

Agenda Item No: 13
Report To: CABINET
Date of Meeting: 9th February 2017
Report Title: Domestic Abuse Annual Report
Report Author & Job Title: James Hann (Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager) and Sarah Rigby (Domestic Abuse Coordinator)
Portfolio Holder Cllr Brad Bradford
Portfolio Holder for: Highways, Wellbeing and Safety



Summary: This paper sets out for comment the progress the council and its partners have made on projects relating to domestic abuse over the past 12 months. It specifically addresses:

- The current position on the Kent and Medway Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service and the work of the council's Domestic Abuse Coordinator
- The partnership approach tackling domestic abuse and for applying to national organisations for additional funding
- The proposal to make permanent the post of Domestic Abuse Coordinator

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the work of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors and Domestic Abuse Coordinator**
- II. Endorse the work of partners in tackling domestic abuse**
- III. Support the partnership approach in working with domestic abuse charities and neighbouring local authorities to apply for additional resources to tackle domestic abuse**
- IV. To agree continued funding for domestic abuse work in the borough and the making permanent the post of Domestic Abuse Coordinator**

Policy Overview: Our work on domestic abuse is as an important part of the council's aspirations to build a platform that ensures support and protection is provided to those who are among the most vulnerable.

Financial Implications:	The council allocated up to £50,000 per year for three years in 2014 to support the work on tackling domestic abuse which includes funding for the post of Domestic Abuse Coordinator. The proposal to make the post of Domestic Abuse Coordinator permanent has been included within the Medium Term Financial Plan and therefore this report has no additional financial implications.
Legal Implications	None
Equalities Impact Assessment	Not relevant to this update report. Work in this area does however have a positive impact and services are universally available.
Other Material Implications:	Proposal to make the post of Domestic Abuse Coordinator permanent will necessitate a contractual change
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	None
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Report Title: Domestic Abuse Annual Report

Introduction and Background

1. This report highlights key achievements from the last year as well as our actions for tackling domestic abuse in the future. Data has been provided by a range of partners.
2. There have been a number of notable successes across the county and the borough over the last 12 months. There are still many challenges ahead with an increased number of domestic abuse reports to police, increased referrals to MARAC¹ and an increase in attendance at the One Stop Shop².
3. The last year has seen agencies dealing with an increasing workload and more often than not a reduction in resources. Professionals across the health, police, fire, voluntary, local authority and charitable sectors have to work in partnership more than ever.
4. The purpose of the report is to demonstrate what has been achieved over the last 12 months and what we want to achieve in the future. This relies on the continued work of partners within the borough; something Ashford can pride itself on. What has been achieved so far and what we hope to achieve would not be possible without those who are dedicated to dealing with domestic abuse. This is particularly the case when one considers the increasing work pressures that exist. A huge effort is being made to ensure those suffering domestic abuse are afforded protection and safety as well as working towards preventing domestic abuse.

Current Position

5. Ashford Borough Council has committed to providing £50,000 of funding towards the Kent Domestic Abuse Consortium (KDAC) for the provision of an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) for Ashford, as well as to fund a Domestic Abuse Coordinator post within the council. The coordinator post provides assistance to the Ashford Domestic Forum (ADAF), coordinates support groups available to victims and ensures statutory partners and related organisations are coordinating their work in tackling domestic abuse.
6. The co-commissioned Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service in Ashford is delivered locally through the Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service. The Ashford IDVA has continued to provide a service to high risk victims throughout 2016.

¹ A Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is a local, multi agency victim-focussed meeting where information is shared on the highest risk cases of domestic violence and abuse between different statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

² The One Stop Shop is a confidential service for people experiencing domestic violence

7. The role of the MARAC IDVA is to address the safety of those identified as experiencing high risk domestic abuse. Acting as a primary contact IDVAs work proactively with their clients from point of crisis to assess the level of risk, discuss a range of options and develop safety plans. IDVAs act as an advocate on the victim's behalf, exploring options and support. The service aims to encourage and enable the victim's voice to be heard by service providers and agencies, ensuring the advice and support offered safeguards the victim and their family.
8. To give an idea of the scale of work that they undertake each quarter there are around 50 to 60 service referrals to the IDVA. Of all MARAC cases 80% have been supported within Ashford. Those not supported would have either declined the service or received alternative assistance. The Ashford IDVA engaged with 91% of clients referred to them, and those reporting a reduction of risk were 94% after the IDVA's intervention.
9. In January 2015 an independent evaluation of the Kent and Medway IDVA Service was published. This included that for every £1 invested in the Kent & Medway IDVA service a saving of £25.18 is generated i.e. it saves money investing in domestic abuse.
10. Through Rising Sun other provisions have been available to Ashford residents. They offer a counselling service which is managed by a highly qualified and experienced psychotherapist who assesses all women who require the counselling service and matches them to a volunteer counsellor. Women are offered 12 sessions initially, which is free to all women who have experienced domestic abuse.
11. Kent Police have recorded over 20,000 incidents of domestic abuse across Kent every year since 2006. Between January 2015 and December 2016, the Borough of Ashford had 1,501 high risk cases.
12. Domestic abuse continues to be one of Kent Police's priorities. They are committed to protecting those at risk of domestic abuse and prevent further harm. Ashford currently has a full time police officer who deals with medium risk cases in the borough, as well as offering support to partners. Ashford also has a number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who have supported the work of partners and continue to use their skills and knowledge to help victims of domestic abuse and hold perpetrators to account.
13. From September 2017 the police are changing the way they support vulnerable people, creating a Vulnerability Investigation Team working from a hub that will be based in Folkestone. The safeguarding hub will focus on domestic abuse, vulnerable adults, adult serious sexual offences and vulnerable children. We will work with our police colleagues to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

Ashford One Stop Shop

14. Between July 2015 and June 2016 3,173 people were assisted at the domestic abuse One Stop Shops in Kent, an increase of 31.7% compared to the previous year.

15. Ashford has one of the busiest One Stop Shops (OSS) in the county. Kent have a network of One Stop Shops, unlike many any other area in the country. The Kent network is overseen by the county wide operational group and each district has a local sub group.
16. Domestic abuse is a key priority for the Ashford Community Safety Partnership. Advice, further information and thee action plan for 2016/17 can be found at: <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/domestic-violance>
17. The lead for this priority area is the ADAF, a local charity that oversees Ashford's One Stop Shop, as well as other key projects.
18. Ashford's OSS has a high level of staff attendance and good reputation for partnership working. Throughout 2016 we have seen this continue, with fewer pressures on our partners as a consequence of the management support being provided by the Domestic Abuse Coordinator post. At a time when resources are reduced and there are added pressures and caseloads, it is important victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their risk level, can access face to face support and advice. Agencies from across the county will often come to observe the running of the Ashford OSS.
19. This year has seen the council's Housing Options Team attend the OSS on a fortnightly basis. They provide one hour support sessions, ensuring those attending with urgent housing need can be dealt with quickly and efficiently. This is proving highly successful for clients at the OSS with positive feedback from both victims and professionals.
20. The table below illustrates the rise in visitors to the Ashford OSS year-on-year. The data relates to the period 1 October to 30 September each year.

No of visitors 2011/12	No of visitors 2012/2013	No of visitors 2013/14	No of visitors 2014/15	No of visitors 2015/16
169	239	239	316	386

21. During the period 2015/16, of those attendees whose ethnicity was recorded, 86% were white British and 14% from other ethnicities.
22. The number of male victims who attended the OSS accounted for 3.3% of the total attendance.
23. Ashford has a high proportion of visitors from within the borough (93%). Victims can access services outside of their local authority area if they fear being seen by the perpetrator, or due to concerns with disclosing information to local services.
24. There is also a positive amount of returning visitors, with over 30% of visitors attending an OSS on two or more occasions.
25. Support was not only provided by those who actually attended the OSS but indirectly 613 children were supported. While it is difficult to evaluate the

outcomes for individual people, 100% report that the visitor and support given was helpful (response rate 74%).

26. The recording of outcomes has been a challenge, as dealing with service users at the point of crisis and requesting them to provide feedback on the service is always sensitive and can sometime be extremely difficult. The data capture for outcomes is something which partners must work towards in the coming year. The success of the OSS is, however best reflected by some of the visitor's stories and feedback, an example of which is provided at Appendix A.
27. As more people access the OSS, there is a need to continue to meet this demand and provide services to keep victims and their families safe. At the OSS support includes, KCC's Early Help and Preventative Services staff, a health visitor (who specialises in domestic abuse), a caseworker from Porchlight, Kent Police, pro bono legal assistance from local legal practices and the Domestic Abuse Coordinator as regular support. Kent Fire and Rescue Service have dedicated a volunteer who will be able to offer support in the coming year.
28. Agency referrals are the main signpost to the OSS, with the majority of the total visitors reporting they heard about the service through an agency. This is a reflection of the partnership working within Ashford, and we hope to continue to build on this awareness with local services.
29. Due to the growth in demand for the OSS's service as evidenced by the high number of visitors, the council and the ADAF are aiming to open a rural drop-in service in 2017 for Tenterden and surrounding areas.

Multi-agency funding bids

30. Rising Sun, the ADAF and council are working in partnership to submit a funding application to the Big Lottery Fund for a three year project to provide a Community Development IDVA who would focus on engaging with representatives from agencies representing hard to reach communities. This will involve strengthening knowledge and understanding of the issues involved for these communities and gaining their trust to seeking support if experiencing abuse. Those communities we are trying to reach include those from rural areas and minority communities.
31. The council, in partnership with the ADAF and Rising Sun, recently submitted a grant funding bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government for £100,000. The council and its partners are aware that the provision of accommodation for victims of domestic abuse is costly and with decreasing funds to provision of women's refuges, continues to be a challenge to find appropriate placements. Whilst a bid for funding was unsuccessful in 2015, it is the vision of the council, the ADAF and Rising Sun that this work will continue to ensure those most vulnerable due to domestic abuse can be provided with suitable and cost effective accommodation.
32. The bid proposes to provide increased refuge spaces and other accommodation for women from hard to reach communities who are fleeing domestic abuse. The bid included letters of support from the Chief

Superintendent of Kent Police (Divisional Commander – East Division), the Chair of the ADAF and the Chief Executive of Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service.

Group work (Freedom Programme & Recovery Toolkit)

33. Ashford's main support programme is the Freedom Programme which over 12 week provides information and support to help victims of domestic abuse recognise the impact of domestic abuse on them and their children's lives, understand the behaviour they are/were exposed to and also to understand warning signs in possible future relationships.
34. This programme has been provided in Ashford for a number of years and is delivered by a range of partners. The enormous support provided by KCC's Early Help and Preventative Services (EHPS) is particularly noted. The majority of facilitators for this group are provided by the EHPS, as well as other partners such as the Kent Community Health (NHS) Foundation Trust, KCC (especially the education service) and the council. The rooms including crèche are provided free of charge via the Beaver Community Trust, a commissioned service within Ashford by KCC.
35. In 2015 the Recovery Toolkit was developed as a complimentary programme for victims of domestic abuse. It was designed to prove a follow up to the Freedom Programme and was introduced as a direct response to feedback from those who had attended the Freedom Programme.
36. The Recovery Toolkit is a psycho-educational resource which includes a cognitive behavioural therapy module. It can be offered to women, and also men, and provides a follow on to the Freedom Programme. The Recovery Toolkit was offered for the first time in early January 2016 and reports have been extremely positive. Over 90% of those who sign up to the programme attend, and this is a usually high attendance rate. It is hoped to continue offering this each academic term to run alongside the Freedom Programme.
37. Through the Local Children's Partnership Group (LCPG), the council and its partners have developed a preventative programme for young people. Through funding allocated to the LCPG from KCC's Early Help and Preventative Services a programme has been developed that engages with girls at John Wallis, Wye, Towers and Homewood schools. Homewood is also supporting a trial One Stop Shop approach within the school.
38. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner agreed to match fund the local commitment to the programme for boys and Norton Knatchball, Homewood, North, Towers, Kennington and Wye schools, as well as the Aspire programme have all engaged in the programme.

Training and Awareness

39. In 2015 a new offence of "controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship" was created under the Serious Crime Act 2015 section 76. The offence came into force in December 2015 and it closed a gap in the law around psychological and emotional abuse that stops short of physical abuse. The offence carries a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or

both. Changes in legislation plus turn round in staff have meant that training and awareness needs to continually be developed and offered to partners to ensure front line professionals are able to cope with changes to provide the best service possible for victims.

Other developments

40. In 2015 the ADAF was successful in receiving charitable status. This has enabled them to apply for more varied funding streams, to continue with the work its partner agencies deliver as well as providing a flight fund for local victims who are destitute and must leave in an emergency. The High Sheriff of Kent held a fund raising event over the summer to specifically raise awareness and money for the ADAF.
41. As previously mentioned, preventative work is a key element for the ADAF. Working with partner agencies to develop programme content and services that are appropriate for young people, helping them further understand healthy relationships and develop their understanding of domestic abuse is vital. This includes work on child sexual exploitation, which is also a priority for the Ashford Community Safety Partnership.
42. Another priority moving forward is to ensure adequate provision of perpetrator programmes. There is currently a national pilot to assess the importance of working directly with high risk perpetrators. Ashford, like other areas across Kent, does not currently offer any perpetrator programmes. This is due to a lack of funding. The council has arranged for the Domestic Abuse Coordinator to receive training on delivering perpetrator sessions. We will work with our partners in the county to develop a programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse, in the hope this will be another step in breaking the cycle of abuse.

Commissioning across Kent

43. Domestic abuse support services on a county basis have been funded through a mixture of commissioned services, grant funding and charitable funds. The landscape of service provision varies across the county with different levels of support available in different areas of Kent.
44. The three largest services currently commissioned by KCC are Women's Refuges, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) and Floating Support (including refuges). These contracts were due to come to an end in 2016. The IDVA service is additionally funded by partners, with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner holding the contract.
45. KCC are proposing to integrate these existing services into a single service, being delivered by service providers. They will then subcontract some elements in order to improve client journeys and provide clarity on where to go for support. The aim of the integration is to ensure consistency of support available wherever a client is living and the proposal includes the introduction of a central referral process to ensure those accessing the service can be referred appropriately at their first contact.
46. The borough council is included in a "Lot" with Canterbury City Council and Shepway District Council. At the time of writing, the tenders have been

submitted and are being evaluated. Officers from the borough council have been included in part of the evaluating process and an announcement is expected in early February 2017.

47. Officers will continue to work with the new service to ensure a seamless transition and continue the coordinated approach and joined up partnership working which has continued in Ashford for many years.

Implications and Risk Assessment

48. Local authorities play a vital and central role in tackling domestic abuse. As well as providing services and raising awareness, the council's role at the heart of local communities means that they are well placed to facilitate local partnerships, bringing all the agencies together to tackle this issue. As well as the direct and devastating damage to the victim or their families, there are significant costs to the local authority in terms of providing social service support, emergency housing costs, lost of economic output and costs to the police and health services.
49. The level of direct funding by the council since 2014 has been £50,000 per year. The budget falls within the Health, Parking & Community Safety Service's core budget and this level of funding appears in the Medium Term Financial Plan. It is proposed that this funding continues with the fixed term Domestic Abuse Coordinator post being made permanent.

Equalities Impact Assessment

50. Not relevant to this update report. Work in this area does however have a positive impact and services are universally available.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

51. In preparing this report the views of our major stakeholders were sought. The following paragraphs indicate what they feel about the support provided by the council as well as updating on their particular focus.

Chair of the Ashford Domestic Abuse Service:

52. *"The One Stop Shop for advice and help with matters concerning Domestic Abuse continues to be extremely busy and in the run-up to Christmas saw days where 20 victims attended per day. The pressure of this demand is challenging, especially now that our dedicated Domestic Abuse Health Visitor has been tasked by her NHS management to only attend on alternate weeks. Some further changes by the NHS are in the pipeline, and how this role will pan out after the spring is unclear. In addition we were unable to have the regular help of the ADAF Vice-Chair owing to family illness. A further concern is the high number of attendees with very young children.*
53. *ADAF is confident that the work of the One Stop Shop is not only meeting the targets set by the Community Safety Partnership, but is also identifying*

women and men who are at a higher risk of serious harm than they realise and then getting them the expert help they need. There is no doubt that lives have been saved as a result. In 2017 ADAF will be working with those interested in funding educational projects to produce a programme for secondary school children on recognising abuse in their own homes and also what is inappropriate behaviour in their own relationships. This is of crucial importance if we are to break the cycle of Domestic Abuse. We are also very grateful to Ashford Borough Council for their continued support for our work.”

Kent Police (Inspector Andrew Bidmead, Community Safety Unit:

54. *“I can confirm that the One Stop and DA Co-ordinator`s role are integral to ensuring that vulnerable victims and witnesses are encouraged to report incidents with continued support and safeguarding in place. These elements are vital to the service delivery within the district and are key to the future success of our safeguarding strategy. For the year ending December 2016, at force level, recorded DA crimes increased by 36% compared to the year ending 2015- up by 5151 offences on last year. This does not include DA secondary incidents.*

Chief Executive, Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service:

55. *“As the Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service providing a range of specialist domestic abuse support services to victims throughout the Ashford Borough Council, it is essential for us to work closely with partner agencies including the Ashford Domestic Abuse Coordinator. The strong working relationship we have with the coordinator enables those living within the Ashford borough and experience domestic abuse to have robust safety planning for themselves and their families including children and young people bespoke to their needs. Working in a multi-agency partnership is the most effective way to approach the domestic abuse at both an operation and strategic level. The coordinator within Ashford plays a key role in developing and sustaining partnership working with a range of agencies, enabling a much improved response to the complexity of working with adults, children and young people affected by this. As an organisation we value very much the work of the coordinator and very grateful for this service.”*

Other Options Considered

56. Clearly there is always more that can be done on this important agenda. Cuts have hit domestic abuse services hard and in some situations the quality of support given has suffered. There is a need to consider the wider impact this has on our society. Domestic abuse comes at a huge cost to the public purse, and this will not change until there is a change in society’s attitudes towards this crime. Prevention and rehabilitation is of fundamental importance as is ensuring that the services we provide are consistently provided.
57. Joint working is the key to a successful response to domestic abuse. It is the vision of the council that we continue to work towards securing funding for services which can save lives, as well as aid recovery, awareness raising and prevention. Working for and with our partners is crucial in terms of providing

support to each other, sharing knowledge and best practice, coordinating awareness raising, undertaking training, and preventative measures.

58. As stated above the funding for the domestic abuse coordinator currently ends in January 2018. If the funding for this role is not continued then the council could try to provide the services delivered by this role by incorporating it into other council staff roles. They could end its commitment to partnership work with partners on domestic abuse. Without funding the council would not be in a position to continue its partnership work to support high risk victims through the IDVA services.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

59. The council has shown a strong lead in domestic abuse in the last two years. Our partnership approach, combined with dedicated specialist staff and support for the IDVA service, has been recognised by our partners and is greatly valued.
60. Domestic abuse is not going away. The local picture of domestic abuse is reflected nationally. Reporting of domestic abuse continues to rise with police forces and service providers all reporting increasing referrals. The latest county data indicates that reports of domestic abuse crimes increased by 36% last year, with an additional 5,151 offences being recorded.
61. Councils have a key role, alongside other agencies, in tackling domestic abuse by safeguarding survivors, offering services to reduce the impact of the abuse and holding perpetrators to account. It's easiest to understand this role by dividing it into three areas: councils input into local partnerships; their corporate response, and direct service provision. All this is complimentary to the work undertaken by the voluntary sector, criminal justice professionals and other public service providers.
62. The impact of domestic abuse is felt beyond the victim and perhaps most poignantly on the children that are part of the family unit. By helping the victims of domestic abuse the council and its partners are supporting the families of those victims and providing an opportunity for a brighter future.

Next Steps in Process

63. Officers will continue to work in partnership with the ADAF, Rising Sun and our other partners in tackling domestic abuse. We will work on the combined bid for a Community Development IDVA to develop the services to engage with hard to reach communities. We will continue our commitment to the One Stop Shop and ensuring this and the programmes to help victims are coordinated and successfully delivered.
64. If the recommendation of funding is agreed the current post holder of the Domestic Abuse Coordinator will be offered a permanent position.

Conclusion

65. With the appointment of a full time Domestic Abuse Coordinator, the council has been able to direct activity to support victims of domestic abuse, both through the OSS and through support programmes. We have been able to offer training sessions to partner agencies and local services to ensure continued development of those engaging with victims of domestic abuse. The scope of domestic abuse is constantly changing and it is important professionals stay up to date with new legislation and policy.
66. Domestic Abuse continues to be one of the priorities for the Ashford Community Safety Partnership, with its main aim being to raise awareness through education, in association with partners.
67. The work being undertaken across the borough to support the domestic abuse agenda has been extremely valuable. Services are dealing with more victims than ever before, feedback from other agencies and organisations has been positive and many women and their children have been supported. The council continues to have a very serious interest and part to play in helping families in crisis. In continuing to fund this area of work we are able to help ensure that services are coordinated and that the borough has the necessary dedicated professions to keep helping those at real risk.

Portfolio Holder's Views

68. In Ashford we are fortunate to have many excellent services committed to preventing domestic abuse. Tremendous work is undertaken by a range of agencies, some being specifically mentioned in this report. I take this opportunity to thank those who are involved in this important work. It is important for the council to continue to play its part, something that is achieved by making the crucial post of Domestic Abuse Coordinator permanent and continuing to championing their work. By doing so we can ensure that victims are supported and enable to build a better future for themselves and their families. We need to continue working to prevent domestic abuse and, where it is happening, enable people to access support that is right for them. We have a role, be it as individuals or organisation to tackle this important issue that really can make the difference between life and death.

Contact and Email

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Appendix A

Letter from Recovery toll kit client:

For me Recovery Toolkit is having a great effect on my psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing. As I read through my folder each week and register the distance I have travelled alone - amazing!

The thought diary is a wonderful tool, ah "aha" moment for me, I now nip negative thoughts in the bud, I think to myself-"don't go there" and I smile. Thank you so much for all the time and effort you put into both the preparation and method of delivery. You are enabling me to change from feeling worthless (a wimp) to being a winner. I am also learning much from our group.

This feedback was taken from Kent Community Health Team NHS magazine, which featured Ashford's lead DA Health Visitor and the invaluable work she continues to do for victims in Ashford.