

**Norwich City Council**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Item No 6**

**REPORT for meeting to be held on 22 November 2018**

**Council and partner responses to domestic abuse**

**Summary:**

Domestic abuse was identified as a key priority for focused work by the Norfolk County community safety partnership – chaired by the council's chief executive, Laura McGillivray - in 2015. It is a safeguarding issue that all public sector partners have a responsibility to tackle and for which our voluntary sector partners are an integral part of the solution.

With reporting of domestic abuse increasing, the issue therefore remains a focus for all local partners; although partners believe that this is not evidence that prevalence is rising.

Since 2015, many new and innovative domestic abuse responses have been put in place. This report will provide an overview of how people experiencing domestic abuse in Norwich can be supported.

**Conclusions:**

The report provides members with key information on Domestic abuse and the work that council officers are progressing with partners to help tackle the issue in Norwich.

**Recommendation:**

That the scrutiny committee considers the information presented at this meeting and considers:

- How members might contribute to tackling domestic abuse locally
- Comment on the current services available for victims of domestic abuse
- Suggestions or recommendations scrutiny committee may wish to make to Cabinet to support partnership activity in place, being developed or may be required.

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## Report

### Context

1. Domestic abuse continues to prevail in Norfolk with over 17,000 reports made to Norfolk Constabulary in 2017-18. More than 25% of these reports were in relation to Norwich residents.
2. Norfolk averages two domestic homicides each year. The UK averages two domestic homicides a week; of which less than two victims per year are male. In addition, a further three women take their own lives each week in the UK, rather than continue to live in abusive relationships, and a further nine women each week attempt to take their own lives for the same reason.
3. People experiencing domestic abuse often struggle with issues of mental ill health and / or substance misuse as a result of that abuse.
4. In 2015, public and voluntary sector partners from the Norfolk county community safety partnership (NCCSP) undertook a review of domestic abuse to better understand the gaps in provision for people experiencing domestic abuse and consider what could be developed to improve outcomes for victims and their families.

The following areas of work to take forward were identified:

- Increased campaigning to raise awareness of what domestic abuse is (including coercion and control), how and where to report domestic abuse and reduce stigma
  - Commissioning with partners to address shared outcomes
  - Strengthen early intervention work; including reviewing referral processes
  - Establish a countywide network of trained public and voluntary sector domestic abuse champions
  - Review training requirement of public sector workforce
5. The recommendations above were delegated by NCCSP to the Domestic abuse and sexual violence board (DASVB) to take forward, which has been undertaken to varying degrees over the last three years.
  6. Whilst in Norfolk we have seen domestic abuse reporting rise year on year for the last four years, agencies do not necessarily see this as an increasing problem, more as increased success in raising awareness of what domestic abuse is and how to report it through increased and targeted local campaigning.
  7. The Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act 2015 established a requirement for a Domestic Homicide review (DHR) in the event of death from domestic abuse. This affords all partners the opportunity to review how we might change our practices and processes to better protect domestic abuse victims from harm. Some of the changes in the last few years following DHRs in Norfolk include:

- Police checks for history of domestic abuse when applications for firearms made
- Training staff at all Norfolk GP surgeries on indicators and impact of domestic abuse and how to support victims
- Various changes in the practice of public sector partners to improve information sharing and awareness of current risk levels

### **Countywide provision**

8. Despite diminishing resource, domestic abuse remains a priority for CCSP and partners in day to day response.
9. Collectively, at a number of strategic boards, partners identify funding opportunities that might benefit the local area and design new projects and programmes as appropriate. Some of these will be explained in more detail by our guests from Leeway and Spurgeons children's charity. Other recent responses developed and successful in obtaining funding include:
  - The Anchor project; (Leeway, district and county council partners) enabling spot purchasing of accommodation and provision of outreach support at the accommodation for domestic abuse victims that can't access refuge services due to lack of space or location challenges with space available.
  - DA Champions Network (Norfolk County Council); Two year funding from the Home Office to create networks of DA Champions in Health and Education environments having been previously rolled out in the wider public and voluntary sector
  - Healthy relationships (Office of police and crime commissioner Norfolk, Norfolk constabulary and Children's services led) Working in schools and other venues to provide healthy relationship education and targeting attitudes of boys and young men
10. The Police last year launched Operation Encompass. This is where a police response is provided to a domestic abuse report and there are children present, police will now inform the safeguarding officer at that child / children's school by the next morning. This enables school staff to better support those children that may have experienced trauma and emotional harm. It does require schools to sign up to Operation Encompass, and while not all Norfolk schools have yet done so, the majority of Norwich schools have. The police continue to approach those that have not.

### **Norwich City Council response**

11. Norwich City Council was first awarded White Ribbon status by [White Ribbon Campaign UK](#) in 2015 for all of the proactive and responsive work it does to support victims of domestic abuse and was recently re-endorsed.
12. As a housing provider, Norwich City Council recently pledged to 'Take a Stand against domestic abuse' as part of the Chartered Institute of Housing's national campaign. This aligns with the work we do as part

of the council's White Ribbon status and marks us as meeting a standard in relation to a being both a housing provider and an employer.

13. Norwich City Council is represented on Norfolk's CCSP and DASVB and actively contributes to strategy and service development, to help ensure that the needs of Norwich residents are incorporated.
14. Norwich City Council is one of the six local funders, partnered with SafeLives, which collectively commissioned Spurgeons children's charity to deliver the new Norwich Connect programme. Norwich City Council is one of just two local funders on the national Beacon Project Board with SafeLives and Women's Aid.
15. Norwich City Council has 16 officers in a Domestic abuse champion role across all front lines services and one council member (Cllr Fullman) in the role for members.
16. The council has a policy on domestic abuse to provide guidance to team leaders and managers on how to support officers experiencing domestic abuse.
17. The council last year introduced the role of domestic abuse advisor into its Housing Options team as part of the review of the council's neighbourhood services, which assesses the domestic abuse risk of people presenting to the council as either a current victim or fleeing domestic abuse and signposts to any support services available. The domestic abuse advisor also chairs one meeting a week of the daily multi agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). During the first year of this role operating from the council:
  - Opened 161 cases
  - 51% were assessed as high risk and supported through MARAC and accessed Leeway Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA)
  - 49% were assessed as standard or medium risk and had no access to IDVA support.
18. Norwich City Council continues to take domestic abuse seriously and recognises the impact on individuals and families through many of the services it provides for residents. The council has a long history of doing so and in 1974 supported Leeway to establish its first refuge.
19. The council's learning and development team ensures that all council officers receive safeguarding training; incorporating domestic abuse. Working with the council's safeguarding group they ensure that all front line officers receive an advanced level of training in domestic abuse to enable them to identify the signs of domestic abuse and refer victims quickly - and that the training is refreshed periodically. These teams also ensure that learning from serious case reviews where domestic abuse is a factor and from domestic homicide reviews is disseminated to front line officers via reports and face to face workshops, to improve practice.

20. Norwich City Council also provides a safeguarding presentation to council members each year, which supplies information and awareness on domestic abuse issues and services.