

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 25 MAY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.07 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Laura Blumenthal, Shirley Boyt, Peter Dennis (Chairman), Chris Johnson, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Gregor Murray and Alistair Neal

Officers Present

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Partnership Manager), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)) and Steve Moore (Interim Director of Place and Growth)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Alistair Neal and seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey that Peter Dennis be elected Chairman for the 2022/23 municipal year.

RESOLVED That Peter Dennis be elected Chairman for the 2022/23 municipal year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Alistair Neal and seconded by Chris Johnson that David Cornish be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2022/23 municipal year.

RESOLVED That David Cornish be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2022/23 municipal year.

3. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from David Cornish.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey attended the meeting as a substitute.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following minor point and correction:

- The breakdown of callouts to the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and the reasons behind them be circulated to the Committee;
- Agenda page 13: It was noted that issues relating to commercial processes, construction sites and water supplies were covered by environmental ~~purposes~~ **permits** for some commercial processes.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

8. WOKINGHAM DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 15 to 20, which gave an update on instances of domestic abuse within the Borough.

The report outlined a number of progress updates within the Domestic Abuse Strategy, including an increasing awareness of safe accommodation choices, provision of an inclusive range of accommodation options, provision of support for victim-survivors in safe accommodation, strengthened partnership working to drive and improve outcomes, and support for individuals to help them to begin rebuilding their lives.

Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager) and Steve Moore (Interim Director of Place and Growth) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

During the ensuing discussion, members raised the following points and queries:

- The Committee thanked Narinder Brar and her team for a great deal of hard work in providing an essential service;
- Was a detailed breakdown of where instances of domestic abuse took place within the Borough available? Officer response – A more granular breakdown was being worked on for the future, which would be reported on a quarterly basis.
- Would the strategy be taken to the residents' equality forum? Officer response – There was a real drive to reduce any barriers to accessing services where possible, and it was key to not homogenise different communities. The residents' forum was one area which could be included more in the future to help achieve these aims.
- Would a range of KPIs and their performance be available for the Committee to view at a later date? Officer response – A full suite of KPIs were being developed, and these could be reported to the Committee in future.
- Could officers confirm that no-one escaping domestic abuse within the Borough had been turned away? Officer response – This was correct. There was a 3-bed refuge available within the Borough, whilst housing and homelessness legislation was in place as a safety net to allow safe accommodation to be provided by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).
- Was there an update on the 2021 Community Safety Partnership contract which included provision of services to schools to work with children who had seen or suffered domestic abuse? Officer response – This was quite a specialised area of work, and Cranstoun had recruited a young people's worker who was now on maternity leave. Plans were in motion to get play therapy, one to one counselling, drama therapy and counselling therapy back on track and delivered.
- What successes had been realised in the perpetrator intervention programme to help to address abusive behaviours? Officer response – There had been a number of challenges at the start of this programme, and more details on uptake and successes would be circulated to the Committee.
- How had the independent domestic violence advocate service been working? Officer response – Advisors were allocated to an individual once they had been risk

assessed. Advisors would work flexibly with victims dependent on their individual needs, with face to face meetings or advice given via phone call in a way that was safe. This strategy was front and centre of the overall service provided by WBC.

- It was noted that a list of the 30 and above partner organisations that worked alongside WBC to support the strategy would be circulated to the Committee.
- What additional actions, facilities and interventions would be put in place to ensure that Ukrainian refugees being housed within the Borough were being kept safe from domestic abuse? Officer response – Officers were working closely across departments and organisations on a number of different projects in relation to the introduction of a number of Ukrainian refugees locally, for example tying this in with the modern slavery agenda to ensure there was no abuse of power. Information was being translated to allow refugees to understand and access information first-hand, whilst there were pieces being circulated around education on what is culturally acceptable within the UK. Detailed training was being provided to case workers who would be working directly with guests to make them more acutely aware of indicators around all forms of abuse. Information was being provided to let refugees know that they can trust and talk to the police and WBC officers in case they were in need of help.
- It was agreed that an update report be provided in 6 months' time to update to Committee on any domestic abuse interventions that have had to take place, and any additional resources required to support Ukrainian refugees.
- What percentage of victims returned to their abusers, and what percentage of abusers were serial abusers? Officer response – Data was not currently being collected in relation to how many victims returned to their abusers, however national and global research was being undertaken within this area. Whilst a huge amount of work was being carried out with perpetrators in order to break the cycle of abusive relationships and harmful behaviours in relationships, the data around it was not currently available locally. Unfortunately the sad truth was that individuals who experienced domestic abuse as children tended to repeat that behaviour, either as an abuser or a victim, in their adult life. Children were now recognised as victims within their own right, which resulted in dedicated services and support being put in place for children to help break the cycle.
- Where were most referrals received from, and how quickly were they actioned? Officer response – Most referrals were received from the police and social care, whilst a number of self-referrals were also received. The new domestic abuse contract had introduced new SLAs which had increased the speed at which victims were contacted. Performance against these SLAs would be circulated to the Committee.
- How much did the service cost to provide, and how much of this was funded by central Government? Officer response – An overall contract breakdown and the total cost of the service would be circulated to the Committee.
- Would central Government funding likely be reviewed in future? Officer response – Officers had expected a three-year funding settlement, however only a one-year settlement was agreed. £250k was agreed this year, and a similar figure was expected this year.

- What was the occupancy level at the WBC refuge? Officer response – A sharp increase in people accessing the service was expected during the pandemic, however this was not quite realised in Wokingham, however since restrictions had been relaxed a steady increase in demand had been realised. Occupancy levels would be circulated to the Committee, however the refuge was almost always full and quite often full of people from neighbouring Boroughs as it was not always safe to access a refuge within your home Borough, whilst reciprocal arrangements were in place with other local authorities.
- What coverage was in place for single points of failure, for example the single officer working with schools? Officer response – This was a commissioned service for one children and young people worker, and a temporary member of staff would provide cover for the maternity period. Additional demand was being placed on this service than was originally anticipated. It was incumbent on the supplier to provide support to ensure that one full-time-equivalent member of staff was carrying out the work as required by the contract.
- Were figures available detailing how many victims were being housed via social services or homelessness provision? Interim Director response – From a relatively low base, those fleeing domestic abuse had quadrupled in Wokingham in the past 6 months. Demand was being met through a variety of appropriate provisions, whether that be the dedicated refuge or WBC owned housing.
- A number of questions were provided to officers prior to the meeting. Written answers to the below questions would be circulated to the Committee.
 - 1) Who has been consulted and given input into this report?
 - 2) The report acknowledges the need for more data and to compare it with the census results to check for representation. Of the 2700 women and 1500 men affected annually, what else do we know e.g. age, disability, LGBTQ+, ethnicity etc. How do these demographics impact the needs of the victims?
 - 3) What are the different needs of male and female victims (and other demographics)? Are they being met? We heard from Cranstoun the difficulties in getting ethnic minority women to come forward. Later in the report it suggests that men are under-represented when it comes to accessing services but why is this? Perhaps their needs are different.
 - 4) Refuge provision - It is clear that there is a need to get a long term strategy in place for this which considers current provision and future needs. Currently there is no local refuge provision for families or those with complex needs. This is a gap which we heard from Cranstoun and I've also heard this from Berkshire Women's Aid previously. How are we currently meeting the needs of these victims?
 - 5) Data and demographics - we are funding a pilot for a support worker for older people. How do we know this is a priority and best use of available funds?
 - 6) Could additional information be provided in relation to the "networking group that has regular attendance by 30+ representatives of local DA services". What is this group, how often does it meet, who attends, what is the purpose and impact?
 - 7) Are Cranstoun delivering according to what they are contracted for? Also, what specifically are the gaps on top of currently commissioned services - what's the process to find this out?
- How did the reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities work in practice? Officer response – There was a national data pool of refuge provision that professionals had access to, which allowed matches to take place between victims

and refuge provision. Provision was often sought where a victim had existing support, for example near family or friends, whilst allowing the victim to shop at a different supermarket but still often close enough to complete a school run or attend work. Each placement was carried out on a case-by-case basis dependant on the victim's individual needs. This was a flexible and victim orientated service, and just because Wokingham only had a three-bed refuge did not mean that is all it could access elsewhere.

- Once a victim had left the Borough to be placed in another area, did WBC officers remain in contact with the victim? Officer response – Liaison was undertaken for a period of time between local authorities, and if a placement was more permanent then a period of handover was undertaken with a variety of agencies including children's services, MARAC, and the local domestic abuse provider.
- Was there a standard level and quality of accommodation provided across the country? Officer response – The quality and standard of accommodation varied, however officers did visit accommodation within other Boroughs and also visited purpose built accommodation to see examples of best practice.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Narinder Brar and Steve Moore be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) A detailed breakdown of where instances of domestic abuse took place within the Borough be provided at a future meeting of the Committee;
- 3) The full suite of KPIs currently being developed be reported at a future meeting of the Committee;
- 4) Details on the uptake and successes of the perpetrator intervention programme be circulated to the Committee;
- 5) An update report be provided in 6 months' time to update to Committee on any domestic abuse interventions that have had to take place, and any additional resources required to support Ukrainian refugees;
- 6) Performance against SLAs be circulated to the Committee;
- 7) An overall contract breakdown and the total cost of the service be circulated to the Committee;
- 8) Occupancy levels of the Wokingham refuge be circulated to the Committee;
- 9) Written answers be provided to the list of seven questions sent into officers and detailed within the minutes.

9. PLACE AND GROWTH DIRECTORATE PRIORITIES

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 21 to 30, which outlined the key priorities for the Place and Growth Directorate.

A number of key priorities and issues were outlined, including a significant increase homelessness within the Borough, successfully accommodating a number of Ukrainian

refugees, reviewing bus routes within the Borough, updating the local plan, delivering the customer excellence programme, reviewing and delivering upon the climate emergency action plan.

Steve Moore (Interim Director of Place and Growth) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

During the ensuing discussion, members raised the following points and queries:

- Plans were in place to deliver 4 additional solar farms within the Borough, and a wider energy strategy would be key in delivering on the Borough's future energy needs. Interim Director response – This was an important part of the wider climate emergency action plan, and conversations were being had between directorates on a regular basis. To ensure the most effective and efficient use of officer time, it would be best for this to be considered alongside other related conversations at a future Committee meeting.
- Members received a considerable number of resident comments in relation to road maintenance, congestion, and any future increases in terms of recycling. Were these part of the Directorate's priorities? Interim Director response - These were key parts of Place and Growth's service delivery whilst being of significant importance to residents. Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) needed to look at how road maintenance was communicated with our customers, which could link in with the customer excellence programme. Congestion had strong links to other priorities including climate emergency and bus route provision, whilst a consultation was underway on the proposed waste strategy which would be reported to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Members noted that road maintenance needed to be viewed as a wider project, as residents expected a consistent level of maintenance. Interim Director response – Road maintenance needed to be viewed within the wider financial landscape, as increased spending on maintenance projects might mean that savings would have to be found elsewhere.
- It was noted that there was a £16bn deficit nationally in highway infrastructure, whilst adoptable roads within new developments were not just a WBC problem. WBC would only adopt roads which were built to adoptable standards when developers agreed to pay WBC the required management fees.
- Members raised concerns that there appeared to be a two-tiered social housing system within the Borough, with good quality provision from WBC and a substandard provision from some housing associations. Interim Director response – This was an excellent and timely point, as the contract was up for renewal this year. The Directorate would support the creation of a task and finish group to review this aspect.
- How were developers being held responsible for delivering the required facilities within SDLs? Interim Director response – This was not always the fault of the developer, as WBC had various timings and triggers that needed to be managed. An item could be taken to a future Committee meeting which outlined the approach that WBC took when delivering SDLs within the Borough.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Steve Moore be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The key priorities raised by the Interim Director be considered when agreeing the Committee's work programme;
- 3) A task and finish group be formed to consider how a 'one-tier' approach to social housing could be delivered within the Borough.

10. RESOURCES AND ASSETS DIRECTORATE PRIORITIES

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 31 to 36, which outlined the key priorities for the Resources and Assets Directorate.

The report outlined the significant programmes of work within a variety of service areas, including the implementation of the leisure strategy, the opening of the Carnival Hub in the summer of 2022, transitioning the internal-audit team in-house, enhancing Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) financial management practices, and delivering enhanced Legal Services.

Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

During the ensuing discussion, members raised the following points and queries:

- Could additional details be given in relation to WBC's intermediate risk management plan? Deputy Chief Executive response – The corporate risk register was produced by the corporate leadership team and reported to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.
- What impact might inflation have on the delivery of Council projects? Deputy Chief Executive response – Greater contingency had been placed into the capital programme, whilst a figure in excess of £8m was allowed for within the revenue budget. This figure of £8m may not be enough, however it was within the region of three times greater than allowed for in previous years. WBC was protected in a number of areas where we were tied into contracts at fixed prices which were being honoured, whilst project managers were working hard to ensure that contracts were being honoured across their whole term, whilst extensions were being sought where possible. A reconsideration of the budget mid-year might be required, and an update would be taken to the Committee in such a case.
- Had a return to pre-pandemic levels been realised within the leisure service? Deputy Chief Executive response – Heavy users were quick to return to leisure activities, whilst those who were more frail were more reluctant to return. Overall, around seventy to eighty percent of customers had returned to their normal leisure activities.

RESOLVED That:

- 4) Graham Ebers be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 5) The key priorities raised by the Deputy Chief Executive be considered when agreeing the Committee's work programme.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 37 to 40.

Members prioritised a number of items for consideration during the municipal year.

Members commented that they wished for items including the Local Plan Update, the development of the LCWIP and the bus strategy to be considered by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee this municipal year.

Members reiterated that they wished for a task and finish group to be set-up to consider how a 'one-tier' approach to social housing could be delivered within the Borough.

The Committee resolved a draft schedule of items for future meetings as set out below.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham and Neil Carr be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Bus Strategy and the LCWIP be added to the 4 July 2022 meeting of the Committee;
- 3) The Council Owned Companies update scheduled for 5 September 2022 be considered as a component of reviews of other relevant items in due course;
- 4) KPIs relating to the domestic abuse service and a breakdown from within the Borough as to where the most instances of DA are taking place, and an update on the implementation of the in-house enforcement and safety service be added to the 5 September 2022 meeting of the Committee;
- 5) An extraordinary meeting be scheduled for September 2022 to consider progress made in relation to the Local Plan Update;
- 6) An update report on actions being taken to address homelessness within the Borough be added to the 3 October 2022 meeting of the Committee;
- 7) An update report on the implementation of the Arts and Culture Strategy and efforts being made to include as many different communities and groups as possible be added to the 3 November 2022 meeting of the Committee;
- 8) A written report be circulated to the Committee with regards to burial capacity within the Borough;
- 9) A task and finish group to be set-up to consider how a 'one-tier' approach to social housing could be delivered within the Borough;
- 10) An update report be provided to the Committee in 6 months' time to update to Committee on any domestic abuse interventions that have had to take place, and any additional resources required to support Ukrainian refugees.

Appendix 1 to the Minutes

Updates on Actions Relating to the Domestic Abuse Item which were raised at the Meeting

- 1) A detailed breakdown of where instances of domestic abuse took place within the Borough be provided at a future meeting of the Committee; -

This had been noted and will be provided at a future meeting potentially November alongside a KPI's update.

- 2) The full suite of KPIs currently being developed be reported at a future meeting of the Committee; noted as above.
- 3) Details on the uptake and successes of the perpetrator intervention programme be circulated to the Committee;

Uptake from 1/7/2021 – 31/3/2022 there were 25 referrals received for the programme, of which 22 were offered a place on the Men & Masculinities programme; 1 was offered 1:1 support and 2 were not suitable (1 identifying as the primary victim and another referred in error). As at 31/3/2022, 17 were showing on the perpetrator worker's caseload.

We will get a better update on the success of the programme when this current funding quarter ends (1st July) for future meetings committee may want to consider putting this item on for the September meeting – to allow for a whole 12 months of data to be available.

- 4) An update report be provided in 6 months' time to update to Committee on any domestic abuse interventions that have had to take place, and any additional resources required to support Ukrainian refugees; noted this will be provided at the November meeting.
- 5) Performance against SLAs be circulated to the Committee; A full 12 month end of year report will be available at the end of July, I propose this is shared with the committee to consider as part of the November items.
- 6) An overall contract breakdown and the total cost of the service be circulated to the Committee;– After consideration of legal advice, this has been shared to members under a part 2 exemption.
- 7) Occupancy levels of the Wokingham refuge be circulated to the Committee;

9 women were referred into the refuge in the year 1/4/2021 – 31/3/2022 and the refuge was full as at 31st March 2022. Maximum number of adult female residents at any one time is 3.

- 8) Written answers be provided to the list of seven questions sent into officers and detailed within the minutes. Please see below.

1) Who has been consulted and given input into this report? e.g BWA, Kaleidoscopic, Cranstoun... The report was compiled by the Wokingham DA Coordinator and Community Safety Manager

2) The report acknowledges the need for more data and to compare it with the census results to check for representation. I would agree. Of the 2700 women and 1500 men affected annually, what else do we know e.g. age, disability, LGBTQ+, ethnicity etc. How do these demographics impact the needs of the victims?

The 4200 number is based on ONS estimates following a statistically representative sample of people's experiences of domestic abuse (regardless of whether these incidents have been reported to the police or not) – you can find out more information about this at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2021> . It indicates that based on our local population 4200 residents will have been victims of domestic abuse during the past year. We use this information as a rough guide to try and understand underlying domestic abuse prevalence as the only other quantitative data we can access relates to police recorded incidents and crimes. There is higher prevalence of domestic abuse as well as specific ways in which the abuse may be experienced by those who share a protected characteristic or have complex needs. In order to gain a better understanding of the unique ways in which someone may experience abuse linked to their characteristic (eg LGBT+) as well as prevalence rates statistically within each group we use research findings (for example 80% of trans people are likely to experience domestic abuse; 25% of LGB victims) and it is estimated that between 5 – 8% of the population are LGBT. The Census returns of 2021 asked questions around sexuality, so we should hopefully be able to get a better estimate of the number of trans / gay / bi people in the borough to enable us to establish how many residents self-classify as being part of this community and therefore how many are likely to have been affected by domestic abuse over the past year as well as during their lifetime. We also need to consider where the abuse is coming from (eg intimate partners / ex-partners or family members) in order to tailor resources, literature and services to ensure that people from this demographic and increase accessibility by members of the community. Sadly members of the LGBT+ community can experience stigma, shame, threats of being outed and many other common issues and barriers to accessing support. Each demographic community faces different barriers so for example someone who is older may be being economically abused by a child or grandchild, but is worried about consequences of reporting, such as visits being stopped, care needs not being met etc. Whilst we have research to help our understanding of 'groups' they are not homogenous groups and each individual will have their own unique needs and concerns which need to be addressed in order for them to feel that support is realistic for them.

3) What are the different needs of male and female victims (and other demographics)? Are they being met? We heard from Cranstoun the difficulties in getting ethnic minority women to come forward. Later in the report it suggests that men are under-represented when it comes to accessing services but why is this? Perhaps their needs are different.

The basic needs for all victims are to be believed, be supported and to achieve safety but in order to achieve this, they will need to recognise that what they are experiencing is domestic abuse, be aware of services and laws which are in place and how they can access these services. Unfortunately it is only when individuals are 'visible' to services that they can be supported by the agencies, and there are a lot of people who are affected by domestic abuse who services aren't aware of – for example those from ethnic minorities

and male victims as well as those with other protected characteristics or complex needs. As a result, it is vital that we maximise opportunities to raise awareness of domestic abuse and reach out to communities where we know that we are not seeing statistical representation within police reported data and / or housing presentations and domestic abuse services, to educate on what domestic abuse is and what help and support is available. Concerns faced by victims from ethnic minority groups, can include cultural and / or language barriers (eg lack of laws, enforcement or support within their home country); concerns over immigration status as they may have been told (incorrectly) by their abuser that means that if they report domestic abuse they will be deported; may experience family and / or wider community pressure to stay within a marriage; or there could be many other reasons why they are nervous about voicing what is happening to them. Male victims often feel that they won't be believed (a message which is often reinforced through media messaging); shame (that as a man they aren't able to protect themselves); lack of 'role models' who have spoken up about the abuse they have experienced and many other reasons.

There are many excellent websites which provide a lot of information to help us understand more about the needs for those with different demographics and I also have loads of research papers if there is a group for which the resident would like to gain a more in-depth understanding of key barriers and concerns.

4) Refuge provision - little bit woolly on what is being provided and how it is being funded. Think it is clear that there is a need to get a long term strategy in place for this which considers current provision and future needs. Currently there is no local refuge provision for families or those with complex needs. This is a gap which we heard from Cranstoun and I've also heard this from Andrea at BWA previously. How are we currently meeting the needs of these victims?

Currently we have a 3 bed refuge within Wokingham borough for female victims of domestic abuse. This is run by BWA with the housing related costs (rent) paid by residents who are working or through housing benefit. The support element linked to the refuge is now funded by WBC through a contract with BWA, although this is only a recent development.

(Information for Sarah - Prior to the awarding of the DA contract to Cranstoun in July 2021, the support element was funded by WBC as part of the commissioned service but on contract change, BWA made the decision to retain the refuge and advised they were able to fund the support element through charitable donations, although a grant was subsequently awarded as a result of government funding being allocated to WBC linked to the Domestic Abuse Act which placed a new duty on local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation (deemed as refuge, home refuge scheme and designated DA temporary and emergency housing). The hope was, and remains to increase our refuge provision (best practice suggests 1 refuge space per 10K population) with Cranstoun seeking to secure an additional 3 refuge bed spaces. However, this has proved to be very difficult in the short term linked to the high cost of housing, lack of rental properties (would need planning permission to become a House of Multiple Occupation) and lack of suitable WBC owned properties which could be used for this purpose).

A plan is currently being worked on, in partnership with BWA and the Housing team to increase the refuge provision in Wokingham, and address the gaps in refuge provision which currently exist (eg for male, gay, trans victims as well as those who have complex needs and larger families). To ensure that any refuge provision meets the needs of the individuals it seeks to support, research has been commissioned to gain an understanding of what the needs are for male and LGBT victims of domestic abuse within refuge provision as there is currently very little research on what these needs are.

Whilst we recognise the need to increase refuge provision in the borough, it is important to re-iterate that no-one who presents to Wokingham Council as needing safe accommodation is turned away and suitable accommodation will be identified, be that a refuge in another area (victims from Wokingham wouldn't be housed in a Wokingham based refuge due to safety issues), through home refuge scheme measures, if this would be a safe option, or alternative accommodation options.

5) Back to the data and demographics - we are funding a pilot for a support worker for older people. I'm not saying this is not needed but how do we know this is a priority and best use of available funds? All organisations were eligible to apply for funding through a grant funding scheme we offered to address local needs linked to support in safe accommodation. Hourglass made an application through this funding stream and were successful in their bid for a pilot project linked to the very low numbers of older people who are reporting domestic abuse to the police and / or accessing specialist domestic abuse services locally, especially when the indication is that around 20% of Wokingham population falls into this age bracket. In addition many older people have many barriers to accessing help and support which reduces their opportunity or ability to recognise the abuse or seek realistic (from their perspective) help. The Hourglass project involves reaching out to community groups and holding awareness raising events as well as providing an IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy) service to support those who reach out for help and are aged over 60, which involves ongoing holistic support. The service is working very closely with Cranstoun, with most professional referrals being channelled through Cranstoun who will support the individual with safety planning and immediate support, but then referring clients who need more indepth or longer term support to Hourglass. Hourglass additionally have a 24/7 national helpline to provide advice and support and those calling the national helpline from our area will be referred into our local Hourglass service. We will be able to monitor the impact of this service through the number of older domestic abuse victims who report to the police as well as who have engaged with the domestic abuse services.

6) Would like to know more about the "networking group that has regular attendance by 30+ representatives of local DA services". What is this group, how often does it meet, who attends, what is the purpose and impact?

The group meets bi-monthly and is responsible for delivering the Domestic Abuse Action plan aspects which aren't directly related to the council's duties under the Domestic Abuse Act. The group has agreed terms of reference and impact is measures through outcomes linked to the action plan and reported data. Membership is open to any organisations who are supporting those affected by domestic abuse in the Wokingham borough and please contact karen.evans@wokingham.gov.uk if you are aware of any groups who would like to be part of our work. Membership currently consists of statutory agencies (including police, schools, probation, adult social care, children's services, health); community groups (including The Cowshed, foodbanks, Citizens Advice, Flag DV, Victims First) and specialist domestic abuse services (Cranstoun, Kaleidoscopic, Support U, Hourglass, Paws Protect and Freedom Dogs Project)

Terms of reference state:

The group will continuously work to improve the quality of domestic abuse responses by:

- Developing and working as a strong multi-agency Group, allowing for information sharing, networking, collaboration and sharing of good practice.

- Enabling the 'voices' of those directly affected by domestic abuse to be heard and responded to.
- Working to identify and address barriers to information and support experienced as a result of having a protected characteristic or complex need.
- Providing expert advice and data to support the development and delivery of the Wokingham domestic abuse strategy, agreeing, and undertaking appropriate steps and actions to address identified issues.
- Influencing and informing local decisions by advising and making recommendations regarding gaps and opportunities in local services, using best available evidence and good practice.
- Supporting organisations to effectively engage with domestic abuse victim-survivors and expert services in order to understanding and respond to the range and complexity of each individual's needs.
- Escalating unresolved issues with individual or collective relevant representative / bodies within the relevant organisation or if this is unsuccessful, to the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership.
- Ensuring that training and support for front line professionals is available and regularly reviewed, including learning from Domestic Homicide and Serious Case Reviews, to meet ongoing and emerging training needs.

7) Are Cranstoun delivering according to what they are contracted for? Also, what specifically are the gaps on top of currently commissioned services - what's the process to find this out?

Cranstoun are contracted to provide a helpline, outreach and IDVA support, group based support, work with children and young people and perpetrator interventions. In addition they provide multi agency training, participate in child and adult case conferences and multi agency risk management meetings. The service specification was written early 2021 and as it is for a 5 year period it is likely there will be emerging needs identified – when this happens we will put in place options to address these needs. A robust contract management process is in place to ensure that the service delivers as contracted for.

Unfortunately, the number of people needing support due to being affected by domestic abuse continues to rise both nationally and locally. The main issue is capacity as demand is significantly increasing and case levels are now higher than anticipated demand.