

Communities and Culture Committee

Scrutiny Inquiry : Domestic Abuse

Response from Flintshire County Council

Introduction

This report sets out some of the key areas in addressing the provision of services for different groups who have suffered domestic abuse in Flintshire. It looks at how the National Strategy is delivered at a local level, including response of different sectors to domestic abuse including the criminal justice system. This is not a definitive overview as the process for monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing process.

Flintshire is located in the north eastern corner of Wales bordered by the counties of Wrexham, Denbighshire and Cheshire, and sharing a river boundary with Wirral along the River Dee. It is the most populous and densely populated county in North Wales with around 150,000 (2006- Office for National Statistics) people living in an area of 438 square kilometers.

1. Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence typically involves a pattern of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and intimidations, which escalates in frequency and severity in time. It can be understood as the misuse of power and the exercise of control by one partner over the other in an intimate relationship usually by a man over a woman, occasionally by a woman over a man (though without the same pattern of societal collusion), and also occurring amongst same sex couples. It has profound consequences in the lives of children, individuals, families and communities.

Ref. Mullender and Humphreys (1998).

Domestic Violence accounts for just under a fifth of all recorded violent crime. The economic impact in respect of service delivery is estimated at £5.7 billion per annum in addition to the £17 billion (est.) in human and emotional cost. (LGA Research, 2005).

Domestic abuse has been steadily ascending the political agenda and has been recognised as one of the key priorities. The reason for this increased focus is illustrated by statistics that reveal domestic abuse as a pernicious and prevalent crime that has devastating personal consequences for victims and their families and has a major impact on the local and national economy, as well as the Criminal Justice system and statutory services. Domestic abuse is repetitive and typically

involves an escalating pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour, which can be life threatening.

2. In March 2008, Flintshire obtained immediate accreditation for the 'Specialist Domestic Abuse Court' in Mold from HM Courts. This followed the establishment of a SDAC model from the Home Office, with 11 core components that need to be evidenced by participating areas and a formal application process.

The following range of achievements will be in place as part of the development of the Flintshire SDAC Programme:-

Court Facilities

Mold Court has separate entrances. Separate waiting facilities for victims and witnesses. There is a live link room and excellent children's facilities.

Trained Staff

Training covering the dynamics of domestic abuse and the SDAC process for all court personnel, including legal advisors, court administrators and the Witness Care Unit.

Domestic Violence Specialist Prosecutors will attend the weekly SDAC in addition to a weekly liaison meeting with the IDVA (once in place).

Victim Safety

Information about court decisions will be given rapidly to victims and usually within 24 hours. Victims will also be notified of any changes in the prosecution process.

Again, the implementation of the IDVA Service will be an important ingredient to victim safety.

Information Sharing and Joint Working

North Wales has an established protocol for Domestic Abuse cases between HMCS, CPS, Probation, Police, YJS and the LCJB.

There will be an active process of information sharing between the IDVA (when in post), support workers, police and the CPS.

Understanding the seriousness of this crime

The SDAC promotes consistent reference to domestic violence being serious, complex and unacceptable. Any attempts to minimise it as a private and less serious matter will be challenged. In Wrexham the IDVA has become a significant partner in the education of defence solicitors in relation to the dynamics of the power and

control demonstrated in domestic abuse and provides information from this perspective in the presence of both the prosecution and defence.

Conditional Bail

In areas where the SDAC exists, it is very unusual for domestic violence cases to be given unconditional bail. More often bail conditions and restrictions remain regardless of the victim withdrawal and for the period following conviction and before sentence.

Pre-Sentence Reports

Following conviction, it will be standard practice for the bench to request a 'full standard delivery report' from the Probation Service. All sentencing options will usually be requested for assessment, including an assessment for Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP). Probation Officers in Wrexham actively seek out information from the IDVA in order to be able to provide more comprehensive assessments to the Courts.

Safeguarding Children

The SDAC Programme requires an area to ensure that the variety of different needs that children/young people experience in relation to domestic abuse are identified and addressed through the delivery of

mainstream services and specialist services. The Home Office guidance recommends that children need access to a range of service including those that focus on increasing safety for both the child and the non-abusing parent.

3. National Strategy

All those who come into contact with children and families in everyday work, including people who do not have a specific role in relation to child protection, have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Women and children who have experienced domestic abuse have a range of support needs. The impact of domestic abuse on the health, social and economic wellbeing of women and children is far reaching.

In line with National Strategy Flintshire currently has an action plan which has been formulated by Flintshire's Domestic Abuse Project Group.

The plan has a number of aims and objectives. These are set out below (See attached Action plan).

1. To ensure that all members of the community are able to access appropriate and timely information and support about domestic abuse.
2. To ensure that Practitioners in Flintshire are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify those at risk or who are experiencing domestic abuse.

3. To protect the safety and dignity of domestic abuse survivors.

4. To promote the activities of the Flintshire Domestic Abuse Project.

4. Multi Agency responses

Local Authorities across North Wales have experienced a significant rise in the rate of referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents.

In Flintshire the increase in referral rates has been pronounced over the past few years and referral rates have almost trebled. This has had a significant impact upon resources within the authority and has necessitated changes in working practices to ensure appropriate and timely responses are afforded to the child and the adult victim.

Currently there are a number of coordinated strategies in place which are linked together to enable effective working.

In Flintshire the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference was established in February 2007 and is held monthly. Chaired by North Wales Police the MARAC looks at the high risk cases and seeks to coordinate an appropriate multi agency action plan in protecting victims and their children. Collaboration between agencies and

practitioners is very effective and currently all the relevant agencies are signed up to MARAC in Flintshire.

In addition to the MARAC Flintshire Children's Services holds a weekly Domestic Violence Panel which started in November 2005. The panel was established in response to the increase number of referrals relating to domestic violence and to ensure a comprehensive multi-agency response.

Children's Services Domestic Violence Panel.

Flintshire's Children's Services Domestic Violence Panel works in accordance with the Departments Child Support and Prevention Thresholds. The Panel is chaired by a Senior Practitioner from Children's Services and panel members include Flintshire's Domestic Violence Officer, N. Wales Police, and Women's Aid for North and South Flintshire, a representative from Health and Education. All participants are practitioners within Flintshire and contribute considerable knowledge and understanding of the victims and children who have suffered as a result of domestic abuse.

The purpose of the panel is to review all referrals received by Children's Services with concerns about Domestic Violence and to consider the best outcome for the victim and their children. The content of the discussion, information sharing and decisions are recorded. Where the panel has agreed the need for a

joint visit between a social worker and police DVO then a risk assessment tool will be completed prior to the visit. The Domestic Violence Panel has been a helpful forum for developing and sharing good practice between agencies. The following table provides the number of referrals from October 2007 until March 2008.

**Flintshire Duty & Assessment Team
Domestic Violence Information
October 2007 to March 2008**

Month	DV Referrals/ Info Received	No. taken to DV Panel	No. Assessments Opened
October 2007	70	50	15
November 2007	54	45	6
December 2007	74	60	10
January 2008	83	59	15
February 2008	59	51	1
March 2008	56	37	5
TOTALS	396	302	52

5. Support Provision for Adults & Children in Flintshire.

Currently there are two refuges in Flintshire, Delyn's Women's Aid and Deeside's Domestic Abuse Safety Unit. They also provide outreach support which includes a Saturday club and Outreach resettlement. In addition to this there are four child refuge workers work across Flintshire, providing direct work with the children in refuge with one to one support and group work.

A new initiative which started in February 2008 is Caring Dads Programme which is coordinated by NSPCC and held in Wrexham it is an intensive group work programme for the non convicted perpetrators of domestic abuse. The group is set out to work with fathers who want to improve their relationships with their children or step-children, partners or ex-partners.

Running alongside this is the Freedom Programme a Group for women survivors of domestic abuse. The groups are currently being held in both the North and South of the County and a follow on course will be implemented called the 'Free To Be programme'.

Another very recent initiative to North Wales which is lottery funded is 'Choose 2 Change'. The programme is a domestic violence intervention programme delivering group work programmes to work with non convicted perpetrators. Any man from Flintshire who wants to change his behaviour and improve relationships can

access the group. The programme also looks at parenting and the effects of domestic abuse on children.

North Wales Probation Service, provide the IDAP Programme for the convicted perpetrators of Domestic Abuse in Flintshire.

Flintshire's Domestic Abuse Project has also driven forward a new service coordinated by the Domestic Abuse Coordinator, North Wales Police, Women's Aid and Flintshire Neighbourhood Wardens. Flintshire 'Homesafe' is a project to provide target hardening equipment where needed across the county of Flintshire for victims of domestic abuse with an eight hour response time. The project included female fitters. Neighbourhood Wardens will deliver the service which has a launch date for 23rd of May 2008. This will enable vulnerable victims to remain in their homes.

Flintshire is also waiting for funding for an Advocate for High Risk Victims.

6. Isolation

In 2001 21% of the population in Wales were able to speak welsh. Within rural areas the detection of domestic abuse is often more difficult due to some victims who's first language is welsh. Flintshire's Domestic Abuse Project Group's Action Plan aims to distribute leaflets and posters in workplaces of partner agencies, FCC Mobile Office, Family Clinics, Youth

Centres, GP Surgeries and Libraries providing welsh copies so that welsh speakers feel able to access the support services.

In 2006, 15 thousand people migrated into Wales from overseas. (Office for National Statistics). A significant number of Eastern European families have moved to the County with a notable group in the Flint area. Domestic Abuse cuts across every culture, recognising no boundaries. Within Flintshire we are able to access BAWSO a voluntary organisation providing specialist services to Black and minority ethnic women and children. BAWSO is affiliated to Welsh Women's Aid and works closely and in partnership with other Women's Aid organisations.

The Travelling communities have also been represented in Flintshire. This has been a difficult group to access. However, links have been established with the help of the Inclusion Welfare Officer from St Richard Gwyn High School who has become a familiar support for a number of women and children within the travelling community.

Monitoring outcomes

Within Flintshire there are 14 statutory and voluntary partners signed up to the MARAC. Joint information sharing protocols exist to take a firm stance against domestic abuse and improve multi-agency

working. A Multi agency referral system is in place.
Following a recent review of the Domestic Abuse MARAC
124 cases were discussed during the first 12 months.
107 which were adult victims. (2 male)
170 which were children (mostly pre school)

Ethnicity of referrals to MARAC

102 white European
2 Polish
1 Bulgarian
1 Brazilian
1 Afro Caribbean

In 6 month follow up point, 65% of victims experienced
no further abuse.

Cindy Thomson
Senior Practitioner
Flintshire's Duty & Assessment Team.

Domestic Abuse Project Action Plan – 2008-09

Aim 1: To ensure that all members of the community are able to access appropriate and timely information and support about domestic abuse.				
Objective	Planned Action	Lead Agency/Person	Timescale	Update
To increase domestic abuse reporting overall, particularly in hard to reach communities (target to be taken from Strategic Assessment)	Distribution of signposting leaflets and posters in the workplaces of partner agencies, FCC mobile office, Family clinics, youth centres, GP surgeries, Libraries.	D A Coordinator Neighbourhood Watch/ Neighbourhood Wardens/ Victim Support/ Flintshire County Council Mobile Office / Womens Aid / Family Clinics/Youth centres/GP surgeries/Youth workers/Libraries – Sheila Kirby	Ongoing	Welsh copies now also available for distribution. Ongoing.
	Revamp current DA Project leaflets for multi agency use	D A Coordinator North Wales Police	March 08	Been updated and is with NWP printing dept.
	Age Concern to work with	D A Coordinator Margaret Hanson/Louise		Meeting arranged with

	<p>Project on designing leaflets around dv and the elderly</p> <p>Provide information to children of school age about domestic abuse</p>	<p>Hughes</p> <p>School Liaison Officers to deliver 'All Wales Schools Programme' to Year 10.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Need to monitor programme for Year 10s</p>	<p>Margaret in April to progress. Funding will be their responsibility.</p> <p>Waiting for update from SLOs. Need info on planned sessions for 2008 -09</p>
	<p>Sessions on safe/healthy relationships to young people within YJS</p>	<p>D A Coodinator DASU Ray Dickson</p>	<p>Delivery April/May</p>	<p>DASU now delivering session. Planned and awaiting approval from YJS</p>

Aim 2: To ensure that practitioners in Flintshire are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify those at risk or who are experiencing domestic abuse

Objective	Planned Action	Lead Agency/Person	Timescale	Update
				.
To provide awareness training for practitioners related to the needs of their respective organizations for MARAC	<p>Monitor attendance, training hours provided etc, and evaluate training provided</p> <p>Compile annual MARAC report using analysis provided by MARAC admin worker and Community Safety Partnership Analyst</p>	<p>Domestic Abuse Coordinator</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Coordinator North Wales Police Partner Agencies</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>April 2008</p>	<p>Seven MARAC workshops have been delivered during 2007. GH and JG need to plan more sessions with added info from Annual Review</p> <p>Planned Review group meeting for partner agency to address issues arising from feedback questionnaire which will then be included in the Annual Review.</p>

<p>To provide multi level awareness training for partner agencies.</p>	<p>Health Visitors School Nurses Save the Family Homestart Drug & Alcohol Team Fire Service Sexual Health clinics N E Wales NHS Trust (child protection level III) Flying Start Project</p>	<p>Domestic Abuse coordinator Jackie/Marie Stewart</p>	<p>May 2008</p>	<p>HV and SN session planned. Delivery April 08 . CDAT training on hold Fire Service training completed. Sexual Health clinic training on hold. Delivery NEWI Wrexham in June 08 To be arranged</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Aim 3: To protect the safety and dignity of domestic abuse survivors

Objective	Planned Action	Lead Agency/Person	Timescale	Update
To establish a Specialist Domestic Violence Court	In place. Now seeking accreditation from Home Office, HM Courts and Crown Prosecution Service.	D A Coordinator	March 08	Successful in immediate accreditation.
To establish an Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service	Submit an application for part time post in the interim from Building Safer Communities fund (via CSP)	D A Coordinator	January 08	Implementation group passed this bid but decision hasn't been reached by Exec. Decision outcome May 08 for funding to be taken from JAG under 'special circumstances'.
To support the North Wales SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre)	To circulate information To public and partner agencies	North Wales Police Health All partner agencies D A Coordinator	September 2008	Planned opening 09/08
Provide partner agencies with the necessary skills and equipment to identify and act on incidents of domestic violence	All agencies to work towards work based domestic abuse policies D A Coordinator to supply existing policies/protocols to partner agencies	Domestic Abuse Coordinator to assist all partners:	April 2008. Jackie has copies of WAG workplace policy leaflet which can also be downloaded from WAG website.	JG met with Fiona Mocko to discuss lack of policy within FCC. JG to attend a Corporate Equalities Review Team meeting in April.

To continue to involve partner agencies in MARAC who have not yet signed up	Jackie to contact Barnardos and CAIS.	Domestic Abuse Coordinator		Jackie has met with CAIS and they currently are signing relevant documentation.
To support the development of a non mandatory perpetrator programme across N. Wales	Jackie to continue to Chair N.Wales Perpetrator/Partner Support meetings	Domestic Abuse Coordinator/NWDAF	Relate looking to deliver these programmes in accordance with RESPECT guidelines commencing ?	Programme is 'Choose2Change'. Advert for N. Wales facilitators currently being trained. Programme coordinator Kelly Aldcroft. Two venues planned Colwyn Bay and Wrexham Sub group will meet April 08 for further info
To provide target hardening equipment where needed across county.	(i)To officially launch the Neighbourhood Wardens service (8 hour reponse etc) and ensure one referral route for agencies (ii)to develop interagency protocols and safety procedures (iii) to design a leaflet and establish a name for the Service	Neighbourhood Wardens/Project team Domestic Abuse Coordinator/Police/WAid, FN Wardens Project team - Task & Finish group		Launch date 23 May at Beaufort Park Hotel 9.30 – 12.30. Ongoing Meeting again April No decision made on name of Service.

Aim 4: To promote the activities of the Flintshire Domestic Abuse Project

Objective	Planned Action	Lead Agency/Person	Timescale	Update
Engage with local businesses to generate income for the Domestic Abuse Project	Explore the idea of 'Business pledges'	Business Crime Coordinator	March 20068	Update from CSP re post holder.
Promote the work of the Forum through the Community Safety Partnership	(i) Community Safety Newsletter (ii) Flintshire Focus (for FCC employees) (iii) Partners' 'Guide to the Partnership'	Domestic Abuse Coordinator/Community Safety Officer Domestic Abuse Coordinator/Community Safety Officer Sian Jones	April 08 ,	Jackie to prepare something for next edition.

