

PROGRESS REPORT - DOMESTIC ABUSE**Report By: Director of Children's Services****Wards Affected**

Countywide

Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is to inform Scrutiny Committee of progress made in addressing the needs of children affected by domestic abuse, since the last report to Scrutiny Committee in December 2008.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Background

3. The last report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, dated 8th December 2008, detailed the background to the position in Herefordshire regarding domestic abuse services, and reported the progress made since the Joint Area Review of Children's Services was undertaken in Herefordshire in Autumn 2005.
4. Following the report to Scrutiny Committee in December 2008, the outcome of the Annual Performance Assessment was published (an inspection of Council Services to children and young people in Herefordshire, undertaken by Ofsted). This identified the progress made in domestic abuse services to children as a major strength. *"Good progress has been made in identifying, assessing and assisting children, who through exposure to domestic abuse, may have suffered significant harm."* (Ofsted 17/12/08). In the six months since then, there has been considerable progress in the development of the services outlined in the last report to Scrutiny Committee. These are detailed below.

Current Position

5. Nationally, on average, half of all children referred to Children's Social Care Services, and 75% of children subject to child protection plans are because of domestic abuse.
6. In Herefordshire, the percentage of children subject to child protection plans where domestic abuse is a significant factor has increased from 40% in 2008/9 to 52% currently.
7. Information on the percentage of referrals to Social Care in which domestic abuse was a significant factor is not available for 2008-9 or for previous years, as the available management information system could not collate such data. The first phase of the Integrated Social Care Solution, Frameworki, was implemented on 10th November 2008, which provides the capacity to report much more accurately. Work is being undertaken at present on improvement of data quality to enable accurate reporting on this matter for 2009-10. Since the implementation of Frameworki in

November 2008, 21% of all contacts to the Referral and Assessment Team have come from the Police, and 25% of all initial assessments have been initiated as a result of referrals by Police.

8. The West Mercia Constabulary (WMC) has now implemented a risk assessment process for all domestic abuse calls which the Police answer. This is designed to ensure, amongst other things, that children who may be at risk are identified and reported to the Children's Social Care Referral and Assessment Team. It has been agreed that this risk assessment format will be amended to ensure inclusion of the history of abuse and the particulars of the incident attended, to aid early identification of the need for social work assessment. Police will also share the risk assessment document with key Health professionals.
9. West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) remains the primary local provider of services to women and children affected by domestic abuse, principally funded by a "Supporting People" contract. (The "Supporting People" funding stream from central government, managed within the Adults and Community Services Directorate, is provided to support adults who need additional help to obtain and maintain appropriate housing. The Council commissions a range of such services through the Supporting People Commissioning Board.) Provision includes a 24-hour helpline, refuge accommodation, and outreach support for women and children moving on from the women's refuge into their own accommodation, and to those who remain living in the community.
10. In 2009-10 the "Supporting People" and Children and Young People's Directorate contractual arrangements are being brought together into one overall contract between the Council and WMWA. The Children and Young People's Directorate funds provision of services to children in the Women's Refuge and multi-agency work by WMWA, including training and awareness raising activities, children and young people's engagement and consultation in safeguarding issues.
11. The Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children Service of the CYPD is in the process of commissioning a revised and increased range of family support services to children in need and their families from October 2009, which will include focus on providing prompt assessment, intervention and support to children affected by domestic abuse.
12. The Common Assessment Framework training has been revised and refreshed, with the current training programme being implemented from February 2009. Professionals working with children and families are carrying out an increasing number of common assessments for children with additional needs, and plans for integrated support to children are being implemented across a range of agencies. The anticipated implementation date for integrated locality team working is January 2010. This supports a range of work with children with additional needs and provides support and guidance to other professionals.
13. As part of the PCT Health Action Plan the PCT has reviewed the information provided and now uses national leaflets about domestic abuse, which are given to women routinely ante-natally and post-natally. Training on domestic abuse has been provided to Health Visitors to support their work in this area.
14. The Domestic Abuse Forum is the multi-agency body with specific responsibility for development of a strategy to address domestic abuse in Herefordshire, and works in partnership with the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership (HCSDP), and Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board.

15. The Forum has developed an Action Plan as part of the HCSDP 2008-2011 strategy. The three key objectives are to increase early identification of and intervention with victims of domestic abuse, to build capacity within the domestic abuse sector to provide effective advice and support to victims and to improve the Criminal Justice response to domestic abuse. Mapping of existing service provision is under way, to support analysis of need and development of future services.
16. The Domestic Abuse Forum has established a multi-agency Criminal Justice and Domestic Abuse Task Group, responsible for implementing and monitoring key elements of the Action Plan. Specifically these are the development of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), the Specialist Domestic Abuse Court and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference processes (MARAC).
17. Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) work from the point of crisis with survivors of domestic abuse; their work is typically short to medium term and they work within a multi-agency setting to manage the risk that survivors face. Since December 2008 an additional part-time IDVA has been appointed, making 1.5 IDVA posts in total, both hosted by West Mercia Women's Aid. The additional post means that the IDVA will now be able to provide a service to male victims of domestic abuse as well as female victims.
18. Herefordshire currently has a Dedicated Domestic Abuse Court, which is working well. The Court operates weekly and all domestic abuse cases going through the Magistrates Court are heard in this Court. All magistrates who sit on this bench in this Court have received training about domestic abuse. The IDVAs are working closely with the Court and other professionals involved, supporting a multi-agency approach, which is central to the success of the Court. Police, prosecutors, Court staff, the Probation Service and specialist support services work together to identify, track and risk assess domestic abuse cases, support victims and share information so that more offenders are brought to justice.
19. Accreditation to become a Specialist Domestic Abuse Court has been sought from the Ministry of Justice, but deferred for 6 months while the MARAC arrangements are established and performance monitoring is developed further. The application for accreditation will be resubmitted in Autumn 2009.
20. The main purpose of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is to provide a framework for a multi-agency approach to reduce the risk of serious harm or homicide for a victim and to increase the safety, health, and wellbeing of victims, both adults and children. A (MARAC) co-ordinator has been appointed, has been in post since April 2009, and conferences are taking place monthly. Protocols and procedures have been agreed and representation from a range of agencies on the MARAC is established.
21. The governance arrangements for the work of the IDVAs, MARAC co-ordinator and the Specialist Court will be through the Domestic Abuse and Criminal Justice Task Group. This group will monitor and review performance and report to the Domestic Abuse Forum and Community Safety and Drugs Partnership.

Recommendation

THAT; the Committee notes the progress made in provision of services to children and families affected by domestic abuse in Herefordshire.

DOMESTIC ABUSE FORUM

TASK GROUPS AND LINKS

Appendix 1

