

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 3rd May 2016
Report of: Director of Legal Services
Subject/Title: Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee –
Domestic Violence Task and Finish Group Final Report
Portfolio Holder: Councillors P Bates and J Clowes

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the Domestic Violence Task and Finish Group's (the Task Group) Report on its findings, conclusions and recommendations following its review. (Cabinet is asked to note that those recommendations marked with an asterisk* have already been implemented.)

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet receive the Task Group's Report (attached).
- 2.2 That Cabinet note the Task Group's recommendations below, which are contained in the attached report:
1. In order to facilitate longer term planning and retain skilled and experienced staff IDVAs Council funding should be mainstreamed rather than being 12 monthly.*
 2. The deficit in funding for the service (£50K) should be met from the MTFs on a recurrent basis to secure the service at its current level and the Council seeks to continue to influence partners to review their funding arrangements at local or sub regional level.*
 3. Domestic violence should be a priority for the Council and feature in the soon to be refreshed Community Strategy/Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
 4. Due to funding only being secured for the next three years, the low risk domestic violence service be evaluated and consideration be given as to how the service will be funded from 2018.
 5. The ambitions relating to the scale of interventions for perpetrators should be funded long term as part of the work on early intervention and prevention. A protocol between the various agencies should be developed to ensure an integrated approach was taken when dealing with perpetrators.

6. That the administration of MARAC be transferred to the Police, which would reduce the cost of the overall service by £20k and strengthen a sub regional approach to high risk work.*
7. That the possibility of sharing resources, such as the Polish IDVA, with other authorities be investigated.
8. That the information sharing policy be reviewed to ensure all agencies are fully informed of domestic violence cases and where necessary awareness raised, to ensure that victims receive as much help as possible and are treated with respect and dignity.
9. That MPs and the Police and Crime Commissioner be lobbied to provide funding for domestic violence, as it funds mental health and substance abuse.
10. That HMCTS be requested to improve the quality of the technology for providing remote evidence giving to such a standard that would allow the establishment of a single specialist court service.
11. In the event of IDVAs being commissioned sub regionally, every effort should be made ensure that this is not at the detriment of local service delivery.
12. That subject to Operation Encompass and Tandem Project producing the intended outcomes, the availability of resources be considered to sustain the projects.

2.3 That the Portfolio Holders undertake to come back to the next meeting of Cabinet with a formal response to each recommendation and that response be submitted to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 Domestic abuse is a serious cross cutting issue that harms children, adults, families and communities across Cheshire East. It affects all communities irrespective of demographics, environment or situation. It is often associated with mental ill health and substance abuse, all of which can have life long negative impacts on our population at great financial, economic and social cost.
- 3.2 It is likely that domestic abuse is as underreported in Cheshire East as in other parts of the country. The reasons for this range from fear, shame and barriers to accessing service through a feeling of responsibility to hold the relationship and/or family together.
- 3.4 The Council is committed to an ambitious partnership strategy to prevent harm and provide safety and recovery for those affected. This includes commissioning out provision for refuge, outreach, children's support and perpetrator work (as agreed at Cabinet in July 2015) and providing a dedicated high risk team in house - the Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit. The high risk service provides direct support and intervention for victims and their children who have experienced Domestic abuse.

3.5 Our Partners have now given their definitive position, which is essentially an agreement to sustain current contributions. Whilst this is to be welcomed, it does not meet the funding gap in providing the current service which is assessed to meet needs effectively and efficiently.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications

The policy implications are not known at this stage

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 The financial implications are not known at this stage

8.0 Legal implications

8.1 The legal implications are not known at this stage.

9.0 Risk Management

Key risks are managed through the Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, which is accountable to the Safer Cheshire East Partnership.

10.0 Background

10.1 The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up the task and finish group at its meeting on 16 June 2015. The purpose was to understand how domestic violence is dealt with, investigate the under reporting of domestic violence and understand the reasons not to have a single specialist court in Cheshire East. To do this the task group agreed the following terms of reference for the review:

- To gain an understanding of why it was decided not to have a single specialist domestic violence court in Cheshire and how the court process will be improved without this in place.
- To gain an understanding of the sexual violence/abuse police incident reporting process.
- To investigate why domestic abuse reports from Cheshire East residents to the Police are the lowest in Cheshire in a context of extremely low levels of police reporting in Cheshire compared to similar forces nationally
- To review progress on sustaining funding for high risk domestic violence services (Council based)
- To review victims' journey through the system.

10.2 The attached report documents the Task Group's findings, conclusions and recommendations to Cabinet.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Katie Small
Designation: Scrutiny Officer
Tel No: 01270 686465
Email: katie.small@cheshireeast.gov.uk