

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TO CABINET 15 JULY 2015

Report Title	RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE
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Agenda Status: PUBLIC

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet for consideration, the comments and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Review – Interpersonal Violence.
- 1.2 Members of Cabinet have been issued with a copy of the full report. All Overview and Scrutiny review reports are published on the Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's Webpage and a copy of this report can be located:
www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny - Previous Scrutiny Reviews.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that:
 - 2.1.1 In recognising the success of the information stand hosted by the Scrutiny Panel as part of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a similar event is held annually in the town centre in a location with a consulting room should attendees need advice and support.
 - 2.1.2 Education Information Packs on domestic abuse preventative services are disseminated to BME Groups, schools, universities, faith groups and community groups in Northampton prior to Domestic Violence Awareness Raising Week 2015.
 - 2.1.3 In recognising the good practice undertaken by Northampton Borough Council in funding domestic abuse services; Northampton Borough Council (NBC) should take this into consideration when allocating funding in future years and share best practice with other funding bodies.

- 2.1.4 The countywide definition of vulnerable adults is adopted by Northampton Borough Council.
- 2.1.5 The Cabinet Member with responsibility for education at Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) is contacted and asked whether education, advice, information and support regarding healthy relationships and personal safety can be included in the school curriculum.
- 2.1.6 Public awareness of domestic abuse is increased and services that are available to tackle the issue and support victims:
- Review and update contents of relevant pages of NBC website to ensure it is informative and 'user friendly'
 - Provide effective and updated publicity throughout the Borough via poster, leaflets and contact cards
 - Support NADA awareness raising campaigns for the county
 - Training for all Councillors on Interpersonal Violence is delivered and an information booklet or webpage is produced
- 2.1.7 NBC's Domestic Abuse Policy is revised and updated to reflect the new countywide Interpersonal Violence Strategy; which is currently out to consultation.
- 2.1.8 The statistical data collected in respect of domestic abuse is reviewed to ensure that it is robust and meaningful. NBC considers the effectiveness of current data collection in relation to domestic abuse and encourages all relevant departments to review and contribute by the end of December 2015.

Funding

- 2.1.9 It is established whether NBC has central funding to access interpreter services, to aid communication with victims whose first language is not English.
- 2.1.10 Due to the relocation of the Sunflower Centre, Northampton Council provides them with accommodation in the One Stop Shop for drop in sessions.
- 2.1.11 A central budget to support the Sanctuary Scheme and the target hardening for victims properties is identified to enable victims to remain in their own home.

Training Programme

- 2.1.12 NBC develops a sustainable domestic abuse awareness raising training programme for Councillors, managers and all staff. This programme is also offered to neighbouring Local Authorities.

Housing Services, Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH)

- 2.1.13 It is recommended that the conditions of Tenancy Agreements are fully explained to new and prospective tenants to ensure their understanding and compliance.
- 2.1.14 Dual Tenancies are encouraged and staff trained to recognise the implications of cultural differences.
- 2.1.15 In recognising that when moving from a crisis and safe accommodation to a permanent address; women often have no furniture or equipment; a Transition Strategy is introduced. Information is provided detailing where household items can be obtained, for example Charity Link and Spencer Contact.

Housing Solutions, Northampton Borough Council

- 2.1.16 New people to the area; and individuals with no recourse to public funds, are offered advice, support and given information.
- 2.1.17 Housing Solutions, NBC, takes responsibility for reports of domestic abuse and ensures all staff are trained and able to respond.

3. Background and Issues

- 3.1 The purpose of the review was to review Northampton Borough Council's response in addressing issues around interpersonal violence (domestic abuse, sexual abuse and child exploitation), centring on domestic abuse.
- 3.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its work programming event in March 2014, agreed to include a review of interpersonal violence. This was an issue that had been suggested by Scrutiny Panel 1 (Serious Acquisitive Crime, violent crime and community safety) recommending that a review of inter-personal violence be undertaken by a future Scrutiny Panel. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned Scrutiny Panel 1 to undertake the review. An in-depth review commenced in May 2014 and concluded in March 2015.
- 3.3 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair); Councillor Sally Beardsworth (Vice Chair); Councillors Brendan Glynane, Anna King, Danielle Stone and Sivaramen Subbarayan. Matt Chester, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and Steve Lingley, Northants Police, were co-opted to the review.
- 3.4 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority 2 - Invest in safer, cleaner neighbourhoods.
- 3.5 The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- Background data, including:
 - Presentation to set the scene: To identify the prevalence of the problem locally
 - Relevant national and local background research papers
- Best practice and successful initiatives in Northampton and comparable Local Authorities
- Witness Evidence:

3.6 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

Preventative Strategies and Models – Northampton

3.7 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that front line staff, Northampton Borough Council (NBC), had undertaken awareness training for domestic abuse in the last 18 months.

3.8 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that Northampton benefits from a good range of Agencies dealing with domestic abuse.

3.9 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that the Sunflower Centre and Serenity (sexual assault referral centre), Northampton are both recognised nationally as models of excellence. The Scrutiny Panel further realised that there are organisations within Northampton that delivers similar services to those highlighted within the results of the desktop research exercise.

3.10 The MARAC process within Northampton deals with high risk cases and has recently been further developed by merging with the Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Forum (DAF) meetings. The DAF's focus was on low to medium risk cases, and similar to the MARAC brought agencies together to review cases and identify appropriate support and intervention for the victim. The Scrutiny Panel realised that by bringing all Agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented, a risk focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim. It further noted that the merging of the two processes has created a more joined up approach with a broader range of agencies attending and contributing. It has also provided the opportunity to pull together all available support and intervention programmes that are available within the domestic abuse 'tool box' to enable a joined up response and avoid duplication.

3.11 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that the MARAC has received praise from CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) which oversees MARAC meetings nationally.

- 3.12 Underpinning the work of MARAC is the role of the IDVA's (Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor) that sit within the Sunflower Centre. An IDVA is a named, trained professional case worker for domestic abuse victims whose primary purpose is to address the safety of 'high risk' victims and their children. IDVA's serve as a victim's main point of contact, and normally work with their clients from the point of crisis to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options, developing and implementing coordinated safety plans.
- 3.13 Evidence received highlighted that there is a need for service providers to work in collaboration. All Agencies are working to the same agenda but there are gaps in strategic thinking. There needs to be joined up thinking and working across the seven Local Authorities in the county. The sharing of resources, protocols and policies would be advantageous. The lack of strategic overview and cohesive thinking can create client frustration.
- 3.14 It was recognised that there is a wealth of experience and knowledge within Agencies and that there are mechanisms in place for cross-referral to other Agencies. This is further supported by the close working relationships that the Agencies have developed.
- 3.15 The evidence received highlighted that there is a need for sustainable funding and wider strategic thinking to ensure services can develop and thrive.
- 3.16 The good practice undertaken by Northampton Borough Council in funding domestic abuse support agencies was noted. It was felt that there is a need for there to be dialogue with other funding bodies so that the good practice undertaken by NBC can be replicated.
- 3.17 The Scrutiny Panel conveyed its concerns regarding the reduction in services meaning that there is a growing issue about pathways to support such as reduction in refuge spaces, loss of legal aid.
- 3.18 The Scrutiny Panel was concerned regarding the cost of interpreter services which can be very high. For example, in some cases £100 per session has been charged to Relate. It was felt that this highlights a gap in service provision.
- 3.19 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that two Awareness Raising Sessions on the work of Relate Northamptonshire (in particular Choosing to Change) for staff in Children's Services and Social Workers had been scheduled for December 2014.
- 3.20 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised the need to do more for victims of domestic abuse and their children.

- 3.21 The Scrutiny Panel raised concerns regarding the inconsistencies around referrals and advice from Children's Services. It felt that there is a need for an awareness raising training programme for Councillors in Northamptonshire.
- 3.22 The refuge visited by the Scrutiny Panel was perceived as well run, nicely decorated, welcoming and containing good facilities for children.
- 3.23 It was recognised that there is a need to address both male and female perpetrators so that they change their behaviour. Evidence received highlighted that additional research needs to be undertaken in order to facilitate the evidence base for female and same sex perpetrators. Funding would be required to do this.
- 3.24 The Scrutiny Panel noted that a victim of domestic violence is categorised as priority by the Borough Council. It was pleased that the system is very robust with a clause in the Tenancy Agreement that if a perpetrator is convicted they will lose the right to the tenancy; i.e. the victim would have the right to remain in the property. The Tenancy Agreement has been reviewed and updated. However, the Scrutiny Panel felt that there is a need to explain the Tenancy Agreement process to new and prospective tenants.
- 3.25 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for a Transition Strategy as when moving from a refuge to a permanent address; women often have no furniture or equipment.
- 3.26 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has recently allocated £10million of funding for domestic abuse preventative services. Local Authorities can bid for £100,000 of this funding. One of the criterion for funding is that services are not ring-fenced specifically to a county and must be available to individuals from anywhere in the UK. The bid has been submitted and the outcome is awaited.
- 3.27 Approximately 50% of referrals to the Sunflower Centre are from the borough of Northampton.
- 3.28 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged the good work of the Sunflower Centre realising the need for accommodation for drop in sessions at the Guildhall, when they move to their new location at Riverside House.

Domestic Abuse Awareness

- 3.29 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to take part in Domestic Abuse Awareness Week that took place week commencing 24 November 2014. 25 November 2014 was International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The Scrutiny Panel hosted, together with officers from Community Safety, an information stand at the Guildhall on this day. Representatives from Northampton Women's Aid also provided information at the stand. Various ward Councillors visited the information stand and also promoted the information at their surgeries. Information packs were disseminated

to all borough Councillors. It was felt that this information would be of tremendous value to various BME groups. It was further agreed that the education information packs would be of benefit to various organisations such as, schools, universities, churches and community groups.

- 3.30 The Scrutiny Panel noted that an anti-abuse campaign in cinemas has been very successful. Following the campaign, comments on the Webpage of the cinema had been posted detailing that people had not been aware that they were being abused until they had had sight of the campaign. The Scrutiny Panel further noted the advice of the Home Secretary that schools have a role to play in educating children about relationships; this had also been highlighted in evidence provided to the Scrutiny Panel by expert advisors.
- 3.31 The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the need for a standard definition of vulnerable adults that could be shared with all Agencies.
- 3.32 The Scrutiny Panel felt that advice on healthy relationships is omitted from education PSHE lessons, and this would be a valuable part of the school curriculum.
- 3.33 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there appears to be low level reporting in BME communities, highlighting the need for cultural training and shifts in understanding. There is a need to work with communities to ensure that services and language assistance is available to them but it was recognised that this would be a further piece of scrutiny work.
- 3.34 80% of domestic abuse relates to women. It was felt that it would be useful for Northamptonshire County Council's Adult and Social Care Scrutiny Committee to investigate the reason for this; signposting to relevant academic research.

Best Practice Elsewhere

- 3.35 The Scrutiny Panel found the document produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) – 10 questions to ask when scrutinising domestic violence – a guide for Local Authority Scrutiny Officers and Councillors useful when putting supplementary questions to expert advisors.
- 3.36 Desktop research highlighted that the Blackpool Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is noted as a beacon of excellence. Blackpool is one of the few areas to have children's independent domestic violence advisors who take individual cases and oversee the MARAC process. Safer Peterborough has the provision of a Men's Advice Line for men experiencing domestic abuse.

3.37 The Scrutiny Panel commended the Australian and New Zealand Preventative Model and Strategies for domestic abuse; acknowledging that a number of these processes are replicated in Northamptonshire.

3.38 The Scrutiny Panel was pleased to note that the domestic abuse services in Northampton link in with male victims.

4. Options

4.1 Cabinet will need to consider the possible options as part of its response to the recommendations.

5. Implications (including financial implications)

5.1 Policy

5.1.1 The work of Overview and Scrutiny plays a major part in the development of the Council's policy framework through its work programme.

5.1.2 The report and its recommendations have policy implications in relation to interpersonal violence. Cabinet's response will need to consider these issues in detail.

5.2 Resources and Risk

5.2.1 Cabinet will need to consider the resourcing issues for the recommendations made.

5.3 Legal

5.3.1 Legal issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the recommendations.

5.4 Equality

5.4.1 Equality issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the recommendations.

5.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

5.5.1 The Committee consulted and took evidence from a variety of sources as detailed in paragraph 3.5 of this report.

6. Background Papers

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee report – Interpersonal Violence (March 2015)
- Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 March 2015

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