



## REPORT OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### 1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 At its meeting on 8 May 2012, the Crime & Disorder Committee agreed to establish a topic group to

- review the level of services delivered locally in respect of the effects of Domestic Violence on Young People and Children both as victims, witnesses and/or perpetrators;
- look at what steps the Community Safety Partnership were taking to tackle the problem in the future;
- identify good practice in other boroughs;
- make recommendations to the administration on areas which could be improved, if appropriate; and
- look at the scope of Domestic Violence locally against male victims.

1.2 All members of the Committee indicated a desire to serve on the Topic Group.

1.3 The topic group met on four occasions including two visits. One for the group to look at the work of the Women's Aid Refuge and second to look at the work of the Partnership Triage in Hackney.

### 2.0 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

2.1 The Topic Group were looking to see how effectively services were co-ordinated to meet the needs of children and vulnerable adults who were living with Domestic Violence.

2.2 The Topic Group were looking to see what specific interventions were available.

2.3 The Topic Group were looking to evaluate the impact of current policies and procedures including reporting and detection of Domestic Violence.

2.4 The Topic Group were looking to explore the provisions of Domestic Violence Services for male victims of Domestic Violence.

### **3.0 FINDINGS**

#### Havering Women's Aid

- 3.1 Three members of the Topic Group attended the Annual General Meeting of Havering Women's Aid on the 24 September 2012. Women's Aid provided two refuge's in Romford and Hornchurch.
- 3.2 The members noted that in previous years Women's Aid had receive grant funding of £24,000, from Social Services, which was used to replace sheets, mattresses , bedding, etc. The Romford Refuge was housed in Council premises for which Women's Aid paid a commercial rent. The Hornchurch Refuge was in accommodation provided by a Housing Association who provided office space free of charge.
- 3.3 At the end of the Annual General Meeting officers talk to one of the residents of the Hostel. She explained that she had been resident there for nearly 6 months because the accommodation being offered by Housing was in a different part of the borough to the school her son was attending. She did not wish to move her son from the school where he was settled as this would be a second move for him in a short time.

#### Troubled Families

- 3.4 Work had begun in May 2011 to identify and work with high need, high contact families, across all agencies. Approximately 350 individuals had been identified at risk from Domestic Violence.
- 3.5 With regard to Domestic Violence the team had adopted the following approach:
- 2 lead professionals approach in DV families;
  - Team around the family;
  - Specialist DV support and capacity in front line teams;
  - Introduced SMART Plans and CAF – tenancy officers have unusual (positive) relationships;
  - Young male Adolescent Perpetrators are put in Anger Management courses. But there are not enough places.

#### Housing Services

- 3.6 In 2010/11 the loss of a home due to violent relationship breakdown accounted for 20% of homelessness acceptance in Havering. This was higher than the national average. In 2011/12 the figure was 17%. Generally the figures for London Boroughs were higher than areas outside the Metropolis.
- 3.6 In terms of numbers 226 households were accepted as homeless by the council in 2011/12. Of these 38 households were accepted as homeless because of violent relationship breakdown.

- 3.7 Housing Services deal with victims differently depending on whether they are owner/occupied, private rented or other type of property not rented from a Local Authority or a Social Landlord, or rent from a Local Authority or Social Landlord.
- 3.8 Where a person is feeling Domestic Violence and does not reside in Social Housing they were dealt with by the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service. They can be approached in person or referred by an external agency i.e the MARAC Panel or Family Mosaic.
- 3.9 Where a risk of violence is identified the first action of the Team is to secure a place of safety, this will usually be a refuge placement. These would nearly always be out-of-borough. Once a refuge place has been secured a choice exists between continuing with the homelessness application with the Council and making a homelessness application to another authority.
- 3.10 The Council can only secure accommodation within the borough therefore an approach to another authority was often in the best interests of an applicant in cases where there was a risk of further violence if resident in the borough. However once an application has been made to the council a referral to another authority can only be made if the applicant has a local connection with that authority. There was no mechanism for referring to another authority on the grounds that they would suffer violence within the host borough. It was therefore important that a fully informed choice was made as to which authority a homelessness approach was made to.
- 3.11 In order to be eligible for assistance a person must not be subject to immigration control. If a person is subject to immigration control and fleeing domestic violence the local authority cannot assist them directly with accommodation. In such cases an applicant may be able to approach the UK Border Agency for assistance.
- 3.12 Homelessness law defines who is in priority need. The local authority cannot depart from these categories or add their own. The vast majority of cases accepted as homeless by the Council are in priority need because a member of the household is pregnant or because they have dependent children residing with them. A person can also be in priority need because they were vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence, or threats of violence that were likely to be carried.
- 3.13 The vast majority of those fleeing domestic violence would be in priority need because they were pregnant or because they have dependent children residing with them.
- 3.14 If the local authority was satisfied that an applicant was eligible, homeless and in priority need they will then look to see if the applicant has a local connection with them. A local connection could be established by residence in the borough, immediate family residing in the borough or by employment in the borough.

- 3.15 If an applicant does not have a local connection they may be referred to another borough with which they do have a local connection. However, a person cannot be referred to another authority if they would be at risk of domestic violence in that area.
- 3.16 If the authority were satisfied that an applicant was eligible, homeless and has a local connection they would be offered on-going accommodation. This would ordinarily be a private sector property leased by the Council.
- 3.17 Secure tenancies were valuable things and were in short supply. Where the person fleeing violence is a secure tenant of the authority, the authority will always attempt to ensure that they were not disadvantaged by losing their tenancy. This would normally be done by arranging a management transfer to another property as long as that is a safe option for the tenant.
- 3.18 Requests for management transfers were considered by a team of senior officers within the estates services. Once approved the tenants would be registered for such a move by the Council's Housing Needs Team and would be placed in the Council's Housing Register in Band 'A'.
- 3.19 They remain in Band 'A' for 12 weeks after which, if no successful bid has been made a direct offer of the next available, correctly sized property, would be made.
- 3.20 Under the New Allocations Scheme which was due to come into effect in April 2013 the household would not need to participate in the Choice based Lettings Scheme and instead the case would be deemed an emergency requiring assisted, direct offer of accommodation.

#### School Admissions

- 3.21 When a woman and child(ren) were placed in a Women's Refuge in Havering they needed to apply for a place at a school using the Local Authority's In-Year Common Application Form. Staff at the Refuges were familiar with the forms and were able to assist mothers with their completion.
- 3.22 If a place was available at the requested school this was granted. However, more often than not if a primary school place was required it could well be that no place was available within a reasonable travelling distance. In those circumstances the request would be considered by the Fair Access Panel who would take into account exceptional social circumstances. Given the shortage of places at reception age and in the primary sector generally this was likely to happen more often than not.
- 3.23 Once a family was re-housed a fresh application for a school place nearer to the new home might well be necessary. The same process would need to be followed with additional disruption for the child(ren).

- 3.24 Currently just two schools in the borough do not have a criteria of exceptional medical or social grounds. This could change, especially in the secondary sector as all but one of the schools in the borough have gone down the academy route and could set their own admissions criteria.
- 3.25 From 2013/14 there was no requirement for the Local Authority to co-ordinate in-year admissions. It was likely that a significant number of own admission authority schools, i.e foundation, voluntary aided and academies would wish to deal with their own in-year admissions from September 2013.
- 3.26 Whilst the local authority would be required to provide information to parents about the places still available in all schools within the borough the new system was likely to result in delays in placing children in schools.

#### Family Mosaic

- 3.27 Family Mosaic work closely with the Council. They were a Housing Association who provided care and support. They provide a floating support system to provide support where it was needed.
- 3.28 A key area of support was the provision of money for a rent guarantee scheme to help victims of domestic violence find suitable accommodation. This money was reclaimed from victims once all the benefit issues had been resolved.
- 3.29 Family Mosaic did not have a specific pot of money to help victims of Domestic Violence. Money came from a general fund.
- 3.30 They help find out-of-borough accommodation and have a good relationship with Housing Benefits. They worked closely with the Police, and both Adult and Children's services. The £40,000 they have available for the rent deposit scheme helped up to 100 families a year. They received around 20 referrals a week.

#### Partnership Triage Scheme.

- 3.31 The Chairman and officers visited Hackney on the 6<sup>th</sup> March to look at how their Partnership Triage Scheme worked and see if there were any lessons Havering could learn from this model. The model had been introduced 2 years ago because there had been a lack of coordinated response to Merlin reports.
- 3.32 During the past year, Partnership Triage's role had been broadened to take more than police referrals. Referrals were now accepted from schools, Health Visitors, School Nurses, Children's Centres and Parenting Service. Partnership Triage dealt with more than just Domestic Violence, it also worked with missing children and Children Missing Education. Triage was very focussed on Children, adult domestic violence did not come through Triage.
- 3.33 In a typical month approximately 4% of case referrals to Partnership Triage were Domestic Violence cases and a further 4% Domestic Dispute.

- 3.34 What Hackney had found was that young people did not understand the language which was used. As a result very few 16/18 year olds were reporting domestic violence. Partnership Triage was working with Young Hackney to deal with this problem.
- 3.35 Partnership Triage had developed a strong relationship with Health, a representative from Health worked in Triage. They also had a good working relationship with Homerton Hospital (maternity unit) and school nurses. Housing was still a problem.
- 3.36 Approximately 30% of cases referred related to male/parents as victims of domestic violence.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To recommend the lead member with responsibility for Housing and Public Protection to review how the Homelessness Team deal with the Victims of Domestic Violence;**
- 4.2 To recommend the Lead Members for Housing and Public Protection and Children and Learning to explore ways of improving the communication between Housing and Public Services to ensure the victims of Domestic Violence were not disadvantaged by decisions taken in isolation. i.e. Housing to check with Pupil Services whether a suitable school place was available within a reasonable distance before making an offer of accommodation.**
- 4.3 To recommend the Mead member for Children and Learning to explore with officers the best way to communicate with young people to ensure the measure about domestic violence was understood.**

#### **5.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

During the course of its review, the topic group met and held discussions with the following people:

Vicki Nicholson – Havering Women’s Aid  
Sarah Thomas – Troubled Families  
Neil Keylock – Manager, Additional Education Needs Service  
Alexander Szantal – Housing Options Manager  
Jonathan Geall – Housing and Public Protection  
James and Kelly – Family Mosaic  
Jeanne and Katherine – Hackney Partnership Triage