

## The Highland Council

### Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014

Agenda Item	10i
Report No	CPE 41/14

## Violence Against Women

### Report by Director of Care and Learning

#### Summary

This report details actions achieved over the last year in the Violence Against Women (VAW) work plan and outlines 5 areas of work being taken forward in the next year.

## 1. Background

1.1 The Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) developed a three year work plan in 2013, which includes the following intermediate outcomes:

- Women affected by VAW receive services which meet their needs
- Children & Young People affected by VAW receive services which meet their needs
- Perpetrators are tackled about their behaviour
- Reduced acceptance of VAW
- Healthier gender relationships

1.2 In order to work towards meeting these outcomes, a number of key deliverables for 2013-16 have been set by the VAWP. These 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

## 2. Levels of Violence Against Women in Highland

2.1 In 2013/14, a total of 2139 domestic abuse incidents were recorded in Highland. 2,155 were recorded in 2012/13. The latest Police Scotland figures for 2013/14 indicate that there were 108 rapes reported in Highland.

## 3. National Context

3.1 The Scottish Government and COSLA in association with a wide range of partners jointly issued "Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls" in June 2014. The document outlines four priorities:

- Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls
- Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically
- Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women and girls

- Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response

3.2 Equally Safe acknowledges the progress made in recent decades in placing violence against women on the agenda of government and mainstream services. The strategy states however more needs to be done, particularly in relation to prevention and early intervention, in order to address the systemic gender inequality that lies at the root of violence against women and girls.

#### **4. Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH)**

4.1. An interim service for sexual abuse survivors has been in place in Highland since February 2014. It is expected to run until December 2014 and the new voluntary sector Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH) will be operational in early 2015. Additional funding was secured from the Scottish Government to provide the interim service and also to cover start-up costs of the new service.

4.2 In conjunction with establishing a stand alone voluntary sector service, the VAWP is also examining the quality of service provision offered through the statutory services which have a remit to respond to sexual violence. Any improvements and/or developments that are required to improve responses to survivors are being identified and added to an improvement plan. Services currently involved in this process include psychology, sexual health, forensics, police, and substance misuse services.

#### **5. Perpetrator Behaviour**

5.1 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.

5.2 Women's 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.

5.3 CJS are about to evaluate the programme in order to assess progress to date and to identify improvements. It is hoped to complete this in Spring 2015.

#### **6. Housing**

6.1 Housing staff from Community Services and local Housing Associations attend the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) meetings and provide updates, and appropriate advice and guidance in relation to each case.

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 In addition to accessing the Safe at Home scheme, the Highland Council's Homeless Prevention approach has assisted victims to address their housing concerns in other ways, 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.
- 6.5 Unfortunately in some cases it is not reasonable for the victim to continue to reside in the home and they have 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.

## **7. Education**

- 7.1 Education services are in the process of rolling out prevention education programmes on Violence Against Women to both primary and secondary pupils. Key messages have been mapped to Curriculum for Excellence.
- 7.2 Twilight sessions for staff will begin this term (2014-15) in the CPD calendar to prepare staff to deliver sessions on Violence Against Women issues.

## **8. MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)**

- 8.1 Over the course of 2013, MARAC rolled out to cover the whole of the Highland area. This is a process designed to identify high risk victims of domestic abuse and to put plans in place to manage the risks they face and to increase safety. The MARAC process is supported locally by a programme of multi-agency training.
- 8.2 To date in 2014 the MARAC has discussed 358 cases of high risk domestic abuse in Highland and generated in excess of 1487 multi-agency actions to reduce the risk of serious harm to the highest risk victims of domestic abuse.
- 8.3 The Violence Against Women Partnership are considering how to support staff dealing with cases which are 'just below' the identified thresholds for formal processes such as MARAC and Adult Support and Protection. This is likely to involve the development of information and potentially the introduction of new training.
- 8.4 It is hoped that this will improve staff confidence in responding to public protection issues, and will also ensure that those who do not quite meet threshold levels are

still provided with services and resources to help keep them safe and reduce the risks that they face.

## 9. Training

9.1 During 2014 a number of training courses were offered, which correspond to the deliverables of the 2013-16 VAW workplan:

- Understanding gender inequality and violence against women
- MARAC training
- Asking the questions about violence against women
- Child and adult survivors of sexual abuse
- Working with perpetrators of domestic abuse
- Sexualisation and commercial sexual exploitation
- Harmful traditional practices with a focus on forced marriage and female genital mutilation

9.2 More information about the 2015 VAW training programme is available on the Council website.

## 10. Future Plans

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

- Two new training programmes: Children and Adult Experiences of Domestic Abuse and White Ribbon Speaker training (Men Working to End Violence Against Women).
- Developing an exit strategy for women involved in prostitution.
- Supporting the progression of Cedar (Working with children, young people and their mothers recovering from domestic abuse)
- Developing a 'Safe Contact' approach in Highland (for children who have lived with domestic abuse)
- Multi-agency work is ongoing to evaluate outcomes from MARAC.

## 11. Implications

11.1 **Resources:** The development of MARACs has resulted in higher workloads for Women's Aid groups in Highland. They have been supported with additional funding to manage this.

11.2 **Legal:** The Respect Training has enabled criminal justice social workers to deliver Domestic Violence Prevention Programmes to men placed on statutory orders. The development of MARAC supports the legal process in prosecuting crimes of Violence Against Women.

11.3 **Equality:** 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. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the strategy and current work plan development. Training was undertaken on the needs of women with learning disabilities. Services are person centred and can meet the needs of BME, older and younger women.

11.4 There are no **Risk, Climate Change/Carbon Clever, Rural** or **Gaelic** implications.

**12. Recommendation**

12.1 Members are asked to note the actions achieved in the work plan and the 5 areas of work for the next year.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

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