

Local Members Interest
N/A

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 06 July 2021

Domestic Abuse

Recommendation

I recommend that:

- a. That the Scrutiny Committee reviews and comments upon the content of this report concerning Domestic Abuse and commissioned services.

Report of Cllr Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

Summary

What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

1. This report provides an update on the Domestic Abuse services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with a focus on the impact of the pandemic, as well as updates on key pieces of work associated with Domestic Abuse. The Select Committee is being asked to note and comment upon the progress that has been made.

Report

Background

2. Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioners Office (SCO) have jointly commissioned Domestic Abuse (DA) services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with the SCO acting as lead commissioner. Services include provision for victims, perpetrators, children and young people.
3. The service contract for the provision of domestic abuse services for victims was awarded to Victim Support and the service contract for the provision of domestic abuse services for perpetrators of domestic abuse to the Reducing Reoffending Partnership. Both services are provided under the brand name of New Era and the jointly commissioned service began on 1 October 2018.
4. The overall annual contract value for the Victims and Perpetrator provision for is £2,157,000 with the County Council annual contribution being £670,490. This equates to a contribution of 31% of the value of the contract annually, Staffordshire Commissioners Office contribute £1,015,483 (47%) whilst Stoke City Council contribute £544,997 (22%).

5. The Tri-Partite Agreement for both the Victims and Perpetrator services contained an option to extend the contract for each service for a period of two years from 30th September 2020 until 30th September 2023. The decision to action this extension was mutually agreed by all parties and the extension is now in place.
6. The Select Committee previously received a written update on the Domestic Abuse services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in October 2020. This report provides a further update of progress since then.

Performance data - Victim service

7. Since the contract began there have been 14,160 referrals / enquiries for support to the victim service across Staffordshire and Stoke, of which 62.9% (8,907) came from Staffordshire residents. Staffordshire County Council financially contribute 31% of the total value to the domestic abuse contract.
8. The latest quarterly performance report (Q4 20/21) evidences the following:
 - a. 1,096 new referrals were received for Staffordshire residents during quarter 4 of 20 / 21. (This is the total referral figure and includes duplicates, ineligible referrals i.e. out of area and inappropriate referrals).
 - b. Of these referrals, 702 were accepted adult referrals and 511 (72.8%) were supported. 117 were accepted children and young people referrals and, of these, 108 (92.3%) were supported.
 - c. 'Support' is where the victim has been successfully contacted and consented to support or where multi-agency pre-work is being undertaken to identify consent and that it is safe to contact. Those instances which do not result in an adult or child or young person being supported usually occur when contact is made but the individual no longer wants to engage with the service or the service offered is not suitable for their needs.
 - d. The largest proportion of referrals this quarter (45.8%) were from Police followed by self-referral (30.0%) and other sources e.g. Victims Hub, National Probation Service Victim Contact Scheme etc. (14.7%).
 - e. Referrals broken down by district are as follows:

District	No. of referrals	Change from previous Quarter
Cannock	144	↑ 30
East Staffs	165	↑ 4
Lichfield	133	↑ 24
Newcastle	182	↓ 7
South Staffs	103	↑ 3
Stafford	147	↑ 5
Moorlands	110	↑ 4
Tamworth	112	↑ 22

- f. 100% of people receiving support at early intervention level, beyond immediate advice, were satisfied with the service they received.

- g. 97% of people receiving targeted support, beyond immediate advice, were satisfied with the service they received.

Performance data - Perpetrator service

9. Since the start of the contract there have been 918 referrals / enquiries for support into the perpetrator service across Staffordshire and Stoke, with 510 (55.5%) for Staffordshire residents.
10. The latest quarterly performance report (Q4 20/21) evidences the following:
- a. 59 new referrals were received during the quarter from Staffordshire residents; 42 were adults and 17 were children and young people.
 - b. Referrals broken down by district are as follows:

District	No. of referrals	Change from previous Quarter
Cannock	4	↓ 1
East Staffs	3	↓ 5
Lichfield	2	↓ 3
Newcastle	14	↑ 9
South Staffs	10	↑ 4
Stafford	10	↑ 5
Moorlands	6	↑ 5
Tamworth	10	↑ 2

COVID 19 – Impact and Response

11. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted both those affected by domestic abuse and those delivering services nationally, regionally and locally. The following paragraphs outline the impact that COVID-19 has had in terms of demand, service delivery, staffing and waiting times for New Era services. The report also outlines the response and actions taken to mitigate these negative impacts.

Impact on demand and waiting times

12. During the first lockdown, New Era saw an immediate drop in the number of referrals to the services and low figures were recorded for the end of March and April 2020. Referral rates started to pick up again in May and reached the level of the previous year (i.e. 2019) by the end of May / early June. After the first lockdown was lifted, numbers of referrals increased by approximately 5% on those recorded at the same point last year. Following the return to school in September 2020, demand for services increased further. Initially the increase was not unusual, as referrals tend to increase at the start of school terms. However, the number of referrals has continued to increase and has now reached volumes of around 30% greater than the same period last year.
13. Given the considerable increase in demand, the impact of the restrictions on service delivery and the impact of Covid-19 on staff, there are waiting lists for both victims

and perpetrator services. However, the triage process in place allocates individuals to workers based upon a robust assessment of risk, meaning that waiting is kept to a minimum for those who are assessed as higher risk.

14. Not only have numbers of referrals increased considerably, but the complexity of needs presented has also increased. This has added significant pressure on the workforce. Mental health has been highlighted as one of the main issues contributing to the increased complexity of new referrals through the pandemic across both commissioned and non-commissioned services. Commissioners are due to meet with both NHS Trusts and New Era to discuss pathways and referrals routes between domestic abuse and mental health services to ensure that those engaged with New Era with additional needs are able to be supported by appropriate professionals.
15. The victim service reported an increase in the number and complexity of incoming calls to the helpline resulting in increased duration of calls and increased time spent by the Initial Response Officers on triage and outgoing contact.

Impact on service delivery

16. Due to the national restrictions, routine face-to-face service delivery largely ceased. The Perpetrator Service stopped delivering groupwork sessions (which is the usual method of delivery for the programme) and instead delivered their programmes on a 1:1 basis. This has had a significant impact on the number of individuals they are able to support at one time and in turn has increased waiting times.
17. The closure of schools brought complexities to the delivery of support to children and young people. While many of those who were in the Children and Young People's Service were eligible to continue to attend school, some schools had strict policies about allowing visitors onto the grounds and this posed some difficulties. Furthermore, there were some children who were being schooled at home and it was necessary to source safe community spaces for delivery of their support sessions.

Impact on staffing

18. Staffing levels have been affected periodically throughout the pandemic and for a variety of reasons. The impact of school closures left several staff members having to juggle the pressures of work alongside home schooling young children and some had to reduce their hours temporarily. In addition, there were difficulties in making calls to victims and survivors and discussing delicate and confidential situations when children were present in the home.
19. A number of staff were personally affected by COVID-19 and had to take periods of leave due to either contracting it themselves, having to self-isolate after being in contact with someone who has tested positive and bereavement. This has impacted on capacity within the team.

COVID-19 Response / Mitigating Actions

20. Staffordshire Commissioner's Office, as lead commissioner for the pan-Staffordshire contract with New Era, convened weekly meetings with commissioned and non-commissioned providers and other partners throughout each lockdown. These meetings focussed attention on a co-ordinated approach to service delivery across the county and were of great benefit.
21. Commissioners continue to work closely with the provider to ensure that they are responding appropriately to increased demand and that action is being taken to reduce waiting lists. This has included identifying additional resource to contribute further capacity to the contract. Recent funding secured from the Ministry of Justice, along with some identified underspend within the contract, has enabled the Victim Service to fund an additional 3.5 full-time equivalent Children & Young People Workers and recruit to a further 3 Domestic Abuse Practitioner roles. These are both areas of the service where demand is particularly high so the additional staff should alleviate waiting lists.
22. Since Spring 2020, domestic abuse support services have significantly adapted their delivery methods to ensure continuity of service and credit should be given to the dedication of their staff through this extremely challenging period. Services retained their 'front door' to victims and their families and the perpetrator programme has been adapted appropriately. For both victim and perpetrator services, availability of support and services has been maintained throughout the pandemic, largely via remote working arrangements and online delivery but with some face-to-face support where appropriate and safe to do so.
23. The victim service has provided 'in person' support to adults at court in risk assessed courthouses and both the victim and perpetrator services have provided 'in person' support with children and young people in risk assessed venues and subject to COVID related safety measures.
24. The move to virtual delivery methods has worked well for the delivery of some elements of the services and some people have responded better to it. Therefore, elements of this will be continued moving forward, beyond the pandemic. An example of this is where the victim service has supported a service user to attend court via video link from the New Era office and another from their own home. This has given the victims confidence to speak whilst being supported and safe.
25. The approach to the Children & Young People's (CYP) service delivery been jointly developed and refined over the last few months following a review of the needs of those referred into the perpetrator programme. The review highlighted that many referred into the service were exhibiting behaviours because of being a victim of domestic abuse themselves. Referrals for children and young people will now go through one 'front door' (the victim service) who will triage and, based on the risk assessment and an understanding of need and presenting behaviours, will be allocated to either the victim or perpetrator CYP service, as appropriate.
26. The Service has continued to be promoted throughout the pandemic to ensure that victims and their families were aware that support was available and knew how to

access it. This was achieved through traditional mainstream and social media, briefings, campaigns and collaborations with other organisations. There has also been continued presence in the local press.

27. It was previously identified that there is a need to improve communication between front line staff and New Era to enhance both parties understanding of processes and ways of working and to facilitate joined-up working. This is being addressed in several ways. New Era produce a quarterly bulletin which details current service provision and contact details of all relevant staff as well as a reminder of the referral process and a high-level performance overview. This has always been routinely circulated to partners. However, the key messages from this will now be circulated to all frontline staff via an internal newsletter, which staff use as a key source of information. In addition to this, there are quarterly 'interface meetings' between the managers of SCC's Independent Reviewing Officers and New Era, giving an opportunity for feedback (both positive and negative) to be shared and for resolution of any issues identified. Both parties have attended each other's team meetings to give an overview of their ways of working and relevant processes, resulting in a wider understanding and improved working relationships.

Adult Specialist Workers

28. As outlined in the October 2020 report to Scrutiny, funding has been allocated to Adult Specialist Worker provision as part of the 2019 investment of £8.1m into Children and Families service. The introduction of Adult Specialist Workers is intended to support children and families who are open to Safeguarding and will enable us to give dedicated support to the whole family unit, with a focus on helping and supporting parents and their children at the earliest opportunity.
29. Adult Specialist Workers are not intended to duplicate or replace existing services. Instead, they will work with parents and families to understand their needs and the challenges they are facing and to support them to access services where these are available. They will work with parents to get them to a position of 'readiness' for onward referrals and will support transition into services. Where families do not meet the criteria for specialist services, the Adult Specialist Worker can provide tailored interventions.
30. This model of working is currently being piloted in Cannock and involves specialist workers with substance misuse, mental health and financial inclusion expertise, working alongside Children's Social Workers. It is intended that domestic abuse specialists (for both victims and perpetrators) will also feature in the wider roll-out of this model.
31. Building on the lessons learned through the implementation of the pilot, SCC commissioners are working with partners, key stakeholders and those working within the pilot to shape a county-wide model, which will be rolled-out in October 2021, to align with the Children's transformation.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Duty

32. The Domestic Abuse Act has now passed both Houses of Parliament and was signed into law on 29 April 2021. There are a number of provisions within the Act, including the creation of a statutory definition of domestic abuse with a recognition that abuse can be emotional, controlling or coercive and economic abuse, as well as physical violence; establishing the role of the Office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner; creating a statutory presumption that victims of domestic abuse are eligible for special measures in courts; prohibiting perpetrators of domestic abuse from cross-examining their victims in person in courts; and extending the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse among other provisions.
33. One of the key implications of the Act for Local Authorities is the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Duty. The Duty places a legislative requirement on upper tier local authorities to ensure the provision of support for domestic abuse victims and their families within safe accommodation. This Duty covers a range of types of safe accommodation (including refuge accommodation, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes, move-on accommodation and other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation).
34. Staffordshire has been allocated £1.5 million from MHCLG for the delivery of the Duty for Staffordshire. Work is underway, under the auspices of the Domestic Abuse Commissioning & Development Board, to ensure that Staffordshire are able to meet the requirements of the new Duty.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)

35. Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by:
 - a. A person to whom they were related or with whom they were or had been in an intimate personal relationship (an 'intimate personal relationship' includes relationships between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality), or
 - b. A member of the same household as themselves, held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death.
36. There are currently eight DHRs underway across Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent). In addition, there is a further DHR taking place in North Wales that both Cannock Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the central co-ordinating team are supporting with information however we have no responsibility for the formal process. Four of these cases are at the last stage of the process and Reports are with the Home Office awaiting their decision for Publication, a further Report has been passed to the Home Office Quality Assurance Board in advance of the final report being submitted.

37. There are two DHRs that are currently “live” and the reviews are in progress. The remaining case is on pause awaiting the outcome of a Police Investigation. At the time of the last Report to this Committee there were two DHRs on pause, however, we have since been notified by the Police that following investigation, one of these is not a DHR.
38. Following the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns it is pleasing to report that there has not been an increase in DHRs reported to date. The most recent DHR was received in November 2020.
39. The DHR activity is funded by annual partner contributions and is currently financially stable.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

N/A

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