

Scrutiny Committee

28 July 2016

The County Council's role in working with partners to tackle domestic abuse in Suffolk

Summary

1. Domestic abuse can have a devastating and long term effect on the lives of victims, their children and the communities in which they live. It can ruin lives, break apart families and have an impact across generations. A multitude of public sector services, voluntary and community sector organisations may come into contact with or have a role to play in addressing the issues associated with domestic abuse. It is important that these organisations understand how they can work together to focus collective efforts and available resources to reduce the impact and prevalence of domestic abuse in Suffolk.

Objective of Scrutiny

2. The objective of this item is to consider the County Council's role in and contribution to working with partner organisations to tackle domestic abuse in Suffolk.

Scrutiny Focus

3. The scope of this scrutiny has been developed to provide the Committee with information to come to a view on the following key questions:
 - a) What is the County Council's role in tackling domestic abuse?
 - b) Who are the key partners in this work?
 - c) What are the findings of the Suffolk Domestic Abuse Interim Report February – June 2016?
 - d) How will the recommendations from the review be taken forward and what are the timescales for this?
 - e) What are the key opportunities and challenges and how are these being addressed?

How does this relate to County Council priorities?

4. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council's corporate priorities as indicated below. All scrutiny items should consider how well they are delivering against the County Council priorities and Suffolk's Community Strategy.

Suffolk County Council's Corporate Priorities	Link to this Scrutiny
Raise educational attainment and skill levels	
Support the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to increase economic growth	
Maintain roads and developing Suffolk's infrastructure	
Support those most vulnerable in our communities	✓
Empower local communities	

5. Having considered the information, the Committee may wish to:
- a) make recommendations to Cabinet Member for Health and Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Board;
 - b) make recommendations to Director of Public Health and/or Corporate Director, Children and Adults;
 - c) seek to influence partner organisations;
 - d) identify issues which may benefit from further scrutiny;
 - e) seek further information.

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Background

6. The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is: “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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”. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse.
7. The Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2015-18 “A Partnership Strategy for Suffolk” estimates domestic abuse costs Suffolk over £26 million, excluding physical and emotional costs. The Strategy highlights the need for a partnership approach to tackling this issue. The strategy acknowledges there has been a lack of clarity about the commissioning of services which have a role in tackling domestic abuse, and a failure of some agencies to work together, which has led to some duplication and overlap across the system.
8. The Strategy sets out a number of recommendations for actions to develop a more co-ordinated approach to tackling domestic abuse, through a multi-agency approach focused upon the principles of prevention and early intervention, provision of services, partnership working, justice responses and risk reduction.
9. On 24 April 2015, the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel considered a report written by Dr Emma Bond of University Campus Suffolk (UCS) “Understanding domestic abuse in Suffolk: a study of the experiences of survivors” (see Supporting Information section for further details).

10. The members of the Panel recognised a need to find better ways of dealing with the problem of domestic abuse, and of supporting victims. The Panel heard that the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had asked the Constabulary to produce an Action Plan for tackling domestic abuse by September 2015. However, the Panel was aware that many of the issues highlighted in the report related to agencies outside the remit of the PCC. The Panel was concerned to hear there appeared to be a reluctance to address the issues highlighted in the report relating to the services provided by the County Council, and therefore recommended that the County Council's Scrutiny Committee should be asked to scrutinise the Council's performance with regard to domestic abuse.
11. In July 2015, the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board set up the "Safer Stronger Communities Group (SSCG)", a partnership formed of key community safety partners cross Suffolk, to identify those issues which require a whole system approach. The Group identified tackling domestic abuse as one of its four key priorities. The SSCG commissioned a "deep dive" review of the arrangements in place for keeping domestic abuse victims and their families safe and reducing offending across the Suffolk system. The review was undertaken between January and June 2016, and was informed by a series of workshops with members of the Suffolk Domestic Abuse Partnership, individual meetings with a range of public and voluntary and community sector organisations, and also captures some experiences from those who have been the victims of domestic abuse. The report written as a result of this review is attached at **Evidence Set 1**.
12. The report highlights a number of areas which require further investigation and makes a series of recommendations which will form a multi-agency action plan.
13. The report will be considered by the SSCG and will be taken to the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board for consideration in September. Individual services and organisations are encouraged to consider the content of the report and their response.

Main body of evidence

Evidence Set 1 - Domestic Abuse Interim Report February – June 2016, has been provided by Sara Blake, Head of Localities and Partnerships, Suffolk County Council.

Representatives of the following have been invited to provide evidence at the meeting:

- Member with Special Responsibility for Stronger Families, Suffolk County Council
- Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner
- Suffolk Constabulary
- Adult Safeguarding
- Local Safeguarding Children's Board
- Adult and Community Services
- Children and Young People's Services
- Suffolk Troubled Families Initiative
- Anglia Care Trust
- Lighthouse
- SafeLives

Supporting information

Institute for Social, Educational and Enterprise Development (UCS); (March 2015);
Understanding domestic abuse in Suffolk – A study of the experiences of survivors:
Available from:

<https://www.ucs.ac.uk/About/News/UnderstandingDomesticAbuseInSuffolk.pdf>

Glossary

ACS – Adult and Community Services

APVA – Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

BME – Black, Minority and Ethnic

CAF – Common Assessment Framework

CJS – Criminal Justice System

CSE – Child Sexual Exploitation

CSPs – Community Safety Partnerships

CYPS – Children and Young People’s Services

DHR – Domestic Homicide Review

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation

HBV – Honour Based Violence

HRS – Housing Related Support

IDVA – Independent Domestic Violence Adviser

LSCB – Local Safeguarding Children’s Board

MARAC – Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference

MASH – Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

NRPF – No Recourse to public funds

OFSTED – Office for Standards in Education

PCCs – Police and Crime Commissioners

PSHE – Personal Social and Health Education

SDAP – Suffolk Domestic Abuse Partnership

SSCG – Safer and Stronger Communities Group

UCS – University Campus Suffolk

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector