

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel **DATE:** 27 February 2014

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PORTFOLIO: Councillor Sohail Munawar – Commissioner for Social and Economic Inclusion
Councillor James Walsh – Commissioner for Health and Wellbeing

PART I/ II **FOR CONSIDERATION AND COMMENT**

OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN SLOUGH

1 Purpose of Report

To provide the Neighbourhood & Community Services Scrutiny Panel with information regarding the incidence of domestic abuse in Slough. This report contains localised data, comparative data against other local authorities in its Community Safety Partnership family group, and outlines the services currently available to help support victims of domestic abuse and to support perpetrators to change their behaviour.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Committee is requested to discuss the information provided and consider the effectiveness of the programmes of work in place to tackle this issue.

3 Joint Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Reducing the risk of domestic abuse and providing support for victims is a key priority for the Safer Slough Partnership. The Safer Slough Partnership also seeks to reduce the harm that drugs and alcohol can cause to individuals, families and the wider community, in particular to violent crime to create a safer environment for all those who live, work, learn, visit and invest in Slough and therefore meets the following priorities:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Housing
- Safer Communities

4 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

The JSNA highlights domestic abuse as a key priority for 2013/14 and 2014/15.

5 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications of proposed action

(b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal	None	None
Property	None	None
Human Rights	None	None
Health and Safety	None	None
Employment Issues	None	None
Equalities Issues	None	None
Community Support	None	None
Communications	None	None
Community Safety	None	None
Financial	None	None
Timetable for delivery	None	None
Project Capacity	None	None
Other	None	None

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no human rights or other legal implications arising from this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

Feedback and close monitoring of data is analysed according to Slough Borough Council equalities monitoring categories, thereby enabling any differential impact on particular groups to be identified. Appendix One compares the ethnicity of victims of domestic abuse accessing services against victim data held by Thames Valley Police.

6 **Supporting Information**

6.1 Definition of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is not just limited to acts of physical violence and can encompass multiple types of abuse; psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional

In 2012 the Home Office extended its definition of domestic abuse to *“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”*.

Controlling behaviour is defined as *“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 defined as *“an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim”*.

This definition includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group

Appendix One provides a breakdown of types of abuse reported by victims to Slough Domestic Abuse Services.

6.2 National Context of domestic abuse

The Home Office estimates that during 2012¹;

- 1.2 million women were victims of domestic abuse,
- There were 400,000 cases of sexual assault; of which 70,000 (17.5%) was classed as rape
- 20,000 girls aged 15 or under at risk of FGM (female genital mutilation),
- 1,500 cases of forced marriage, and
- 4% of women experience stalking.

In addition to the facts for 2012 outlined above the Home Office also estimate that on average, 2 women per week are murdered by their partner or ex-partner; and 66% of domestic violence occurs amongst repeats victims.

Domestic abuse is usually linked to adults, but there is increasing national concern and evidence to suggest high prevalence rates of abuse amongst young people in relationships. The NSPCC² (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) study found that:

- 72% of girls and 51% of boys reported experiencing emotional partner abuse;
- 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported some form of physical partner violence;
- 70% of girls and 13% of boys stated that sexual violence negatively impacted on their wellbeing.

Historically services in place have focussed their support on adult victims and perpetrators in abusive relationships; the NSPCC study highlights the pivotal role schools and public organisations can play in challenging the myths around teenage relationship abuse; recognising signs of abuse; and signposting or providing support to victims of teenage abuse.

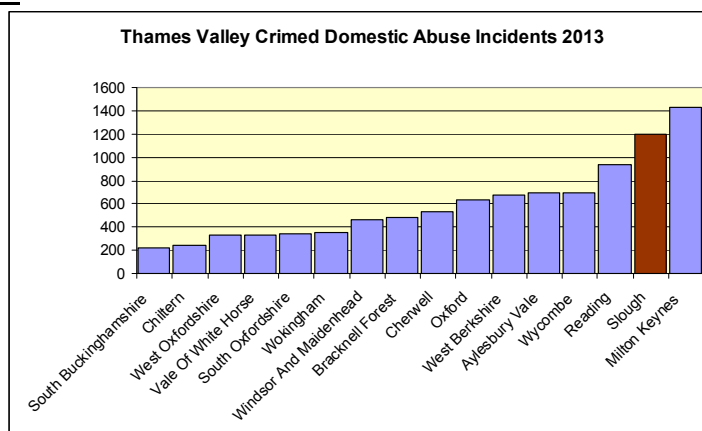
¹ Ending Violence Against Women and Girls_Brief_V3

² Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships

6.3 Local Context of domestic abuse in Slough

Incidence of Domestic Abuse

Figure One: Numbers of Domestic Abuse (crime) per area in Thames Valley Jan – Dec 2013



Source: Thames Valley Police (Headquarters)

Slough has significantly higher levels of reported domestic abuse when compared to other local authorities in the Thames Valley; Figure One shows both Milton Keynes and Reading have comparable levels to Slough.

There were almost 3,786 (1,191 crime and 2,595 non-crime) incidents being reported between January 2013 and December 2013, a slight increase from the previous year of 3,523 (1,218 crime and 2,305 non crime respectively). During this period it was found that approximately 40% of victims had suffered domestic abuse previously and many had witnessed domestic abuse as a child. Over 90% of incidents take place in the home (see Appendix One for further information).

Impact on Children

The impact of domestic abuse resonates through the entire family who are involved or subjected to it. It is well established that one of the major drivers for young people entering the social care system is domestic violence in the household as the majority of incidents involve parents; 50% of incidents take place in families with a young child (0-16 years).

The level of domestic abuse in Slough places significant demand on resources of both Thames Valley Police and the local authority. Data provided by Slough Domestic Abuse Services who screen referrals made to the Early Response Hub shows that 506 referrals were made between January 2013 and December 2013

Data from the Children & Families Team Services shows that

- The average number of domestic related contacts to the Early Help Team is 2 per day,
- 63% of Domestic Abuse contacts were received from the Police,
- Of 1,233 Child in Need cases, 153 have a parental factor* of DV recorded,
- Of 252 Child Protection Cases, 57 have a parental factor* of DV recorded, and
- Of 198 Looked After Children cases, 70 have a parental factor* of DV recorded.

*NOTE: These cases have a Parental Factor of DV recorded on their records – it may not be the primary/secondary reason the children are CIN, CP or LAC.

6.4 Responding to Domestic Abuse

6.4.1 Domestic Abuse Strategy and Improvement Plan

Reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse remains one of the key priorities of the Safer Slough Partnership, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. In February 2013 Slough invited Standing Together, who promotes a coordinated, multi-agency community response to domestic violence, to advise the Safer Slough Partnership to identify key activities across the Partnership and voluntary sector to ensure that early and supportive interventions are achieved in an effective and joined up manner. Whilst many aspects of the service were found to be satisfactory, the overall performance of the Partnership was considered to be poor and a number of recommendations were made to help further strengthen our strategic planning and achieve improved outcomes from service providers.

The Domestic Abuse Improvement Plan has identified the following key actions:

- Identify a strategic lead (completed),
- Invest in a full time Domestic Abuse Coordinator (in progress,)
- Update the strategy and action plan (in progress),
- Map resources and local service provision in response to domestic abuse,
- Training amongst frontline key workers and partners to encourage reporting,
- Increase publicity and awareness.

Appendix Two outlines progress made against actions identified above.

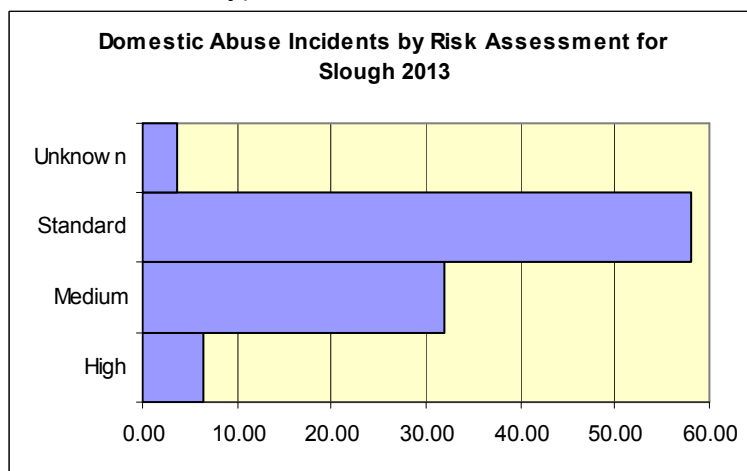
The Slough Borough Council domestic abuse strategy is currently being revised in light of the recommendations made by the review. The revised strategy will be underpinned by the four main principles outlined in the national Government Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG);

- **Prevent** violence against women and girls from happening in the first place, by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it, and intervening early to prevent it;
- Provide adequate levels of **support** where violence occurs;
- Work in **partnership** to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families;
- Take action to **reduce the risk** to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that **perpetrators are brought to justice**.

It is worth noting that Slough has extended the strategy to include male victims of domestic abuse.

6.4.2 Disclosure of domestic abuse and risk assessment

Figure Two: Percentage of Domestic Abuse Incidents by Risk Assessment Jan – Dec 2013 (reported to TVP only)



Source: Thames Valley Police (Headquarters)

Figure Two provides a breakdown of risk assessment for domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police during 2013 and is not reflective of the overall risk across the borough as victims can disclose domestic abuse in a variety of settings. For example, more than 50% of high risk referrals to the MARAC come from other agencies such as the Council, Probation and specialist domestic abuse agencies.,

It is worth noting that that the percentage breakdown of risk will vary by reporting agency; not all victims will choose to disclose domestic abuse to statutory agencies such as the Police. On average victims will experience domestic abuse 35 times before reporting it to the Police³. The Safer Slough Partnership in collaboration with Thames Valley Crimestopper's and other local agencies actively encourage reporting in order to provide earlier but targeted support to victims and prevent increased risk and injury.

Victims of domestic abuse can disclose abuse a variety of settings; Children Centres, Family Nurse Partnerships, Youth Services, Family Support, Home Start to name a few, and can also access specialised support in a similar partnership setting within different locations. The support services in place are client led; and in line with needs and to protect the safety of victims; access channels to support are also provided in a range of settings and in different locations

To complement the diverse reporting mechanisms in place, the Council provides training to frontline professionals working across Slough in either voluntary or statutory services who come into contact with victims of domestic abuse to

- encourage disclosure;
- recognise the signs of abuse;
- enable practitioners to carry out a DASH assessment; and
- to manage disclosures.

All frontline professional should be trained to carry out a DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) risk assessment; but uptake of training has been mixed.

³ http://safer.sthelens.gov.uk/SITEMANV2/publications/40/0901316LeafletsforDVVictims_3.pdf

In addition the Council in partnership with Chnces4Change have embarked upon a rolling programme of Mental Health and Domestic Abuse awareness training. The aim is to raise awareness amongst the Slough general public and to recruit volunteer community champions who could support their local community to increase reporting and signpost to local services.

Once a disclosure takes place, all victims, regardless of their risk level should be referred to a specialist organisation as risk can change quickly. Assessing a victims risk is based on three main strands

- **Professional judgement:** If a professional has serious concerns about a victim's situation.
- **Visible High Risk:** the number of 'ticks' on the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) checklist. 14 or more ticks normally meet the MARAC referral criteria as the client is deemed as high risk
- **Potential Escalation:** for example the number of police callouts or when the victim perceives the abuse to be escalating.

Depending on the risk level; a range of actions can take place to address to bring about an immediate reduction in risk as well as the long term issues of safety.

6.4.3 Responding to victims of domestic abuse

Figure Two highlights that just under 7% of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police are high risk; for high risk victims of domestic abuse the following services are in place:

- **Multi-agency referral assessment and coordination (MARAC)** for high risk victims of domestic abuse. The MARAC is a monthly multi agency meeting, which focuses on the safety of victims of domestic abuse identified as being at high risk. The identification of high risk victims of domestic abuse has been made possible by the use of a risk identification checklist called DASH. Between April and December 2013, 161 high risk cases have been discussed at the MARAC.

In a single meeting, the MARAC combines up to date risk information with a timely assessment of a victim's needs and links those directly to the provision of appropriate services for all those involved in a domestic abuse case: victim, children and perpetrator.

- **Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs);** IDVAs provide support to those victims deemed at a high risk of further serious harm and provide intensive and practical support for an average period of three months. They will support clients throughout the court system where necessary and ensure a multi-agency approach to support is in place. They will be the voice of the victim at the MARAC and ensure the focus of the meeting is on client safety. IDVAs normally work with their clients from point of crisis to assess and monitor the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans
- **Refuge accommodation:** This is for victims and dependents who become homeless because of abuse, violence or threats can need to access a safe place in another part of the country place.

Figure Two highlights that just from the numbers reported to the Police; under 32% of domestic abuse incidents are of medium risk with the majority being of standard risk(60%) ; for medium to standard risk victim support is accessed through the:

- **Advocacy and Outreach Support** for clients of medium to standard risk; this provides one to one tailored support to victims of Domestic Abuse living in the Slough area. Each situation is completely unique and safety and support plans will be developed according to the individual dynamics of each client. Outreach Workers focus on the long term safety and wellbeing of clients and seek to empower them helping to increase independence, self confidence and their understanding of Domestic Abuse.
- **Freedom Programme**, a free 12-week rolling programme providing women with the opportunity to explore the realities of Domestic Abuse and learn how to recognise the signs of an abusive relationship. It is a safe environment for women to share their experiences and meet others who have experienced similar situations. The programme seeks to empower women through knowledge and understanding. The Freedom programme is provided in English and Punjabi and is delivered through the Sure Start Centres in Slough.
- **Resettlement Support** offered for survivors moving out of a refuge and offer advice and assistance in setting utilities, changing address, budgeting support, sustainment of tenancy and advice and assistance to help survivors rebuild their life.

6.4.4 Victim services

Support for victims of domestic abuse in Slough is provided by two agencies, Slough Domestic Abuse and Berkshire East & South Bucks Women's Aid; the former commissioned by Slough Borough Council, whereas the latter covers a wider geographical area and is independently funded.

In 2012 Stonham (part of Home Group Ltd), were commissioned to provide Advocacy and Outreach service, refuge accommodation and associated support under the operating name of Slough Domestic Abuse Services. Since the launch of the new service, Slough Domestic Abuse Services, 201 victims of domestic abuse have accessed the service, of which 46% are high risk. Referrals have primarily come from Social Services (as 151 victims have children with a social care status). 37 women and 31 children have accessed the refuge service and 59 women have accessed the Freedom Programme. Appendix One highlights the types of interventions accessed by victims of domestic abuse with Slough Domestic Abuse Services.

Berkshire East and South Bucks Women's Aid (BESBWA) also support victims of domestic abuse in Slough; and between April 2013 and October 2013, supported 302 domestic abuse victims through the IDVA service. The number of Children supported through their specialist Children Service between September 2012 and October 2013 is equal to 129 through one to one, and 1,185 through group works and workshops. In addition BESBWA supported 12 male and 33 females through their refuge service (September 2012 and October 2013). Outcomes from the commissioned services are listed in Appendix Four.

6.4.5 Addressing perpetrator behaviour

In 2012 Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP), was commissioned to provide support programmes to perpetrators of domestic violence. The service provided by DVIP supports residents who are abusive to their partner and want to change their behaviour. Clients can self refer or can be referred by another agency. The support available includes group work programme for men to explore their use of abuse within relationships, its effect on partners and children, and how to make behavioural changes. Within the first 12 months of the perpetrator programme, 53 perpetrators have been referred to the service. After an initial assessment to test clients motivation and suitability; 22 people were offered to start the 26 week programme. Another 8 received one to one support, From the 53 referrals, 16 were not appropriate or where the client chose to disengage. As well as working with the perpetrator DVIP provide support to partners during the programme through the Womens Support Worker; 34 women have accessed this service. Appendix One profiles the demographics of perpetrators accessing this service.

6.5 Challenges

- The commissioned services have been contracted until September 2016 with the option of extending the contract for another two years by one year periods. In light of the financial and demographic pressures being faced by the Council; any reduction in funding may impact the quality and quantity of provision leading to serious implications for victims. There may be increased levels of violence as victims are turned away, more homicides, and more forced marriages. Consideration must be given to the commissioning intentions of neighboring authorities as this can negatively impact capacity in Slough. A Thames Valley Domestic Abuse Steering Group has been set up to monitor this but to also consider cross boarder commissioning.
- Changes in legal aid have also affected victims of domestic abuse through shifting the burden of proof and making it harder for vulnerable people to seek justice and challenge public body decisions. From April 2013, the scope of services covered by legal aid was reduced significantly and legal aid support was withdrawn for the most frequently-seen family disputes. Instead legal aid funding has been limited to cases involving issues of domestic abuse but crucially legal aid is only available to domestic abuse victims if the individual can produce *evidence* of such violence occurring.
- Data provided by Thames Valley Police show that 2748 children were linked to domestic abuse between April and September 2013. During this period, 19 children were victims of domestic abuse. Children can experience domestic abuse through witnessing the abuse, be physically abused themselves, hear it from another room, or see their parent's injuries afterwards. The effects can include children becoming fearful or distressed and in the longer term, experience domestic abuse within their own relationships. The commissioned services are not set up to provide support to children, although exploratory work is being piloted with Child, Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- Appendix One compares the ethnicity of victims of domestic abuse accessing services against victims who are reported to Thames Valley Police. The chart shows a strong correlation between the two sources, but identifies a differential between the White Other population. Both Slough Domestic Abuse Services and

Berkshire East and South Bucks Women's Aid provide outreach and advocacy services in a range of Asian and Eastern European languages and it is expected that this gap will close as more victims and partners become aware.

- Anecdotal evidence shows an increase in child to parent and child to child abuse; currently there is no service commissioned to provide support to perpetrators under the age of 17 years. An audit has been commissioned for 2014 to validate the types of abuse experienced by Slough residents.

7 **Conclusion**

Slough has comparatively high levels of domestic abuse and this abuse is having a significant impact on local resources in Slough. Early indications show that the services in place are leading to better outcomes for the protection of victims in particular adults with further analysis required to understand how the needs of children and young people can be met.

8 **Appendices**

- 1 - Domestic Abuse statistics
- 2 - Domestic Abuse Improvement Plan
- 3 - Outcomes from commissioned services

9 **Background Papers**

Data was provided by Slough Borough Council, Thames Valley Police and Slough Domestic Abuse Service, and Berkshire East & South Bucks Women's Aid.