

Agenda Item 8.

TITLE	Wokingham Domestic Abuse Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 May 2022
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Domestic Abuse affects around 2700 women and 1500 men in Wokingham each year.

The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 sets out clearly the Council's response to new statutory duties introduced under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as well as its wider response to domestic abuse.

A new 5 year (+1+1) contract was awarded to Cranstoun to deliver the commissioned domestic abuse service for Wokingham, commencing on 1st July 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers an update on reported domestic abuse within the borough for the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 and offers comment.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024 was adopted by Council in December 2022 and was backed with an ambitious action plan to improve responses to domestic abuse as well as deliver new duties placed on the Local Authority through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Following a full and comprehensive tendering process, a new contract was issued to Cranstoun to deliver support for those affected by domestic abuse in Wokingham including a helpline, outreach / Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy, group-based support, support for children and young people, perpetrator interventions and training for other professionals.

This report provides a summary of reported domestic abuse data for the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022.

It also highlights the increasing numbers of referrals to commissioned domestic abuse services both nationally and locally. Request for funding for additional resources have been submitted into a national pool of funding, to the Ministry of Justice.

Background

The Wokingham Domestic Abuse Support Service includes a helpline for individuals and practitioners; outreach and IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) service, group-based programmes; support for children and young people; perpetrator interventions for those who recognise the need to change their abusive or controlling behaviour and; multi agency training options.

The service was delivered by BWA (Berkshire Womens Aid) for the period 1st April 2021 – 30th June 2021 and then by Cranstoun for the period 1st July 2021 – 31st March 2022.

During the year, 216 victims of domestic abuse received safety planning advice alongside practical and emotional support. The number of victims accessing support has been increasing over the past 3 quarters (Q2: 45; Q3: 53; Q4: 69)

Refuge Provision

In addition to the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Support Service, there is currently a 3-bedroom refuge within the borough for female victims of domestic abuse who need to flee to our area. This vital provision is commissioned alongside the core commissioned support service and continues to be provided and managed by Berkshire Womens Aid.

Domestic Abuse and Housing Support

As a result of funding allocation linked to the new duties under the DA Act 2021, we are pleased that this has enabled a new domestic abuse housing specialist to be appointed, based within the homelessness team at WBC. This post is facilitating an improved response for those presenting to the homelessness team as a result of domestic abuse, including supporting the homelessness officer to identify the most appropriate safe accommodation option, and support the individual customer to access and settle in this accommodation. The DA housing specialist is additionally leading the council's application for DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation – the gold standard for housing providers responding to domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse and Older People

The funding has additionally enabled us to fund a one year pilot for Hourglass (previously Action on Elder Abuse) to have a full time worker for our area who is linking with local services to increase awareness of abuse as it affects older people (linked to the low statistical representation currently of older people within domestic abuse services) as well as providing IDVA support to those over the age of 60.

Data overview (covering the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022):

- The police attended 2246 incidents of domestic abuse in the Wokingham Borough (2165 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021), with 1149 crimes identified (1038 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021)
- The area which recorded the highest number of domestic abuse occurrences was Woodley (24%), followed by Fields (18%)
- There were 75 cases discussed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment conference for high-risk victims of domestic abuse, with 96 children living in these households. This was a decrease from the previous year and follows changes to the referral criteria. It is disappointing that there were no cases discussed involving a victim-

survivor from the LGBT+ community and we are hoping that the introduction of a specialist service for domestic abuse and sexual violence (delivered by Support U) will increase confidence of the community in reporting and accessing services. There is also a significant statistical under representation of those who have a disability.

- Of police attended incidents, 72% of the complainants were female and 28% male, however we continue to see a significant under representation of male victims accessing services
- The majority of victims (52%) were in the age range 25 – 44 years old as were perpetrators (55%) within police incidents attended
- Whilst the majority of victims and offenders in police attended incidents were White (80%), nearly 10% were Asian, 3% Black and 4% of mixed ethnicity. When the census data is available, a comparison will be made for statistical representation

Domestic Abuse Strategy – 2021 – 2024 Progress

The Domestic Abuse Strategy was adopted by Council in December 2021 and an update is provided on progress to date linked to the priority themes identified.

Domestic Abuse Partnership Board action plan (to deliver DA Act 2021 new duties):

Priority area	Examples of key progress
Increase awareness of safe accommodation choices for all	DA Communication plan in place which includes regular social media posts, press releases and more accessible web based information (user based testing to be undertaken June 22), and short video clips created linked to safe accommodation options. Measured through number of referrals to the homelessness team and home refuge scheme as a result of domestic abuse, including demographically statistical representation.
Provide an inclusive range of safe accommodation options	Full review of available safe accommodation options undertaken and additional options being explored, including additional refuge provision, reciprocal and collaborative work with neighbouring areas to address common gaps in services.
Provide support for victim-survivors in safe accommodation	Funding provided to support 3 bed Wokingham domestic abuse refuge delivered by Berkshire Women's Aid. Domestic abuse housing specialist appointed to coordinate homelessness presentation to safe accommodation. Continual development of services and support options (practical and emotional) based on survivor feedback
Strengthen partnership work to drive and improve outcomes	Domestic Abuse multi agency groups who drive and deliver action plans. Multi agency training gaps identified and addressed. Continual peer challenge to improve outcomes, measured through client feedback and focus groups

Support individuals to begin rebuilding their lives	New directory of services established to help clients identify support and options which are based on their individual needs.
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Domestic Abuse Networking Group Action Plan (non DA Act related issues)

Priority area	Examples of key progress
Awareness and early intervention	Communications plan produced to co-ordinate social media, campaigns, resources between agencies involved with the Wokingham DA response. Full review undertaken by an independent specialist organisation linked to accessibility of information for those with protected characteristics and / or complex needs. Full multi-agency training plan being delivered
Support for victim-survivors and children	Online directory of services created to map services and identify and address gaps in services. Clear pathways in place for referrals to specialist services based on the needs of the individual
Minimising harm	Perpetrator interventions available for those who self-identify they need help to address their abusive and / or controlling behaviours, alongside those court mandated to attend programme. Multi agency training delivered to support practitioners have conversations and encourage help seeking. Regular meetings with school safeguarding leads to support delivery of mandated relationship education programmes.
Justice, recovery and ongoing support	Close working with Thames Valley Victim and Witnesses Delivery Group to support and drive improved experiences for those going through the criminal and civil courts. Local domestic abuse specialist services supporting improvement to communications from the criminal courts advising of outcomes to be more trauma informed. Increased awareness by local practitioners of options for ongoing support, be that practical or emotional support.
Supporting the council deliver DA Act new duties	Networking group has regular attendance by 30+ representatives of local domestic abuse services who support awareness and access to safe accommodation options and understanding of the parts of the DA Act which have been enacted. As additional measures are implemented, training will be provided.

Analysis of Issues

- Detailed multi agency action plans linked to the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 have been created and are monitored via the Partnership Board and Networking Group
- The commissioned service delivered by Cranstoun has now been in place for 9 months and increasing number of referrals for support are being seen.

- All elements of the commissioned service are now being delivered, with the exception of additional refuge provision currently, due to difficulties in securing a new property. This includes delivery of training sessions which are available for Members as well as multi agency partners. The service is based in Waterford House.
- The Wokingham domestic abuse refuge is in place for 3 female victims of domestic abuse, with the support element being delivered by Berkshire Women's Aid
- We are awaiting the Census reports publication to enable us to access the latest demographic details so we can compare this for statistical representation within services
- User testing on the web pages relating to domestic abuse is due to take place in the next month to ensure customers can access the information they need
- New post in place of a Domestic Abuse Housing Specialist.
- Regular feedback sought from customers to assess progress on increasing awareness, service delivery and outcomes

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cranstoun domestic abuse commissioned service have applied for funding through the Ministry of Justice to increase IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) capacity due to ongoing increase in referral rates seen. Should this application be unsuccessful, there may be a need for consideration to be given for an uplift in funding for the commissioned service to ensure all those who need support can access this.

Cross-Council Implications

The new duties introduced under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 impacts various Council departments. The greatest impact will be on the homelessness team but builds on the team's aspiration to gain DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation – DAHA accreditation being the 'gold standard' for housing providers responding to domestic abuse.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An equalities assessment was undertaken in December 2021.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

None

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