

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

08 October 2020

Report of the Director of Central Services

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 REVIEW OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SCOPING REPORT

This report will provide an update to the previous scoping report. A number of speakers will attend the meeting to provide information about their services and how they support victims of domestic abuse. The paper will also consider best practice from around the country that could be implemented within Tonbridge & Malling and will also look to identify any additional sources of funding that might be available to support these projects.

1.1 Presentations from organisations involved in tackling domestic abuse

1.1.1. We have invited speakers from DAVSS (Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services), Kent Police and Clarion Housing to attend the meeting. These presentations will identify the services that these agencies provide for victims of domestic abuse within the Borough and will allow Members the opportunity to hear more about the work of these agencies. Where possible, these presentations will be circulated in advance of the meeting.

1.1.1 We have also received a written report from Lookahead, who are commissioned by KCC to provide a service to high risk victims of domestic abuse in the borough. This is attached at Annex 1 for information.

1.2 The impact of the Coronavirus on domestic abuse

1.2.1 Since the last meeting we have seen the impact of the Coronavirus on domestic abuse (and the speakers presenting at the meeting will be able to give specific details about the numbers of victims they have helped and how this has affected their organisations). Although the number of people contacting organisations for help reduced slightly during the lockdown period there has now been an increase in people seeking help, with incidents becoming more complex and serious, and higher levels of physical violence and coercive control reported.

1.2.2 The lockdown period and subsequent restrictions on meeting with people has meant that organisations have had to adapt their ways of working. Instead of

providing face to face services, many organisations are now using online meeting technology such as Zoom or MS Teams to speak to victims. Groups, such as the Freedom Programme, are now also run as online groups.

- 1.2.3 All agencies working with victims will of course continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic and if necessary will continue to amend their services to ensure that victims are receiving the support that they need.

1.3 Identifying good practice

- 1.3.1 The last report to Members suggested that we could look to identify good practice running in other areas and then see if this could be something that we could adopt or explore further for our district. Through liaising with other agencies and exploring provision available I have been able to find a number of initiatives that might be suitable for development in Tonbridge & Malling and these are summarised below.
- 1.3.2 Work around domestic abuse is always progressing and new initiatives are always developing through the organisations that we already work with. One such initiative has been the development of a Cyber Stalking Clinic run by Protection Against Stalking (PAS) and Lookahead. Unfortunately the number of people reporting stalking against them has increased and the clinic (which will be held on a monthly basis in Tonbridge) will allow those victims to speak to someone about their issues and get information and advice about actions they can take. The first clinic took place in September and was well attended by people needing to access support.
- 1.3.3 In relation to other initiatives that we could potentially be involved with or develop within the borough, Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council are looking to develop the 'Dragonfly' programme across Kent. This is currently running in Dorset, Hampshire and West Sussex and seeks to identify victims of domestic abuse who are isolated within their own communities. The aim is to train people within communities to become 'Champions' so they are equipped to receive and respond to disclosures of Domestic Abuse, empower communities to support and help victims of domestic abuse and make support easily accessible in isolated areas.
- 1.3.4 This may be something that we would also want to become involved with, although we would need to work with our commissioned organisations to ensure that this wasn't duplicating any work they were already undertaking.
- 1.3.5 Another project that may be of interest is one that has been funded by the Home Office. The 'Everyone's Business Advice Line' run by charity Hestia (based in London) is a service that works with employers so that they can provide information, resources and practical guidance to employees who are experiencing domestic abuse. Their programme provides the necessary tools so employers can support employees and provide safe solutions. Hestia states that lockdown has shown that home is not always safe for everyone, and with more people working

remotely due to Covid-19, cases of domestic abuse are rising. The advice line is now available at no cost to businesses through the funding provided.

- 1.3.6 This initiative may be something that Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council would like to explore further to see if it is something that could be promoted to staff.

1.4 Additional funding for domestic abuse

- 1.4.1 The funding available to tackle domestic abuse is limited and as previously reported the Tonbridge & Malling Community Safety Partnership and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council contribute towards the commissioning of DAVSS in the borough to provide support to victims of domestic abuse (through the use of PCC funding). The CSP also contributes funding towards Protection Against Stalking and the Community Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Programme.
- 1.4.2 Additional funding is difficult to source, although in May this year the Government announced a £76 million emergency fund for organisations to apply to in order to help support victims of domestic abuse and other issues (such as modern slavery) during the Coronavirus pandemic. Locally both DAVSS and Lookahead were successful in receiving some of this funding which will allow them to continue to provide support to victims (and further details about this funding will be provided during the presentations from these organisations).
- 1.4.3 All organisations involved in domestic abuse are always searching for additional funding and will apply for these where appropriate. We will continue to link in with the services working within our borough to ensure that we are working together to apply for funding where available.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a statutory duty upon the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent:-
- Crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment);
 - The misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area; and
 - Re-offending in its area.
- 1.5.2 The above duty also applies to Fire & Rescue Authorities and local Policing bodies.
- 1.5.3 The 1998 Act also imposes a separate duty on the Council, together with other Responsible Authorities, to formulate and implement a strategy to reduce/ combat the matters set out at (a) to (c) above. The Council uses the Community Safety Partnership to formulate and implement this strategy.

1.5.4 The Council also discharges various other statutory duties through the Community Safety Unit. These include :

- The Council may be required to establish, or participate in a Domestic Homicide Review, under the provisions of Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crimes and Victims Act 2004. KCC currently run the Domestic Homicide Reviews on behalf of the Borough/ District Councils within Kent;
- Under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, the Council is a 'relevant partner' of the County Council for the purposes of promoting the wellbeing of children and young people in the Borough. It is therefore under a duty to take part in arrangements to improve the wellbeing of children, defined by reference to 5 outcomes e.g. physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing, protection from harm and neglect. A separate duty exists under section 11 of the 2004 Act, under which the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

1.5.5 The Borough Council also has a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness and domestic abuse is one of the main causes of homelessness. The Council also has a duty to provide advisory services and one of the groups identified that we need to target are those who are experiencing domestic abuse.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 Funding for domestic abuse services/support comes from a variety of sources including the Community Safety Partnership, Kent County Council and local charities involved in the sector.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 Any reduction in services around domestic abuse would lead to additional increases in reports to the Police, lead to increased costs for the health services, could impact on housing and increase homelessness approaches and would be detrimental to resident's lives.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and does not vary between groups of people.

1.9 Policy Considerations

1.9.1 Community Safety

1.9.2 Housing

1.10 Recommendation:

1.10.1 That the Safer & Stronger Communities Manager works with the domestic abuse organisations operating within the borough to explore the options around the new initiatives proposed within the report and to develop these as appropriate.

Background papers:

Nil

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