

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 January 2015

HOW THE CITY COUNCIL RESPONDS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INFORMAL  
SCRUTINY GROUP – RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORT OF THE ISG CHAIR, COUNCILLOR THERESE EVANS

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RECENT REFERENCES

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 February 2014 it was agreed to establish an Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) to consider the 'How the City Council responds to domestic violence'.

This report describes the review process and sets out the recommendations of the ISG.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the recommendations of the ISG and recommend to Cabinet the following:

1. Put in place a formal partnership arrangement between Winchester City Council and the Refuge by developing a Memorandum of Understanding/Protocol between the two.
2. Investigate the possibility of increasing the number of Band 2 supported housing units by a further 10 e.g. identify unit locations and funding/grant opportunities.
3. Ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services to review the corporate policy related to the allocation of housing and consider if there is an opportunity to provide more permanent accommodation at an earlier stage for those fleeing domestic violence.
4. Actively support the work of Winchester Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum by ensuring a room is made available to them for their meetings up to a maximum of 3 times per annum. [Update: The Trinity Centre has since offered the Winchester Domestic Violence & Abuse Forum a meeting room to hold their meetings at no cost].
5. Improve the opportunity for education and awareness training for all frontline staff and councillors in relation to Domestic Violence disclosure and access to support services e.g. ensure that staff and elected members are aware of the corporate policy around domestic violence.
6. Increase awareness opportunities for customers of the City Council by updating the corporate website to ensure helpline numbers are readily available, service web links are easily accessible and literature via customer services/reception/putting information on Council owned public conveniences etc. (healthy relationships) is provided.
7. Actively encourage the Police & Crime Commissioner to commission the continuation/expansion of the IDVA service at a local level (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates).

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### HOW THE CITY COUNCIL RESPONDS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP – RECOMMENDATIONS

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##### DETAIL:

##### 1 Introduction

1.1 At its meeting on 20 January 2014, The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) appointed an Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) to look at how the City Council responds to domestic violence, with particular reference to:

- Access to Housing support and Refuge move on;
- Corporate Policy for staff;
- Education and Awareness for officers, elected members and customers of the City Council
- Commissioning of services, directly as key clients or indirectly via the Office Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) e.g. IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates).

1.2 Membership of the ISG was Councillors Evans (Chair), Mather, Gottlieb, Berry, Scott, Henry, Atchwal and Verney. The supporting officer was Sandra Tuddenham in her capacity as the Head of Community Safety and Neighbourhood Services Team.

1.3 OSC noted the need to review and narrow the focus of the ISG in order to ensure best use of officer/Member time and to avoid any duplication with the work of previous ISGs.

1.4 Details about the programme of meetings, evidence provided by expert witnesses and the ISG recommendations have been included in the final report which is shown at Appendix 1.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

### 2 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO)

- 2.1 The work of this ISG is directly relevant to the Access to Services priority in the Community Strategy as it is seeking to ensure fair and equitable access and is looking at ways to remove any barriers. It also supports the Council's general aim to be an Efficient and Effective Council.

### 3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 From the outset, the ISG was mindful of the need to ensure its recommendations were both realistic and achievable. Implementation of the majority of recommendations set out in this report should have no immediate resource implications over and above staff time and use of internal resources. However should the recommendation to investigate further opportunities to increase the number of Band 2 supported housing units be realised, a significant amount of external funding will need to be found e.g. Government new development contributions.

### 4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 There are no significant risk management issues associated with this report.

### 5. EQUALITIES

- 5.1 The Council has a legal obligation to ensure that no one is unfairly disadvantaged, excluded or subject to discrimination when accessing its services.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Minutes of meetings of the ISG.

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Final Report of the How the City Council responds to Domestic Violence Informal Scrutiny Group

**FINAL REPORT**

**OF THE**

**HOW THE CITY COUNCIL**  
**RESPONDS TO**  
**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE -**  
**INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 This report summaries the work of the 'How the Council Responds to Domestic Violence' Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG).

A presentation given by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 December 2013 covered a range of topics under the auspices of the CSP remit. However, at that event there was insufficient time for more in-depth discussion to take place and members felt that it would be beneficial to consider Domestic Violence as a theme for a future ISG.

The ISG was agreed by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 January 2014. It was established to look at the issue of Domestic Violence and how the City Council responds to those individuals who disclose to officers that they are or are at risk of becoming a victim of domestic abuse or violence.

An informal preliminary meeting was held in June 2014 involving Councillor Evans (ISG Chair) and the nominated lead officer. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the scope of the review to ensure the most efficient use of Member/officer time, and also to agree a provisional schedule of topics to be covered by the ISG meetings. It was agreed that the scope of the review was potentially too broad and that draft terms of reference should be drawn up to clearly define its focus. These would be presented to the first full meeting of the ISG.

### 1.2 At its inauguration, the ISG agreed that the topic of Domestic Abuse is very broad and has far reaching implications for all concerned. ISG Members felt that it was important to look into the subject at an in-depth level and would therefore need to focus their attention on a specific area of Domestic Abuse. It was decided that the focus should be about support being offered to adult victims of Domestic Violence. The specific topics identified for discussion were:-

- **The Current Picture in Winchester** (Hampshire Police, City and County Council perspectives);
- **Housing Options** for those fleeing domestic abuse (Housing Options and Winchester Refuge);
- **External Service Support** (Women's Centre, Victim Support, HMP Prison Centre);
- **Local Forum** (Winchester Domestic Violence & Abuse Forum).

### 1.3 The Government definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and makes it clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

In September 2012, it was announced that the Government definition of domestic violence would be widened to include those aged 16-17 and wording changed to reflect coercive control.

The Government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

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. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a victim.

- 1.4 Between July 2013 and July 2014 there were 665 Domestic Violence cases reported to the police within the District, showing a 50% split between crime and non-crime.

The national Coordinated Action against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) agency statistics show that 90% of victim referral is instigated by the police and only 10% by other external partner agencies.

The crime survey for England and Wales suggests that 30% of women and 16.3% of men will experience Domestic Violence during their lifetime.

1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse some time in their lives.

1 in 20 women will be raped.

2 women will die each week at the hands of their current or former partner.

30% of domestic violence either starts or will intensify during pregnancy.

2 The ISG met on five occasions as follows:-

2.1 **Meeting 1:** 17 June 2014. **Theme:** ISG Programme

The ISG met to agree the format and programme for the forthcoming meetings.

The following was agreed:-

- The group would discuss male as well as female victims, however it was noted that the majority of DV is perpetrated by men against women, so the majority of services across the district are set up to cater for this need.
- The use of acronyms should be kept to a minimum in order to maintain clarity.
- To ensure that the multi-agency approach/partnership delivery is adequate in terms of provision for all victims.

The ISG felt that it was important that the terms of reference remain expansive rather than restrictive, aiming to identify pragmatic improvements designed to enhance current practice and impact.

Within the terms of reference, the ISG agreed that the three key areas to be addressed were:

- Does the Council have adequate processes in place to support victims of domestic violence, both male and female?
- Are all victims of domestic violence aware of, and able to, access support services across the Winchester district?
- Does the multi-agency approach/partnership delivery provide adequate provision for all victims?

2.2 **Meeting 2:** 7 July 2014 **Theme:** Current Picture

The ISG heard from the following expert witnesses:

- Hampshire Constabulary – the District Commander gave members an overview of current statistics, risk assessment tools, safeguarding and national campaigns.
- Hampshire County Council – The Community Safety Commissioning Manager, John Winter gave members an overview of Hampshire services (current and proposed commissioning of service contracts), funding and responsibilities around domestic homicide.

The expert witnesses also gave a background to their role from within their respective organisations and answered questions from Members.

2.3 **Meeting 3:** 17 July 2014 **Theme:** Housing Provision

The ISG heard from the following expert witnesses:-

- WCC - Housing Options officers gave members an overview of the City Council's duty, banding system, temporary units, triage services and the Home Choice register.
- Stonham HomeGroup officers gave members an overview of the Refuge service in relation to current room allocation/take up, outreach services, safe guarding clients, local connection and forthcoming changes to the commissioned contracts.

2.4 **Meeting 4:** 17 September 2014 **Theme:** External Provision

The ISG heard evidence from the following expert witnesses:

- Winchester Domestic Violence Forum – the Chair gave members an overview of the role the forum undertakes within Winchester
- Trinity, Winchester - representatives gave members an overview of the work of the Women's Centre and the 12 week Freedom Programme.
- Victim Support – representatives gave members an overview the service being provided to Winchester.
- Sturgeon (HMP) – a representative gave members an overview of the Invisible Walls programme run from within the prison family centre.

2.5 **Meeting 5:** 8 October 2014 **Theme:** Report Recommendations:

To aid discussion the document previously circulated on behalf of Councillor Evans, listing recommendations and observations from previous meetings was the main topic of conversation.

3. **Main findings of the ISG – Partnership Working**

3.1 ISG Members were told of the forthcoming changes to the commissioning process as of April 2015. Specifically the requirement to 'reduce' the number of months an individual can reside at the Refuge from the current 6 months to a maximum of 3. However it was also noted that bed blocking already occurs because some service users currently stay as long as 12 months.

3.2 Professional Witnesses with responsibility for providing housing support flagged up the need to further develop the communication process in relation to joint working arrangements, specifically around 'move on' pathways for victims of domestic abuse. ISG Members felt that this could be achieved by building on the current working relationship between the City Council and other key support agencies by developing a memorandum of understanding or protocol e.g. WCC Housing Options and the Winchester Refuge.

- 3.3 ISG Members were told that the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) in partnership with Hampshire County Council is currently reviewing the future of contracts and commissioning for Domestic Violence services. Winchester has access to the County wide Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) on a shared basis with the rest of Hampshire. ISG Members were keen to encourage the PCC to continue with or expand the local provision as there is currently only one post covering the whole of Hampshire and the IoW.
- 3.4 Victim Support provides a local service using trained volunteers to support victim's of crime. However ISG Members were told that there is currently a disparity in the service being provided because the majority of service provision is within the North of the County.
- 3.5 Winchester has a Domestic Violence & Abuse Forum and is an independent multi-agency group working to improve support services to those affected by domestic violence and abuse. They meet 3 times per annum to agree agency participation in the delivery of actions related to domestic violence. However as a group they do not have a budget to cover activity or meeting venues.

#### **4. Awareness Raising/Training**

- 4.1 Officer roles and responsibilities are constantly changing, hence the need to maintain training/awareness for all staff and Members as part of an ongoing training programme.
- 4.2 ISG Members felt it was important to provide Domestic Violence awareness opportunities for those using the facilities of the City Council e.g. Web Site, Literature, Information within Public Conveniences.
- 4.3 ISG Members want to ensure that the Corporate Domestic Violence Policy is launched/disseminated to staff and Members alike.

#### **5 Housing Services**

- 5.1 It was acknowledged that the City Council Housing Options team, are well versed in the complexities surrounding Domestic Violence and Abuse.
- 5.2 ISG Members were concerned that partnership working between the City Council and the Refuge relies heavily on the 'goodwill' of the officers involved at the time. This can make it very difficult for staff to easily make contact with some external partners, which is especially important in the early stages of engagement. Members were told that officers trying to support those clients who wish to access longer term housing, need the cooperation of external partners at the earliest opportunity. As a result ISG Members felt it was important to encourage the development of more formal working arrangements with other housing support services.

- 5.3 ISG Members were concerned that as of April 2015 the rules for staying at the refuge will change. This will mean that anyone using the refuge will no longer be able to stay up to a maximum of 6 months; instead the limit will be reduced to 3 months within the new contract. As a result the group felt that it is really important to place a greater emphasis on the provision of temporary, timely accommodation which ultimately supports longer term move on.
- 5.4 ISG Members asked if there is more that could be done to increase move on accommodation opportunities to avoid bed blocking. They were concerned to hear that there is currently a gap in 'band 2<sup>1</sup>' accommodation and that the gap may widen as of 2015 because of the loss of some of the current contracts for temporary housing unit providers. The significant reduction in 'supporting people funding' will inevitably mean the closure of some of the larger supported units.
- 5.5 Most homeless clients start at band 3 if they are accepted on the homeless register and are likely to move up to band 2 after a period of 9 months. This also applies to those who are homeless for domestic violence reasons, it is important for those within the refuge to register for Hampshire Home Choice from day one. ISG Members were told that any time spent in supported housing will be considered as part of the overall requirement to be in temporary accommodation for 9 months e.g. 3 months in a Hostel or Refuge will reduce the 9 months wait for permanent accommodation to 6.
- 5.6 In answer to a question about future funding and how the City Council could increase the number of temporary units, members were told that there may be some funding available from central Government through the New Homes Team, specifically linked to temporary accommodation.
- 5.7 Those fleeing Domestic Violence out of the district can still access housing in the longer term as part of a pre-planned eventual move back into Winchester. However they will need to register for Hampshire Home Choice in the early stages of engagement if they wish to continue to bid for properties whilst they are not living in the district.
- 5.8 During 2013/14 there were 15 triage presentations to the City Council, 11 of those cases presented as domestic abuse and relationship breakdown, 4 of which were fleeing a violent partner (included one male).

## 6 **Witness Statements**

- 6.1 The group heard from a survivor of domestic abuse who told of her experience when accessing support services. She said that one of the main hurdles she came across was proving a local connection e.g. getting children into education is one way of evidencing a local connection. The witness said that in her experience getting a child into school as soon as possible often comes down to how important a professional perceives the need to get things

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<sup>1</sup> Supported Housing is categorised in 3 bands by Hampshire County Council: 1= those requiring emergency direct access and intensive support e.g. Refuge, 2= clients at a reduced stage of support, 3= clients preparing for independent living.

moving and whether they are willing to offer immediate support and sort out the process later. ISG Members felt that there is a need for partner agencies to formally agree working arrangements that provide a degree of flexibility and make it easier for victims to navigate support pathways.

- 6.2 ISG members also heard from a range of external partners and other commissioning agencies to help them understand the complexities surrounding the subject matter. The group also felt that it helped them gain an overview of services available to those who are, or are at risk of, becoming a victim of domestic abuse.
- 6.3 Members were pleased to note the level of partnership and multi-agency work taking place across the district. However, they did flag up a need to put in place more formal arrangements between some agencies to ensure those in need of support do not get lost in 'the system' because of inconsistency in the communication pathways.

## 7. **Examples of best practice**

- 7.1 The City Council offers a triage service, using a generic email address so that when someone comes into the office they are spoken to in private and will have the same officer throughout their homeless journey.
- 7.2 The City Council aims to keep people as near to their support networks as much as is practicably possible.
- 7.3 ISG Members were also pleased that all housing options staff receive DV training. They also ensure that leaflets and posters are provided in the triage room, aiming to give clients the confidence to disclose DV incidents to officers.
- 7.4 The Supporting Families Programme (which operates on a whole family, single key worker approach with multi-agency input) will be subject to a new category of Domestic Abuse when it is introduced from 2015.
- 7.5 ISG Members were pleased to note the level of collaborative working between Council teams and outside agencies, both statutory and voluntary. Worthy of particular reference was the work of the domestic violence forum and external support services like Trinity, Invisible Walls and the Refuge.

## 8. **Concerns and issues that need to be addressed**

- 8.1 The Refuge raised concern that the forthcoming Hampshire Contract due to come to fruition in 2015 is likely to put pressure on Refuge clients to leave before they are ready to move on or have anywhere else to go. This could mean that Stonham HomeGroup may be forced to consider using private rented accommodation for some of their clients if they are to meet the contract criteria.

- 8.2 ISG Members felt that there needed to be a much greater dialogue with housing providers regarding priority cases, the one year local connection, changes in policy and rent bond schemes.
- 8.3 It was suggested that more could be done to promote national helplines and local support services for customers of the City Council e.g. more information on the web site, in the council reception area and using awareness raising posters in public conveniences (Loo Literature) around the district.
- 8.4 ISG Members were concerned that as of 2015 there will be funding cuts for Supporting People. This will mean a loss of at least two large supported housing units in Winchester, impacting on availability and the number of temporary bed spaces at band 2.

## 9 **Recommendations to Cabinet**

That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the information provided by the ISG within this report and recommend to Cabinet the following list for further action:

1. Investigate the viability of increasing band 2 Units by a further 10, using the current number of supported housing units as the baseline figure e.g. look into opportunities related to band 2 units and if appropriate identify those that support the closure of the forthcoming funding gap in order to increase local provision.
2. Ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services to review the corporate policy related to the allocation of housing and consider if there is an opportunity to provide more permanent accommodation at an earlier stage for those fleeing domestic violence.
3. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding/Protocol between Winchester City Council and Stonham HomeGroup which ensures the working relationship between the Refuge and WCC is more formalised.
4. Actively support the work of Winchester Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum by ensuring a room is made available to them for their meetings up to a maximum of 3 times per annum. [Update: The Trinity Centre has since offered the Winchester Domestic Violence & Abuse Forum a meeting room to hold their meetings at no cost].
5. Improve the opportunity for education and awareness training for all frontline staff and councillors in relation to dealing with disclosure and signposting to support services e.g. ensure that staff and elected members are aware of the corporate policy around domestic violence.
6. Increase awareness opportunities for customers of the City Council by updating the corporate website to ensure helpline numbers are readily available and service web links are easily accessible, making literature

readily available via customer services/reception, putting information up on public conveniences doors etc.

7. Actively encourage the Police & Crime Commissioner to commission the continuation and enhancement of the IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) service across Hampshire.