

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at The Council Chamber - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Thursday 14 March 2019 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor JG Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairman)
Councillor NE Shaw, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors H Bramer, BA Durkin, PD Price and EJ Swinglehurst

Cabinet support members in attendance Councillors AW Johnson

Group leaders in attendance Councillors RI Matthews, A Seldon and JM Bartlett

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance Councillors PA Andrews, WLS Bowen and CA Gandy

Officers in attendance: Alistair Neill, Richard Ball, Chris Baird, Claire Ward, Andrew Lovegrove and Stephen Vickers

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors DG Harlow and P Rone.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

62. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

64. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were no questions from councillors.

65. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2019-2022

The cabinet member children and families introduced the report, highlighting that:

- A great deal of hard work had gone into the production of the new strategy, including work with many partner organisations;
- The impact of domestic abuse on victims and families was profound and far reaching, with significant wider impact on society;
- Domestic abuse was a complex issue that impacted people from all communities and at all stages of life, often experienced for many years without being visible;
- Due to under-reporting the full picture was not known, it was difficult to extrapolate from the data available and an increase in reported incidents would be a measure of success for the new strategy;
- Domestic abuse was predominantly but not exclusively perpetrated by men against women, it was one of the toxic trio of common denominators in family breakdown and children coming into care, alongside mental ill health and substance misuse;

- The strategy focused on four priorities under the shared vision – prevention, provision of service, partnership working and pursuing perpetrators;
- The strategy had been developed in partnership with many agencies and relied on ongoing commitment from all partners to achieve its objectives;
- The strategy had a clear statement of focused aim, action and output with emphasis on shared understanding, timely and effective support for anyone who has experienced domestic abuse and a holistic approach to the family including, where appropriate and evidenced, working with the perpetrator to bring about change;
- The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) would be responsible for strategic delivery and leadership while the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Delivery Group (DADG) would produce annual action plans to implement the strategy;
- The shared vision was that communities and individuals would reject domestic abuse as increasingly it was recognised, healthy relationships were fostered and sustained and effective help was sought and provided early.

The leader highlighted the powerful shared vision of the strategy that “domestic abuse is unacceptable to people and communities in Herefordshire” and challenged all those taking forward the strategy to make that vision more prevalent in all partner organisations and relevant literature.

In discussion of the report, cabinet members noted that:

- appendix 2 to the report set out the learning from the previous strategy, some excellent work had been completed such as the provision of a refuge with self-contained units, partially completed actions had been rolled forward;
- a support service for men experiencing domestic abuse was provided by West Mercia Women’s Aid through their Helpline. There was no local refuge for men but assistance with housing was available through the Housing Solutions Team and specialist refuge accommodation was available in the wider region;
- men could be reluctant to seek support from a service provided by a women’s aid group but other organisations were encouraged to refer on cases with an explanation of the service offered, the more cases that came forward the better the needs of male victims could be understood;
- there were various groups and populations with specific vulnerabilities and which were more hidden, an aim of the new strategy was to upskill organisations to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and improve reporting;
- projects already in place, such as work being done where dementia was a feature in an abusive relationship, would be evaluated and lessons applied to future projects;
- support services were in place for children affected by domestic abuse;
- specific interventions would be picked up by the delivery group in the annual action plans;
- existing resources from within partner organisations would be used for implementation. Alternatively external funding could be sought for specific activities. The council’s commissioned domestic abuse support service would continue to undertake some preventative work within existing resources;
- cultural change was an important part of the strategy, generating better understanding among professionals and the wider population and seeking prevention strategies;
- communication would require different approaches and media depending on the particular target groups;
- estimates of numbers of victims were based on self-reported prevalence applied to the population figure for Herefordshire, this was the best data available but under-reporting meant that the true figures could be higher;

- there was an ambitious shared vision that domestic abuse was unacceptable, this was clearly supported within the CSP and it was important that this was disseminated through the partner organisations.

The chair of the children and young people scrutiny committee commented that children, especially boys, brought up in households where domestic abuse was a feature could go on to perpetrate abuse themselves in future relationships or to develop mental health difficulties from the guilt at being unable to stop the abuse. There was concern that some girls viewed it important to have a partner, even if that partner was abusive. There had been difficulties in the past where refuges would not allow boys over the age of 14, which prevented women with older sons from going to the refuge. The provision of self-contained units at the refuge meant that this was no longer an issue.

The chair of the adult and wellbeing scrutiny committee commented that the strategy had been subject to extensive consultation and was a vital piece of work. It was a challenge to encourage those affected by domestic abuse to come forward so publicity was important to tell people where to go to access advice and support. When people did come forward, it was important they received prompt help and support.

The chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee commented that it needed to be easy for those affected by domestic abuse to access support and that organisations needed to work together to tackle abuse.

Group leaders were invited to express the views of their group. There was general support for the strategy and recognition of the work that had gone into its preparation. It was noted that:

- the workshops held in 2018 had been well put together and worthwhile;
- an update would be provided to scrutiny committee members in March 2020;
- the benchmarking of measures of success needed to be kept in focus as the plan moved forward;
- tackling domestic abuse should be one of the council's top priorities;
- there was concern that poor housing conditions put pressure on families which could lead to breakdown in relationships;
- all partner agencies needed to play their part in delivering on the strategy;
- it was suggested that a family based approach such as the Hertfordshire model could be effective and should be considered;
- it was queried who would take the lead on the strategy and ensure all organisations worked together.

The leader of the council stated that Herefordshire Council would be at the forefront of delivering the strategy. Partner organisations had signed up to the strategy and there was a clear focus on what needed to be done. It was up to everyone to ensure it remained a key priority.

It was agreed that:

- (a) the Multi-agency Domestic Abuse Strategy for Herefordshire 2019-2022 at appendix 1 be approved;**
- (b) the response at paragraph 36 of the report to a recommendation made by the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is agreed.**

The meeting ended at 10.47 am

Chairman

