

The Highland Council

Community Safety Public Engagement and Equalities Committee – 5 December 2013

Agenda Item	13
Report No	CPE 55/13

Violence Against Women

Report by Director of Health & Social Care

Summary

This report details progress in the 3 key priorities in the Violence Against Women Action plan, responding to sexual violence, working with perpetrators, and the roll out of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences across Highland. It also outlines the strategic approach for 2013-16.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Highland Council was first involved in the development of a multi-agency strategy to tackle domestic abuse in 2003. Since then, public awareness of the issues has increased enormously, as has recognition of the connections of domestic abuse with a variety of other issues, such as sexual violence, commercial sexual exploitation (e.g. prostitution and pornography) and harmful traditional practices, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. As a result, The Highland Council, alongside our partners, developed a strategy to tackle Violence Against Women in Highland.
- 1.2 During the lifetime of this Strategy a number of significant developments in tackling the issues have been made. These include:
- Roll out and establishment of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for those at higher risk of serious and/or repeat domestic abuse
 - Delivery of a domestic abuse perpetrator programme for men through Criminal Justice Social Work services, including support for partners and ex-partners provided through Women's Aid
 - Development of Multi-Agency guidance for staff to tackle Violence Against Women
 - Joint NHS and Council Policy on supporting Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse
 - Employee Policies for staff to ensure that The Highland Council can effectively support its employees affected by Violence Against Women
 - Roll out of training for staff on a variety of issues relating to Violence Against Women, including the causes and consequences, asking questions about abuse and the MARAC process.

2. Levels of Violence Against Women in Society

- 2.1 In Highland, whilst we have a low crime rate per head of population overall, we do not have a low crime rate for forms of Violence Against Women – it is a just below average rate for both domestic abuse and sexual offences (against both adults and children).
- 2.2 In 2012/13 a total of 2,102 domestic incidents were recorded in Highland. This was an increase of 12% over the previous period. The reporting of rapes has also increased over recent years with 57 rapes reported in 2012. The 2013 figure already exceeds this. Reporting rates are increasing, but all forms of abuse are significantly under reported. Research estimates that between 1 in 2 and 1 in 5 women will experience at least one form of Violence Against Women in her lifetime.
- 2.3 Some women will experience multiple forms, others may be subjected to sustained episodes of abuse, and some may be affected by an individual incident. All women are unique and will find different ways of coping with their experiences. Women may come to the attention of services directly because of what has happened to them, e.g. as a young person experiencing sexual abuse, as a woman looking for support for domestic abuse or as someone seeking a service for sexual violence. Many will come into contact with services for other issues, e.g. substance misuse, involvement with child or adult protection system, or mental health concerns.
- 2.4 It is impossible to quantify the numbers of women who will need a service specifically for the abuse they have experienced as many will seek informal support from their family and friends.
- 2.5 It is likely, however, that as we develop and introduce new approaches to identifying and tackling Violence Against Women, more people will come forward to services for support. With developments in the criminal justice system, we anticipate an increase in conviction rates for domestic abuse and crimes of sexual violence. We expect this to increase confidence amongst others and encourage more people to report these crimes to the police. The roll out of MARAC and perpetrator programmes for domestic abuse is also likely to identify women not involved with support services. Part of the process of both these initiatives is to refer women for support – this is likely to result in an increase in service demand.

3. Local Authority Obligations to Tackle Violence Against Women

- 3.1 Violence Against Women costs society a great deal in both financial and social terms. Levels of acceptance of Violence Against Women and incidents of Violence Against Women are a key indicator of our progress towards gender equality. The Scottish Government and COSLA jointly issued, “Safer Lives Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland” in 2009. This document clearly highlighted the connections between Violence Against Women and gender inequality – as both a cause and a consequence – and outlined the shared approach adopted by both bodies in

how to address Violence Against Women. This document is due to be renewed during 2014. It is anticipated that a wider range of partners will be involved in the new Strategy and it will focus on primary prevention and early intervention.

- 3.2 In addition to “Safer Lives Changed Lives”, the Equalities Act 2010 placed a number of duties on The Highland Council, as well as other partners, including addressing gender inequality. The delivery of the Violence Against Women Work Plan for 2013-16 supports this work.
- 3.3 Many services in The Highland Council work with the consequences of Violence Against Women. The crossovers between Violence Against Women, Child Protection, Homelessness, Substance Misuse, and Health and Social Care services more widely, are considerable. Tackling Violence Against Women will also contribute to reducing pressure on these services.

4. Current Developments

4.1 Criminal Justice Social Work- Programme for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

In September 2011 Criminal Justice Social Work Services (CJS), in partnership with Women’s Aid, started to deliver a programme for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse. The programme is available across Highland to men who have been assessed as suitable and who are subject to statutory community-based sentences (i.e. a Community Payback Order) or a prison licence (e.g. parole). The programme was developed by Respect, who develop, deliver and support effective services for domestic abuse, in partnership with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in England & Wales. It is delivered by CJS Social Workers who have received specific training and comprises at least eighteen one-to-one sessions to enable people who have used domestic violence and abuse in relationships to engage in changing this behaviour. The emphasis is on safety and making a more constructive contribution to their relationships, family and community.

Womens Aid offers a support service to the partners of the male perpetrators. CJS and Women’s Aid work closely together to ensure the safety of women is of paramount importance and this will include, for example, sharing information where there are concerns.

CJS are in the process of evaluating the programme to date and hope to complete this by January 2014.

4.2 Housing - Housing staff from the Housing & Property Service and local Housing Associations attend the MARAC meetings and provide updates, and appropriate advice and guidance in relation to each case.

Since the introduction of MARAC a housing specific Protocol has been developed. The Protocol clarifies that housing providers will cooperate with the MARAC process within the boundaries of Legislation and Local Policy and identifies the solutions that can be considered in relation to the varying housing circumstances that people can be faced with. This Protocol has assisted in

allowing all agencies to understand the housing options that can and cannot be considered for individual cases.

Housing providers in Highland continue to work with Police Scotland in implementing the Safe at Home Protocol which sets out an agreed process that will provide additional security measure for victims of domestic abuse. This scheme is aimed at protecting the victim from further incidents and preventing them from becoming homeless.

In addition to accessing the Safe at Home scheme, the Highland Council's Homeless Prevention approach has assisted victims in other ways of addressing their housing concerns, i.e. funding rent arrears to allow a mutual exchange, private rent deposit guarantee scheme and other solutions that can be mutually agreed with the victim.

Unfortunately in some cases it is not reasonable to continue to reside in the home and the victim is required to be accommodated through a homelessness approach; in these cases, every attempt is made to take account of their wishes along with the views of agencies represented on the MARAC. This can include liaising with other Local Authority areas to facilitate a move outwith the Highlands.

- 4.3 Education -Education services are in the process of identifying and rolling out prevention education programmes on Violence Against Women to both primary and secondary pupils. Key messages are being mapped to Curriculum for Excellence and to other educational programmes, such as Sexual Health & Relationships Education.

Sessions for staff are planned to begin in the next school year (2014-15) in both the CPD calendar and via Associated School Group meetings in order to prepare staff to deliver sessions on Violence Against Women issues. The Highland Violence Against Women Delivery Group is due to agree a position statement for Education on their role in tackling Violence Against Women in the middle of December 2013. It is anticipated that this will be a joint position statement between the partnership and key staff in Education and Children's Services.

- 4.4 Licensing- The key concern for the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership and the Licensing Board in relation to tackling Violence Against Women is the additional activity of 'adult entertainment' that can be added on to a liquor license. The Board has committed to tackling Violence Against Women within its recently published Equalities Strategy. A number of issues have arisen nationally and have impacted on local decision making in terms of applications for licences, which have included 'adult entertainment' being granted with little challenge due to a legal precedent. Together, both the Partnership and the Licensing Board continue to urge the Scottish Government to push forward with their plans for separate licences for, what they are terming, "Sexual Entertainment Venues".

- 4.5 MARAC - In October 2012, a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Co-ordinator was recruited. This member of staff is employed by The Highland Council and based at Police headquarters in Inverness. The MARAC Co-ordinator administers a multi-agency process designed to protect higher risk victims of domestic abuse. Since July 2013, MARACs have been implemented across Highland – one in the North, one for the Mid and one in the South.

A key strength of the approach adopted in Highland is that we are using the CAADA model – a model that has been positively evaluated in other parts of the UK that provides significantly more opportunity to address risk and prevent further harm than other models, particularly as it accepts referrals from any agency and not just from the police. The model also provides support for victims and this is provided locally by Women's Aid groups (for women) and Victim Support (for men)

A key driver in implementing the MARAC process across Highland is the delivery of awareness raising and training to staff at a practitioner, managerial and strategic level. A comprehensive training programme has been developed to support the roll out of MARAC and to ensure that all agencies can identify, risk assess and refer high risk domestic abuse cases to the MARAC.

To date in 2013 the MARAC has discussed 391 cases of high risk domestic abuse in Highland and generated in excess of 600 multi-agency actions to reduce the risk of serious harm to the highest risk victims of domestic abuse.

5. Strategic Approach – 2013-16

- 5.1 The Highland Violence Against Women Logic Model, shown in Appendix 1, outlines how the Highland Violence Against Women Work Plan for 2013-16 will contribute to the Local and National Outcomes. Our key deliverables for the life time of this work plan are:

- Improve safety for those affected by VAW
- Improve services for those affected by VAW
- Take steps to prevent future VAW
- Deal effectively with perpetrators of VAW

The deliverables have been agreed by the Violence Against Women Strategy Group and Safer Highland, but the Group wishes to ensure that the Work Plan remains flexible and responsive to emerging issues over its lifetime. Therefore, whilst a number of priorities have been agreed, these may be adjusted and added to over time. Below are the current (November 2013) priorities for each deliverable.

5.2 Deliverable 1- Improve safety for those affected by VAW

Priorities:

- Continue to implement MARAC:
- Agencies work together to reduce escalation of domestic abuse
- Assess impact of changes to civil justice processes and take steps to address any reductions in service
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with

- contact between a child and a parent with a history of domestic abuse and improve local practice
- Respond to “Adult Entertainment” requests in alcohol licences

5.3 **Deliverable 2 - Improve services for those affected by VAW**

Priorities

- Develop a co-ordinated ‘pathway’ of interconnected services for those affected by rape and sexual assault
- Assess impact of changes to criminal justice processes and take steps to address any reductions in service
- Improve approaches to young women experiencing Violence Against Women (VAW)
- Support practitioners to respond effectively to VAW
- Involve practitioners and survivors in VAW Work plan to inform and drive service improvement
- Support women involved in prostitution
- Equip staff to respond to Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) issues
- Development of ‘champions’ in statutory & voluntary organisations who have additional knowledge & understanding of CSE issues and responsibilities to respond
- Equip staff to respond to forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and ‘honour violence’ issues
- Development of ‘champions’ in statutory & voluntary organisations who have additional knowledge & understanding of forced marriage, FGM and ‘honour’ violence and responsibilities to respond
- Develop communications plan for VAW

5.4 **Deliverable 3 - Take steps to prevent future VAW**

Priorities:

- Delivery of prevention education in primary & secondary schools
- Delivery of prevention education in early years settings
- ‘Bystander’ Programmes delivered in schools and colleges
- Develop & implement training programme for staff to address sexualisation
- Involve men in challenging VAW
- Develop a ‘challenging demand’ plan for CSE
- Increase understanding of ‘Adult Entertainment’ as a form of VAW

5.5 **Deliverable 4 - Deal effectively with perpetrators of VAW**

Priorities:

- Establish MATACs (Multi-Agency Tasking & Co-ordinating – focusing on perpetrators of domestic abuse)
- Continue to establish perpetrator programme
- Explore potential for voluntary perpetrator programmes

6. **Future Plans**

6.1 The immediate plans of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership include:

- Developing a new, stand alone, rape and sexual violence service using

finance secured from the Scottish Government and from joint NHS/Highland Council funding

- Continued training to ensure that staff are aware of the issues and able to fulfil their responsibilities in terms of asking questions about abuse and implementing the MARAC process
- Roll out of sexual violence prevention materials directly with young people in a non-educational setting, which will include tackling issues of gender, consent, the law, sexualisation and the media.

7. Implications arising from the report

7.1 Resource Implications

There are no resource implications

7.2 Legal Implications

The development of MARAC supports the legal process in prosecuting crimes of Violence Against Women

7.3 Equality Implications

Actions to prevent Violence Against Women focus on assisting to reduce the harm suffered by women and children and changing the behaviour and managing the risk of perpetrators. Services are person centred and can meet the needs of BME, older and younger women and women with disabilities

7.4 Climate Change Implications

There are no climate change implications

7.5 Risk Implications

There are no risk implications

Recommendation

Members are asked to reaffirm their commitment to tackling Violence Against Women in Highland and support the delivery of the 2013-16 Highland Violence Against Women Work Plan

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Appendix 1 - VAW Outcomes Triangle 2013



