

Meeting: Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 25 February 2014
Subject: The impact on children of living in family circumstances of domestic violence and abuse.
Report of: Cllr Amanda Dodwell – Deputy Executive Member Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the current work around Domestic Abuse across the Council with particular regard to the involvement of children.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Sue Tyler, Acting Assistant Director – Children's Health
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

- Improved educational attainment.
- Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.

Financial:

1. There are no direct financial implications from this report.

Legal:

2. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

Risk Management:

3. Not applicable

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not applicable

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Not applicable

Community Safety:

6. Not applicable.

Public Health

7. Not applicable

Sustainability:

8. Not applicable.

Procurement:

9. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is asked to consider making recommendations that would enhance the Council's offer. The Outcomes of this meeting will be written into a full report and made available to the Executive members for further consideration.

Introduction

10. The Council has a key role to play in addressing domestic violence and abuse. This is a cross-cutting issue in that it can affect anyone, resulting in directorates across the Council providing services to support domestic violence.
11. There are also a number of key Council partners that provide services for victims of domestic violence and abuse, and the Council teams and services involved in responding to victims engage with these partners in different ways and at different points through a victim's journey.
12. Domestic violence and abuse is an issue that is picked up in a range of strategic plans and boards across Central Bedfordshire, including the Community Safety Partnership (CSP); Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP); Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB); Safeguarding Adults Board (LASB); Criminal Justice Board (CJB) and the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC).
13. Domestic abuse has adverse impacts on the health and wellbeing of victims, and is closely associated with child abuse and neglect, as well as a range of other social issues including homelessness and substance abuse.
14. It has always been challenging for commissioners to address, affecting many different local policy agendas and requiring the cooperation of multiple agencies to resolve it. In addition, the public sector is now operating in the harshest financial climate for a decade: local areas must deal with competing demands for funding in the face of significant spending reductions.

Context

15. The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:
"any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

The definition was changed in April 2013 to include those aged 16-17 years of age and worded to include coercive control.

16. In 2012 around 1.2 million women suffered domestic abuse and national research shows:
- one in three women experience abuse in their relationships
 - on average there will have been 35 assaults before the police are contacted
 - Every minute in the UK police receive a call for assistance concerning domestic abuse
 - Domestic abuse claims the lives of two women every week in the UK
 - 30% of domestic abuse starts in pregnancy
 - 70% of high risk domestic abuse victims have children
17. Locally research in Central Bedfordshire shows that:
- There are on average 49 domestic abuse incidents reported to the police each week.
 - On average 36% of domestic abuse incidents were noted to have had a child present
 - In 2012/13 36% of domestic abuse incidents reported in Central Bedfordshire were from repeat locations
 - Since the change in the definition in April 2013 to incorporate 16 – 17 year olds, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of incidents reported each month. Based on the current reporting level it can be predicted that there will be a 6% increase in the number of incidents reported over the next 12 months.

With the changes in the domestic abuse definition and the increase in population it can be predicted that by 2021 there will be an estimated 18% increase in the number of domestic abuse incidents reported.

18. Appendix A provides detail of reported incidents (where a domestic abuse incident has happened but no crime) and crime (where a crime is recorded) for 2012 and 2013 in comparison with Luton and Bedford.

Supporting Victims

19. A range of partners, statutory and non-statutory, invest in services to support victims of domestic violence and abuse. These include two key services considered as essential for supporting victims at the highest risk of significant harm, the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA).
20. MARACS are where statutory and voluntary sector partner's work together to share information on the highest risk cases, and a coordinated safety plan to protect each victim, and their family, is developed. Because multi-agency support is not successful without a close relationship with a victim, the work of IDVAs and MARACs are inextricably linked, with an IDVA representing the victim at the MARAC.
21. IDVA's are trained advisors providing independent specialist support, both emotional and practical. They engage with adult victims from the point of crisis and facilitate access to the resources of local agencies to keep each victim, and their children, safe. Central Bedfordshire has a shared IDVA Service with Bedford Borough Council, with 2 full time IDVA's for Central Bedfordshire.

22. Between July 2012 and June 2013 the IDVA's for Central Bedfordshire received 185 referrals of which 30% were re-referrals. National research indicates that 57% of all victims supported by an IDVA experience a complete or near cessation in abuse suffered following three to four months contact. Where abuse continued, 43% advised it was at a much lower level.
23. An average of 22 cases are referred to Central Bedfordshire MARAC each month (based on data from November 2012 – October 2013) with non police referrals accounting for 49% of all referrals. During this period there were 257 referrals to MARAC and 376 children were present in the households of the cases referred.
24. National research concludes that for every £1 spent on MARAC at least £6 of public money can be saved annually on direct costs to agencies such as the Police and Health Service. It also shows that following intervention by a MARAC and the IDVA service up to 60% of domestic abuse victims report no further violence.
25. The Council supports victims through a range of service areas including:
 - Housing advice and applications to prevent homelessness when fleeing violence and abuse
 - Strategy – developing and co-ordinating strategies that reflect victim needs
 - Commissioning – programmes and services for victims, including refuge provision
 - Safeguarding adults and children – assessment, conference and review
 - Health – links to drugs, alcohol, young people.
 - Training – delivering domestic abuse training programmes for front line professionals
 - Sanctuary Scheme – providing home security for victims
 - Signposting to other domestic violence and abuse services including voluntary sector
26. Specific programmes that the Council has implemented include:
 - Project Relay: Working with schools in areas where there are high levels of domestic violence and abuse incidents, within 24 hours of an incident happening involving a child/children Information is shared between the police and the Project Relay Support Officer who makes contact with the school Safeguarding Lead at the earliest opportunity. The school then puts both covert and overt interventions in place to support the child/children as they feel appropriate.
 - Children's Refuge Worker: There is a dedicated worker, working with children at the refuges in Central Bedfordshire using play therapy and other therapeutic interventions to enable the children to talk about what has happened to them and allow the worker to identify effective ways to support the child. This work provides positive future outcomes building self esteem and confidence in the child and ensuring that they understand that abuse and violence is not the norm.
 - Sorted: Commissioned counselling provision for young people that have witnessed domestic abuse and violence.
 - Freedom Programme: A 12 week rolling programme for women to understand more about domestic violence and abuse.

- Community Perpetrator Programme: Bedfordshire Probation Trust was commissioned to deliver a pilot community based perpetrator programme. The programme was for men who recognised their abusive and violent behaviour and wanted to change it. Since the programme began referral levels have been lower than expected, and an evaluation to be carried out to consider this and other key learning from the pilot. Due to national changes to Probation Trusts the pilot will end on 01 April 2014; however work has begun to assess options for provision of a perpetrator programme from 01 April 2014.

27. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has recently completed an inspection of Bedfordshire Police as part of its review of police response to domestic violence and abuse across England and Wales. The inspections seek to answer two main questions:

- What is the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence and abuse, focusing on the outcomes for victims?
- Are risks to victims of domestic violence and abuse being adequately managed?

Feedback to Bedfordshire Police at the end of the inspection is that there are areas for improvement. Following the inspection feedback the force has completed an initial review of its processes and will engage with partners in due course.

28. Council and Community Safety Partnership leads for Bedfordshire have met with the police lead to look at how we can become more effective in our response to domestic abuse, including the potential for joint commissioning and looking at different ways of working. This work will continue to progress over the coming months.

29. At an operational level partnership working is proactive with positive working relationships between a range of partners. There are some areas for further improvement, for example sharing information. In formal settings such as the MARAC and Child Protection Conferences, information is shared well however outside of these meetings it is less clear as to what is shared on a day to day basis.

Challenges

30. The Councils' service demand for domestic violence and abuse cases is high, with the majority of direct demand being in Children's Services, Intake and Assessment, and Adult Social Care, Health and Housing in Housing Needs. Indirect service demand, via commissioned services and programmes such as IDVA, MARAC, SORTED also continues to be high.
31. Some of the commissioned services are finding it particularly challenging, with resources very stretched just dealing with the highest risk cases and in some instances demand for services has outstripped capacity. For example, therapeutic interventions for children.
32. The majority of Council and partner services for domestic abuse and violence are targeted at those victims at highest risk of harm. This is seen as the most effective way of targeting resources, but there is a need to consider the longer term demand on public services and how we can respond more effectively, at an earlier stage, thereby preventing longer term draws on resources that continue to reduce.

33. It is recognised that there are gaps in services for victims who do not meet the threshold for a high risk victim, assessed by a risk assessment. Where a victim does not meet the threshold, support is available, although access to MARAC or IDVA is not. This increases the risk of these victims moving into the high risk category in time. In addition services for minority communities or those where there are particular vulnerabilities need to be further developed to ensure those more vulnerable victims and their children access services.
34. Funding to continue services is a significant challenge. Central Bedfordshire MARAC and IDVA provision are partially funded through Home Office grants that end in March 2015. The continuing need for the Council, and other partners, to find efficiency savings are increasingly putting services for victims of domestic abuse and violence at risk and at this time funding to continue the perpetrator programme is still being sought, and funding to continue IDVA and MARAC from April 2015 has yet to be identified.
35. Children's Services continue to see a high number of repeat child protection cases due to domestic abuse. In the most recent quarter Domestic Violence was a factor in 64% of repeat Child Protection plans, but this has been as high as 73% in a quarter, whilst averaging 66% this year to date.
36. Health partners are a vital in developing effective support for victims of domestic abuse and violence. There are clearly identified links between domestic abuse and violence and substance misuse (drugs and alcohol), mental health and pregnancy. The transition of Public Health into the Council has supported improved joint working; however work with the Health and Wellbeing Board needs to be developed further particularly as the Clinical Commissioning Group commissions a range of services including mental health and substance misuse services.
37. New legislation, Domestic Violence Disclosure (DVD) and Domestic Violence Orders (DVO) is also being introduced and whilst positive measures to support victims and their families this will place further demand on partners such as the police to implement and deliver.
38. At a strategic level the links with criminal justice partners needs to be developed further. Police are already a key partner; however Crown Prosecution Service and Court Service, Probation and Prison Services also have a part to play in improving outcomes for victims and their families. Without the right support victims may choose not to progress a prosecution and return to face more abuse, placing themselves and family at further risk. In some cases, where Orders have been put in place, breaches have not been responded to by the appropriate agencies and the victim remains vulnerable and at risk.

Conclusions and Next Steps

39. The Committee is asked to consider making recommendations that would enhance the Council's offer. The Outcomes of this meeting will be written into a full report and made available to the Executive members for further consideration

Appendix:

Appendix – Recorded incidents of domestic abuse and violence