

Report to:

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer:

Jeanette Richards, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Date of Meeting:

9 December 2021

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT – DOMESTIC ABUSE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To receive an update in relation to the Council's approach to tackling domestic abuse.

2.0 Recommendation:

2.1 For the Scrutiny Committee to have oversight in order to provide scrutiny, challenge and support.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation:

3.1 To ensure robust scrutiny of the service.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 No other alternative options to be considered.

5.0 Council Priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is:

- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

6.0 Background information

6.1 Domestic abuse is defined as: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality."

6.2 Data from the NSPCC estimates that:

- Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse.
- Domestic abuse is a factor in over half of serious case reviews.
- A third of children witnessing domestic violence also experienced another form of abuse.
- 1 in 5 teenagers have been physically abused by their boyfriends or girlfriends.
- 130,000 children live in households with high-risk domestic abuse.

6.3 The 1989 Children Act introduced significant harm (ill treatment or impairment of health) as the threshold for compulsory intervention in family life, in recognition of the adverse impact of Domestic Abuse upon children. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 widened the definition of significant harm to include “impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another.”

There is a strong research base that indicates that Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to have behavioural and emotional problems, which have the potential to adversely impact on their immediate and longer term outcomes though to adulthood including educational achievement, increased risk of emotional difficulties, mental health issues, self-harming behaviours, increased risk of offending, increased risk of alcohol or substance misuse, relationship difficulties and impaired physical health.

6.4 **The local context here in Blackpool**

- Blackpool has a relatively high rate of domestic abuse, over twice the Lancashire average rate.
- Blackpool has high levels of socio-economic deprivation, which is a risk factor for domestic abuse.
- Blackpool also has relatively high levels of alcohol-related harm, drug use and mental health disorders.
- Blackpool also has greater proportions of younger people who may be lone parents, on low incomes, have a long term illness and/or low education levels, all risk factors for greater domestic abuse. (Blackpool JSNA).
- Blackpool figures for children in need and for those affected by domestic violence are significantly higher than the Lancashire and England averages. (Blackpool JSNA)
- Between June 2019 and June 2020, there were 748 children from the Blackpool area living in households in cases referred to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). (High Risk DA)

6.5 Given the challenges experienced by the community it is not surprising that reported domestic abuse is a key driver for the continued high demand for Children’s services.

The amount of requests for service screened by the Advice and Support Hub is substantial – each month, the Hub receives more than 400 requests from the Police for individual children, covering 200 families. Previous analysis has shown that around half of those requests relate to domestic abuse – this would equate to 100 families a month – so around 1,200 a year.

These requests for support are triaged by the co-located partners within the Hub.

Overall, slightly less than a quarter of the requests for service received by the Hub progress through to a social care assessment.

6.6 While the Police provide the vast majority of the domestic abuse related work, they are not the only providers (probation would be another key source, for example). The Hub receives slightly more than 1,000 requests for service for individual children (500 families) each month – some of those that are not provided by the Police will also identify concerns around domestic abuse (DA).

Blackpool schools continue to support Operation Encompass and directly receive DA notifications from the Police concerning children with a view to offering additional support to children underpinned by a trauma informed approach.

6.7 The number of overall referrals progressed following triage activity from the Hub during the period 01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021 was 2600.

The number of referrals resulting in an assessment by social care was 2070, of which 848 identified concerns around Domestic abuse.

- For those children subject to an assessment where DA was a factor, 467 resulted in either step down to services or no further action.
- 175 were escalated to a Child Protection Plan.
- 46 escalated children to become Our Children (note that 32 of these were also included in the above figure for Cases Escalating to CP Plan).
- Cases remaining at Children In Need (CIN) – 192 (of those, 30 remain open and 162 have subsequently been closed).

6.8 **Governance Arrangements**

Our Domestic Abuse Partnership is led by the Director of Community and Environmental Services to ensure we have a town wide, population based approach. The Domestic Abuse Board provides the Governance framework, the focus of the Board is a “public health” approach across the partnership of education and awareness, early identification and effective intervention and the prevention of

harm.

Blackpool's Domestic Abuse and Interpersonal Violence Partnership Strategy 2016 – 2020 is currently being reviewed. This is timely given that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has now become statute. This work is governed by the Domestic Abuse Board. Partners and stakeholders will work together to agree shared priorities and principles that, alongside the statutory duties, need to be reflected in the Strategy.

6.9 It is hoped that the Strategy will be agreed and adopted through January 2022.

The Act aims to:

- Raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.
- Further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.
- Strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

Of significance is that children will, for the first time, be recognised as 'victims'. As such, they will be entitled to the provisions made within the Victims' Code. The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code) sets out the services and a minimum standard for these services that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations (referred to as service providers) in England and Wales.

6.10 The Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership (CSAP) has identified Domestic Abuse as one of its three priorities and as such there is a Domestic Abuse Operational Group chaired by the Detective Superintendent Rebecca Smith, which reports into the CSAP North Lancashire Tactical Group and also into the Councils Domestic Abuse Board.

This subgroup meets bi-monthly and has good multi-agency attendance. The work of this group is to progress continued development of services for children and their families where domestic abuse is a concern. The key focus of this operational group is problem profiling, strengthening a partnership response, progressing the learning from the MARAC review and establishing practice guidance to support the work of Children's Services where domestic abuse is an issue.

6.11 Developing a more effective offer to children and their families in response to concerns around the impact of domestic abuse is a priority within the Social Work Improvement Plan. Progress of the Social Work Improvement Plan is reviewed by the Getting to Good Board, which meets Bi-Monthly and is independently chaired and is attended by our Department for Education (DfE) adviser.

Within this work stream, Children's Services have built upon the Constabulary lead pan-Lancashire review of the MARAC review, the overall aim being to move away

from the conference model and to develop a dynamic multi-agency response.

- 6.12 To this end, the Assistant director and Head of Service (MASH, AST and Awaken) is leading on the development of a pathway for children where domestic abuse is a concern, moving to a multi-agency co-located team that will deliver a model of support for high risk domestic abuse that responds in a timely way to reported incidents of high risk domestic abuse. Interventions will be focused upon a personalised approach to the three 'ME's' involved in Domestic Abuse - Child, victim and perpetrator.

The objective is to establish a multi-agency team that is able to respond to the needs of the child and address the multiple disadvantages experienced by adults which are often associated with high risk domestic abuse, particularly mental health issues, alcohol and substance misuse issues.

- 6.13 The team will include a Children's Services team manager, two social workers, two Police officers and three health practitioners. Public Health has provided funding for a substance misuse worker to be based within the Hub and we are currently working on pathways to secure mental health services for adults.

One Third sector Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser and a Children's Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (CIDVA) will also play a crucial role within the team. Virtual pathways to housing and probation are being scoped out.

This will result in a multi-agency team located within the Assessment and Support Service. The intervention this team will provide is focused on child, victim and perpetrator which is a much more systemic approach to domestic abuse. Progress of the project planning is reviewed regularly and it is hoped that a pilot of the approach, following the securing of accommodation at the Municipal Buildings, will take place early next year.

- 6.14 Staff within Children's Services have received additional training in the use of a specialist DASH (domestic abuse, stalking and honour based violence) risk assessment. This is a tool used to assess the risk that a victim is exposed to and can help in the actions required. 139 staff have attended DASH training so far; this provides practitioners with an understanding of the purpose of the tool in identifying (at the earliest opportunity), assessing and managing risk (identifying those who are at high risk and referring to a MARAC meeting) to help keep victims safe.

6.15 **Practice Development**

To strengthen practice, 108 members of staff have attended training to look at safety planning with children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse. This provides practitioners with an understanding of the purpose of safety planning

in keeping children and young people safe, how to implement age appropriate safety planning, using tools provided and how to engage and deliver a safety session in a child friendly way. We are beginning to see good evidence of safety plans in children's records.

Amanda Lynch, Head of Service, is leading on establishing practice guidance for our social workers and Early Help Practitioners. In addition to this there has been a focus upon enriching the offer to families, which includes:

Social Workers and Early Help practitioners having robust referral pathways to Empowerment – the Den continues to provide much needed support to children and young people impacted by domestic abuse; 1-1 CIDVA support; group work; youth provision and positive activities.

6.16 For Baby's Sake

This is an evidenced based therapeutic, trauma informed programme that works to prevent or stop cycles of abusive behaviour. The programme works with couples and those who are co-parenting from conception to the age of two years (1001 days).

The work in Blackpool is funded through our 'A Better Start' work and is well regarded by the national For Baby's Sake Trust. User feedback from our community has been overwhelmingly positive and was highlighted in the Guardian newspaper.

6.17 Caring Dads

Ten family workers and managers have been trained by Leeds City Council to deliver this evidence based programme designed to rebuild relationships between fathers and their children.

This programme has recently been evaluated by the Violence Reduction Network, as effecting Positive Change. The programme works with men to support them in considering their behaviour and the impact this has on their children. The programme is 17 weeks long and is delivered ideally by a mixed gender team.

Our first two programmes are underway with a third programme planned for the New Year. Referrals are initially being taken from Children's Services but as the programme builds momentum we will accept requests from other organisations.

6.18 Establishing relationship champions

Joanne Stewart, Head of Service for Early Help is working with the Department of Work and Pensions and the Early Intervention Foundation as part of national work focused on reducing parental conflict. Research indicates that where there is unresolved conflict between parents, intervention and programmes are unlikely to

make an impact.

A group of ten staff have started their training (to train others) to support them to roll out the pan-Lancashire relationship toolkit to support all practitioners to support parents and co-parents (those who are bringing up children together but live apart) where there is conflict. They will also train practitioners in two structured programmes aimed at supporting families on a one to one basis to 'argue better' and reduce their conflict.

- 6.19 In the New Year an eLearning module will be rolled out to the wider workforce to support practitioners to understand the impact of conflict between parents on their children and to build confidence to ask about parent relationships and how they work. Throughout January 2022, all Early Help staff will undertake the eLearning module designed to raise awareness of the impact of parental conflict on children. The first training session on the Relationship Toolkit and the structured programme will take place again for Early Help and Support staff on 3 February 2022.
- 6.20 Progress of these initiatives and the effectiveness of practice with children and families who are experiencing DA will continue to be reviewed via the Getting to Good Board and the CSAP North Tactical Group and the Domestic Abuse Board.
- 6.21 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 None.

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 None.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 None.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 None.

11.0 Risk management considerations:

None

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

None.

13.0 Internal/External Consultation undertaken:

13.1 None.

14.0 Background papers:

None.