

CRIME & DISORDER COMMITTEE

Under the Police and Justice Act 2006, s. 19, Cabinet is required to consider and respond to a report of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee within two months of its agreement by that Committee. In this case, Cabinet is required to do this by (25/9/2013) at the latest. Cabinet is also required to give reasons for its decisions in relating to the report, particularly in instances where it decides not to adopt one or more of the recommendations contained within the report.

<p style="text-align: center;">REPORT OF THE CRIME & DISORDER COMMITTEE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TOPIC GROUP</p>

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; and
 - make recommendations to the administration on areas which could be improved, if appropriate.
- 1.2 All members of the Committee indicated a desire to serve on the Topic Group. These were: Councillors Osman Dervish (Chairman); John Wood (Vice-Chairman); Becky Bennett; Denis Breading; David Durant; Roger Evans; Georgina Galpin; Frederick Osborne and Linda Van den Hende.
- 1.3 The topic group met on four occasions including two visits. The first visit was to the Annual General Meeting of Havering Women's Aid, the second to look at the work of the Partnership Triage in Hackney.

2.0 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

2.1 The Topic Group decided to look at:

- how effectively services were co-ordinated to meet the needs of children and vulnerable adults who were living with Domestic Violence;
- what specific interventions were available;
- the impact of current policies and procedures including reporting and detection of Domestic Violence; and
- whether anything could be learnt from other borough's approaches to Domestic Violence.

2.2 This report sets out the findings of the topic group review.

3.0 How effectively services were co-ordinated to meet the needs of children and vulnerable adults who were living with Domestic Violence.

Housing Services

3.1 The victims of Domestic Violence are dealt with by Housing under the statutory Homelessness provisions. In 2011/12, 38 households were accepted as homeless because of violent relationship breakdown.

3.2 Individual Domestic Violence cases are dealt with in different ways, depending on whether victims own their own property, live in private rented accommodation or live in social housing.

3.3 If a person does not live in social housing and fears they could become the victim of Domestic Violence they can approach the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service. If staff feel there is a risk of violence the potential victim will be removed to a place of safety, which would normally be a place in a refuge. Once a place of safety has been found the victim has a choice as to whether to continue with the application to the Council or make an application to another authority.

3.4 The Council can only secure accommodation within the borough, therefore, an approach to another authority was sometimes in the best interests of an applicant in cases where there was a risk of further violence if resident in the borough.

3.5 If that local authority is satisfied that an applicant is 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

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residence in the borough, immediate family residing in the borough or by employment in the borough, for example.

- 3.6 If the local 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 that Council.
- 3.7 The topic group found that where the person fleeing violence is a secure tenant of Havering Council, the authority will always attempt to ensure that they are 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.
- 3.8 Under the New Allocations Scheme which came into effect in April 2013 the victim would not need to participate in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and instead the case would be deemed an emergency requiring an assisted, direct offer of accommodation.

School Admissions

- 3.9 The topic group also looked at the issues of re-housing domestic violence victims and access to school places, which was a key issue for many victims. When a woman and child(ren) were placed in a Woman's Refuge in Havering they sometimes needed to apply for a place at a school using the Local Authority's In-Year Common Application Form. Members found that staff at the Refuges were familiar with this process and were able to provide good assistance to mothers in going through this process.
- 3.10 If a place was available at the requested school this was granted. However, 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 be a common occurrence.

Conclusion

- 3.11 The topic group was satisfied that the co-ordination of Council services to meet the needs of Domestic Violence victims was working well. Members questioned whether anything further could be done to improve the linkages between Housing Services and School Admissions, in terms of Housing Services checking if suitable school places were available in reasonable proximity to accommodation being offered to victims of Domestic Violence.

4.0 What specific interventions were available?

Havering Women's Aid

- 4.1 Havering Women's Aid provide refuges for the victims of Domestic Violence nationally, and they run two refuges, one in Romford and the other in Hornchurch.
- 4.2 The Council currently has commissioning arrangements in place with Havering Women's Aid, this includes almost £300k from Social Care and Learning to support both Domestic Violence schemes and provide a floating support service. In addition Community Safety provides a further £15k, including £4k for a Domestic Violence Support Group and £11k for the Domestic Violence advocacy project. The Community Safety team also apply for additional funding throughout the year to provide Domestic Violence awareness raising and other support services.

Family Mosaic

- 4.3 Family Mosaic are a Housing Association who provide care and support to families in need. They provide a floating support system to provide support where it was needed. They work closely with, and are commissioned by, the Council.
- 4.4 A key area of support was the provision of money for a rent guarantee scheme to help victims of domestic violence find suitable accommodation.
- 4.5 Family Mosaic 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.

5.0 The Impact of current policies and procedures including reporting and detection of Domestic Violence.

Troubled Families

- 5.1 The Council 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 (DV).

5.2 The Troubled Families Team had adopted the following approach when dealing with DV:

- Lead professionals allocated to DV families;
- A team approach to working with the family;
- Specialist DV support and capacity in front line teams;
- Introduced SMART Plans and Common Assessment Framework
- Young male Adolescent Perpetrators are put in Anger Management courses, although the topic group noted that places are limited.

6.0 Lessons to be learnt from elsewhere.

Partnership Triage

6.1 The Chairman and officers visited Hackney on the 6th 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 Police Merlin referral reports in Hackney.

6.2 During the past year, the 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. Much of the work undertaken by the Partnership Triage was similar to the MASH arrangements in Havering.

6.3 In a typical month approximately 4% of case referrals to partnership Triage were Domestic Violence cases and a further 4% Domestic Dispute. Members noted that approximately 30% of cases referred related to male/parents as victims of domestic violence.

6.4 Partnership Triage had developed a strong relationship with Health, and a representative from Health worked in Triage. They also had a good working relationship with Homerton Hospital (maternity unit) and school nurses. Links with housing services were not working as well in Hackney as they do in Havering.

Conclusion

6.5 Although the Partnership Triage approach was innovative, given the Council's work on the Multi Agency Sharing Hub, there did not appear to be much for the Council to learn from this approach and indeed in terms of the breadth of Havering's MASH, we are leading the way in this area. Members noted however that some innovative work had taken place in Hackney with young people which could be replicated

elsewhere. In Havering, we already commission engagement work with young people in schools to help increase awareness of domestic violence.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To recommend the Lead Member with responsibility for Housing and Public Protection to review, possibly in 12-18 months time, how the new Allocations Scheme is supporting victims of Domestic Violence;**
- 7.2 To recommend the Lead Members for Housing and Public Protection and Children and Learning to ensure that wherever possible school placements are taken into account before an alternative housing offer is made**

8.0 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

The following comments are submitted by members of staff:

Financial implications and risks:

The recommendations have no specific financial implications.

The level of services provided in the borough impact services across a range of Council services, as highlighted in the report. Resource implications are managed from within existing budgets.

Legal implications and risks:

No implications or risks identified

Human Resources implications and risks:

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No implications or risks identified

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