called to a report of DV and there are children in the household) to ensure that all incidents involving children are identified and dealt with appropriately. The Domestic Violence social worker screens the incident; complete checks on Integrated Children's System (ICS), to ascertain if it is an open case to Children & Young People's Services then makes a decision as to if the case meets the criteria to go to the weekly multi agency allocations meeting.

Cases that meet this criteria are then discussed at a multi agency meeting (attended by both police and health), which are held on a weekly basis to decide the best options to safeguard the children. Decisions are made as to which agency would be most appropriate to offer advice and support to the family and the cases are logged on the DV database. If the Early Intervention Team is involved in a case then this will also be recorded on the eCAF system.

At the time of the review there were 180 children on the Child Protection Register of which 50% of the incidents included DV.

Like MARAC the DVIC Project does not have a stand-alone recording or case management system. Therefore, it can prove difficult to track escalation. DV services as a whole would benefit from a stand-alone system.

A working party was formed over 18 months ago to look into this and costing were provided, however this was placed on hold during OFSTED review and changes in the Director of CYPS.

Currently approximately 75-80% of cases where there are children in the household that are discussed at MARAC have previously been through the DVIC Project at one time or another.

The DVIC has only had one DV Social worker, except for a period of 12 months when funding was identified to fund a second social worker. The DV social worker also co facilitates the Freedom Programme, which is a programme that helps lift a victims self esteem, by getting them to look at and recognise abusive behaviours.

4.8 DV Refuge

There is a DV refuge based within the St Helens area, which is managed by Helena Housing, this is a separate service to the IDVA and was newly opened in May 2012. There are 18 self-contained units, which provide a safe and secure environment for victims of DV, residents can stay for a maximum of six months.

Tenants can be from either inside or outside the borough and placements can also be made for St Helens residents at refuges outside the borough to provide extra security. There is a list of other refuges around the country in the main office so there is an opportunity for residents to move away from the area should they wish to.

The refuge can house female or male victims, with or without children and tenancies can last up to 6 months. This enables security and time to put arrangements into place for a more secure and stable future. During their time at the refuge victims are able to liaise with relevant organisations with the support of the staff located on site. At the time of the review there had not been any male tenants at the refuge.

The refuge is staffed 24 hours a day 7 days a week and staff work 12 hour shifts, so someone is always available for advice and information. The refuge is funded as part of the Supporting People Service.

The task & finish group visited the refuge and were delighted at the standard of accommodation it provides.

4.9 Educating Young People

Officers based within CYPS work closely with school pupils. Relationship Education is covered in all Key Stages covering pupils aged from 3 to 16. The effects of DV are covered in Year 9, although this is an expectation set out in the curriculum, it is not statutory, but is taught in our secondary schools.

All schools have a designated Child Protection Officer to signpost children in the event of DV being an impact in their lives. Some of the boroughs schools have a lead member of staff who act as a 'mentor' or a designated counsellor who work with and support the young people directly throughout their time of need.

Healthy schools team work closely with DV Services and have put together a DV Training package for staff. They have also included two toolkits to address DV on their learning platform.

Teenage Action Zone (TAZ) also update their web site to include updated information around DV and healthy relationships.

A dedicated awareness campaign was developed by young people for young people and introduced by the Community Safety Partnership

A young persons DV conference was also held for secondary schools in November 2012 with pupils taking part by performing minuets around DV. At the end of the conference the schools were provided with an excellent resource called "Face off" which is an interactive CD Rom on DV. This resource was tested in a number of venues and the feedback from young people was excellent.

4.10 DV Champion

Although St Helens Council does not have a dedicated DV champion, Saints rugby star Paul Wellens has been recruited to work together with St Helens Council and it's Community Safety Partners to assist with the 'Lets Tackle Domestic Violence Together' initiative.

Various advertising campaigns have been ran including the national 'White Ribbon Week' in November 2012 and 'Walk in Heels' to raise DV awareness.

For its ongoing work to reduce the level of violence against women, St.Helens Council and the Community Partnership have been granted *White Ribbon Status*. A national award, from the White Ribbon Campaign UK, has been given for the on-going campaign aimed at men who are encouraged to wear a white ribbon as a statement of their opposition to violence.

The status is awarded to authorities that have demonstrated their commitment to the aims of the campaign by addressing and changing social patterns that lead to violent behaviour against women. It is also awarded for involving men in prevention activities, increasing awareness on the issue and providing services aimed at reducing the incidence of DV.

A Domestic Violence Enforcement Campaign (DVEC) has also operated at times when the risk of DV is greater i.e. Christmas and holiday times, by the Police. However this is Community Safety Grant funded and may be impacted upon in the future.

4:11 **Informal meeting with Domestic Violence Service User**

The task group met with a female victim of DV to talk about her own experience of the different agencies working together, what areas she felt worked well and what if anything could be improved. Overall her experience was extremely positive and she felt well supported throughout, particularly by the police (FCIU) and by the Council's DV Coordinator. Contact was maintained by all the agencies throughout the different stages and a package of support was offered.

Whilst there was a variety of support offered, it was noted that most of this was during working hours (9-5) and was not always convenient for those people were in full time employment.

During the meeting it became apparent that where a perpetrator had been given a custodial sentence for DV, victims were not routinely informed of their release date from prison. This caused a great deal of stress and anxiety for the victim and the task group felt that this should be changed so that the victim could be given the opportunity to make any necessary arrangements to help them feel safe.

4.12 **Partnership Working / Best Practices**

The Council works in conjunction with various public sector and charity organisations to enable a holistic approach to the service.

The Police, DV Coordinator and administration, the DV Social Worker and the IDVA are co-located for three days a week. This is considered good practice especially around information sharing and partnership working. This was highlighted as good practice by Central Government in 2007 and St.Helens DV service was asked to talk about the DVIC project at an event in Liverpool, which led to other Councils attending St.Helens to view our practices.

MARAC meets on a fortnightly basis, whereas the majority of other authorities hold their meetings on a monthly basis. Research indicates that if a further DV incident is going to be committed then it would be in a three week period, therefore MARAC have the opportunity to review a repeat case quicker, again this is demonstrating best practice.

The DV Coordinator is reviewing the possibility of starting a news letter where news / research articles of interest could be sent out to practitioners as a further way of raising awareness / promoting best practice. The team will continue to work towards the key aims and objectives as stated in the St.Helens Council Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013.

We found evidence of a comprehensive DV communication plan which covers marketing activities around raising awareness about DV in St. Helens, informing victims and perpetrators about how to recognise abusive behaviour and educating young people about what DV is and where they can go for help. As part of this plan a four page spread on DV was included in the 2011 Autumn edition of 'St.Helens First'.

In addition to promote awareness Safer Communities developed a co-ordinated 'damaged fruit' DV campaign in St Helens, which has used social media, press releases, local radio, and other promotional measures. One of the themes of this approach is to highlight the support available to victims and underpinning this approach they utilised opportunities presented by St.Helens RLFC in 2012 to promote the campaign. They have repeated this again for 2013.

The task & finish group met with representatives from various partnership organisations including:-

- ✓ Merseyside Police

The Police work closely with all partnership organisations and their DV team is co-located with the Councils DV coordinator. Teams work in pairs and work from 8am – 10pm, however there is always a member of the team on night shifts that can deal with any DV incidents.

- ✓ Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust – Safeguarding Children Nurse

Their role is to supervise safeguarding nurses who in turn supervise the Health visitors, they compile Child Protection (CP) / Safeguarding documentation, and ensures staff have attended relevant DV / CP training.

They are the named person as the MARAC representative for Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust and ensures information is disseminated out in accordance with practice / policy to health visitors and likewise obtains information to share at MARAC meeting.

- ✓ Hospital A & E Team - St Helens & Knowsley NHS Trust, Safeguarding Children Specialist Nurse and Operational Lead for Domestic Abuse

Roles and responsibilities of this team include giving advice and delivering training to staff in cases of DV, forwarding appropriate referrals to MARAC and attending the MARAC meetings to share information.

The team also ensures that high risk victims are flagged on the NHS Trust IT systems, and collate the relevant information to assist with cases. The NHS walk in center is also covered by their remit.

- ✓ Addaction - providing drug and alcohol support across the borough

Addaction provide a free drop-in advice and information service and also telephone advice and information to the public.

A confidential needle exchange is available, blood borne virus screening and vaccination programme, assessments, one-one support, group based support, and relapse support. Prevention and signposting is a major part of their role.

Advanced Practitioners provide key working with clients on a one-one basis, issuing prescriptions, referrals to other agencies, liaising with other agencies if required. They provide a DV representative for MARAC and act as the link between MARAC and Addaction.

In addition to this the Probation service also work closely with the DV team, and have two nominated officers that attend MARAC meetings. They identify information on victims and perpetrators to assist in identifying risks and also use this information for pre sentence reports.

Although, it was identified through discussions with the DV Coordinator that the Probation service do not always inform the DV team when a perpetrator has been released from prison or come to the end of their probation period. Both the DV team and the Probation service are currently working together to ensure this gap is closed.

4.13 **DV Forum**

The DV Forum is an informal professional information sharing group around relevant changes within DV, both nationally and locally.

It is as the title suggests a forum where practitioners gain knowledge of services available and how to refer and can dispel any myths around what a service can and cannot provide. It also allows agencies to identify and gaps in service or barriers to progression.

It is planned to trial cutting the meetings down from four times a year to twice a year, but to also include a news letter between these meeting dates highlighting any new legislation, any new service, contact information etc. This will be a trial to see if practitioners feel it will be beneficial as the target audience will be significantly wider, than those who are able to attend the meeting.

4.14 **Perpetrators**

Part of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013 aims to ensure that perpetrators, convicted and non-convicted, recognise and understand their behaviour. One of the actions in the priorities is to look at widening the 'trigger offences' to include DV related offences for the '*Test on Arrest*' initiative.

This is part of Merseyside Police's Drug Strategy 2012-2014, when a person is arrested for an offence involving acquisitive crime such as burglary or shoplifting they are tested for drugs on arrest. This helps identify drug abuse early on in the case by offering the person help from relevant agencies.

Test on Arrest can be requested in DV cases but is not compulsory and has to be on an Inspectors authority.

A statutory support programme is operated by the Probation Service for convicted perpetrators (Community Domestic Violence Programme), but currently there is no provision by the way of example 'Healthy Relationship Programmes' for non-convicted perpetrators in St.Helens.

4.15 **Inter Agency Management Review**

An independent consultant undertook an Inter Agency Management Review in May 2012 at the request of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The review was based on a DV case, which involved a local family, and several recommendations were made.

The recommendations included the following:

- That management in the various agencies involved with DV ensure they have a clear understanding of their roles and working relationships;
- That if a case is referred to MARAC twice in a six month period that consideration is given to holding a more focused and problem solving meeting;
- In high risk cases when perpetrators are remanded to prison that an urgent meeting is held to fully support the victim;
- It would be good practice that in high risk cases that discussions should take place with the relevant agencies if a victim retracts a statement.

Discussions with officers has identified that work has and is being undertaken to ensure the recommendations made are implemented.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 **Funding**

As with all Council services, funding streams are being reduced and efficiencies are being made across the board. It is imperative that we seek to maintain the funding streams associated with DV to enable the service to be provided, at least, at its current provision. Clarity with regards to funding is required, if there is an expectation that IDVA provision is to be commissioned from the Community Safety Partnership grant fund this would present considerable pressures on other crime and disorder priorities.

As published findings are indicating that the level of DV incidents could be increasing due to the economic squeeze that the country is currently undergoing, maintaining a strong and effective service is key to the borough.

5.2 **Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013**

The Council's Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy is an essential document to record the Council's aims and objectives with regards to DV. The action plan provides ongoing targets for the service to work towards and clearly records the expected roles and responsibilities of the Council and its partners.

5.3 **Referrals**

Evidence indicates that the referral process in St.Helens is robust and a wide range of agencies and organisations are aware of the referral process.

Although a great number of referrals are made, numbers of male referrals are low. We feel that an awareness campaign aimed at males could be established to encourage male victims to report cases of DV and that our partnership agencies could also be encouraged to promote this, this should also be aimed at other minority groups.

5.4 **DV Coordinator**

It is evident that the DV Coordinator in St.Helens Council plays an essential part in ensuring that DV cases are reviewed and actions completed as a result of following relevant processes. The role promotes close working relationships between the key organisations and has been developed to ensure an overview of the service is maintained.

5.5 **MARAC**

It is evident that the MARAC process is central to establishing the safety of the victims and their families and that St.Helens is in a privileged position in having this facility. St. Helens's MARAC process is considered best practice and is an essential service. Our attendance at the MARAC meeting evidenced that close partnership working is crucial to maintaining the service at its current standard.

However, further improvements could be made to the service by introducing an electronic system / database so that all relevant agencies could be informed / updated on key decisions made on a more timely and efficient basis.

5.6 **The Family Crimes Investigation Unit (FCIU)**

It is evident that the FCIU provide an essential service that provides victims of DV a reporting avenue to enable perpetrators to be prosecuted. The use of body cameras assists this but these are limited and therefore limit the number of DV incidents recorded.

5.7 **IDVA**

Following our discussions with relevant DV officers it is evident that the current IDVA service is effective in working towards the aims and objectives of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013.

Close working relationships have been built and without the service the process would be much more difficult and lengthy. However, expanding the IDVA service to cope with the demand for the service would enable the Council to help and support a wide range of DV victims in St.Helens.

5.8 **DVIC**

The DVIC Project is a much needed service, when it first began at the end of 2003 early 2004, by dealing with the incidents at source (police) it reduced the numbers of referrals to CYPS by 50%. Its focus is on Children, their welfare and looking at the impact of DV on this.

It may benefit from a review around who it receives the referrals from, (unlike the MARAC, the DVIC only receives referrals from Police) what is the impact on families and review services to plan best way forward.

5.9 **DV Refuge**

The DV refuge facility in St.Helens is of an excellent standard, victims can be assured that the refuge is secure and staffed on a 24/7 basis. There is opportunity for the victims to obtain the help and support they require to help them rebuild their lives. The newly opened building is located in an ideal location to provide security and ease of access to St.Helens facilities.

Whilst there was a variety of support offered for victims of DV, it was noted that most of this was during working hours (9-5) and was not always convenient for those people were in full time employment.

5.10 **Educating Young People**

Although work is being undertaken with our schools and it is has been shown from the evidence provided to us that schools offer some support to young people, not all schools have a mentor or counsellor in place.

This role is key to help identify and work with young people with whom DV affects their lives. It offers a much needed guidance and advice and can help change a young persons life especially provided through one to one work.

Also it is essential that schools continue to educate pupils with regards to DV, this could be assisted with the aid of a DV Policy.

5.11 **Partnership Working**

It is evident from our meetings with representatives from partnership organisations and discussing their roles and responsibilities with the DV Coordinator that a close working relationship has been formed and continues to be a major part of the successful DV service.

Currently there is work being undertaken and lead by police in looking at the formation of a "Safeguarding Hub".

In other areas i.e. Devon / London, they have developed this idea and it is called a MASH Unit (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub). This is felt to be the way forward and is seen as "Best Practice" in a number of Local Authorities across the country.

Although discussions are currently being taken place, processes should be put in place to ensure that the Probation Service inform the DV coordinator when convicted perpetrators are released from prison.

5.12 **Perpetrators**

Work with perpetrators is ongoing in the borough including work from other local organisations and charities. However, we feel that there is gap when it comes to dedicated programmes in St Helens with regards to Healthy Relationship programmes.

If the Police and other agencies could identify the 'triggers' of DV when a perpetrators is first identified then signposting to the correct agencies could start at a much earlier point.

This could be enhanced by the 'test on arrest' concept. If drugs are a 'trigger' point with certain perpetrators then help can be obtained from the outset.

5.13 **Inter Agency Management Review**

The Inter Agency Management Review has highlighted some key points and actions have been taken to address these within each of the relevant organisations.

6.0 Recommendations

1. Clarity over funding for the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) is required to ensure that pressures are not placed on other crime and disorder priorities. Investigation as to additional funding streams from Children and Young People's Services, Adult Social Care & Health, Supporting People and the Police Basic Command Unit (BCU) fund should be undertaken.
2. The panel note that the Council's current Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy concludes this year and recommends that a strategic analysis is conducted to provide a basis for the strategic direction for 2013-2016.
3. That consideration be given to enhance current Domestic Violence services available to male victims and minority groups with a view to increasing reporting rates.
4. That the feasibility of establishing an electronic system, such as the system utilised by Knowsley MBC (MODUS) for the MARAC / whole DV process be investigated to ensure all agencies have access to relevant information on a timely basis, this should include investigation to the current in-house systems.
5. That consideration be given by the Police for the use of body cameras to record all Domestic Violence incidents.

6. That consideration be given to the viability of expanding the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) service within St.Helens to ensure synergy with all DV services.
7. That Domestic Violence Involving Children (DVIC) service consider undertaking a review of the service to ensure referrals are being received from all the relevant areas and that the service is operating to it's greatest potential.
8. That consideration be given to extending Domestic Violence services beyond standard office hours.
9. That all schools in the borough investigate the feasibility of an appropriately trained lead member of staff being in place to act as a mentor or counsellor to work with young people with whom Domestic Violence affects their lives and to ensure that pupils are educated with regards to Domestic Violence and that schools give consideration to establishing a Domestic Violence Policy.
10. That consideration be given to a services being provided that supports children and young people via group work or on a 1 – 1 basis.
11. That should consideration is given to establishing a MASH Unit (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) in the St.Helens area, then St.Helens Council fully support the development.
12. That the Probation service be encouraged to ensure better liaison with Domestic Violence services with regards to prisoner release.
13. That the Police provide clear evidence that 'Test on Arrest' Inspectors' authority criteria is being used for Domestic Violence incidents where appropriate.
14. That consideration be given to establishing a holistic Domestic Violence Service, which would include Healthy Relationship programmes, and be in conjunction with other organisations.

Domestic Violence Services

Rec No	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	Clarity over funding for the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) is required to ensure that pressures are not placed on other crime and disorder priorities. Investigation as to additional funding streams from Children and Young People's Services, Adult Social Care & Health, Supporting People and the Police Basic Command Unit (BCU) fund should be undertaken.		
2	The panel note that the current DV and Abuse Strategy concludes this year and recommends that a strategic analysis is conducted to provide a basis for the strategic direction for 2013-2016.		
3	That consideration be given to enhance current Domestic Violence services available to male victims and minority groups with a view to increasing reporting rates.		
4	That the feasibility of establishing an electronic system, such as the system utilised by Knowsley MBC (MODUS) for the MARAC / whole DV process be investigated to ensure all agencies have access to relevant information on a timely basis, this should include investigation to the current in-house systems.		
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Domestic Violence Services

	service within St.Helens to ensure synergy with all DV services.		
7	That the Domestic Violence Involving Children (DVIC) service consider undertaking a review of the service to ensure referrals are being received from all the relevant areas and that the service is operating to it's greatest potential.		
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10	That consideration be given to a services being provided that supports children and young people via group work or on a 1 – 1 basis.		
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Domestic Violence Services

13	That the Police provide clear evidence that 'Test on Arrest' Inspectors' authority criteria is being used for Domestic Violence incidents where appropriate.		
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