

Report of the Cabinet Member

Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services

I have been asked by Councillor Hannaford to report on the work being done by the County Council with others to provide help and support for people experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Including since the new Splitz model was introduced how many women, men, and children have we been involved with each year. Also the Council's take and analysis on some of the key challenges, such as better access to legal aid for domestic violence clients, delayed access to support services, the ongoing national closures of women's refuges, budget cuts, the introduction of universal credit, and the new legislation on domestic violence that specifically relates to children.

Response

Over the past two years, Devon County Council and our partners have collectively developed a Devon DSVA (Domestic, Sexual Violence and Abuse) strategy that sets out a vision to *end domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Devon*: from prevention through to recovery and resilience and from supporting individuals to taking action at a societal level.

Our strategy and five year action plan can be found at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/dsva/the-dsva-strategy-and-action-plan/>. A multi-agency DSVA Strategy and Delivery group has been established to oversee the implementation of the action plan and is accountable to the Safer Devon Partnership.

Devon Domestic Abuse Support Service (DDASS)

The total commissioning budget is approximately £800,000 per annum. The majority of this funding comes from the Public Health Grant. This represents only a small proportion of the overall resources spent on domestic sexual violence and abuse across the system, with a significant proportion raised by the specialist domestic violence and abuse voluntary sector in Devon.

Splitz Support Service has been commissioned by Devon County Council to deliver the Devon Domestic Abuse Support Service since April 2014 which safeguards and supports adult victims of domestic violence and abuse. The outcomes for victims as monitored by the national organisation SafeLives has been consistently above the national average, with well over 95% of clients being satisfied with the service.

The activity of the service is shown below:

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Victims	235 high risk 1229 medium risk	291 high risk 1144 medium risk 64 help desk	1097 high risk 779 medium risk 22 help desk
Perpetrators	26	18	45
Children	267	219	72

The activity is not directly comparable from year to year because the service has had to adapt to changes in external funding over this period, for example one-off grants from the

Ministry of Justice and the Home Office have ended and the service has had to accommodate this.

The original perpetrator programme was decommissioned due to lower than expected uptake and since 2016-17 has been funded by Devon Domestic Abuse Support Services (Splitz Support Service) from other funding sources.

Despite the excellent service provided locally by Devon Domestic Abuse support Services and a thriving Alliance of statutory and third sector partners, which has resulted in several recent major grants to Devon to promote innovation, there are still challenges:

Children and young people

Witnessing domestic abuse is a frequent cause of stress in children and can manifest itself as an emotional or behavioural problems in school. The Early Help for Mental Health (EH4MH) programme is working with schools and academies across Devon to enable them to recognise and support children in this situation.

Devon Domestic Abuse Support Service provides support to children at high risk when the parent consents to engage with the service, but also monitors the outcomes of MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) and MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub) enquiries.

Devon Domestic Abuse Service works with many other agencies to provide training and support, for example to schools through the roll-out of operation ENCOMPASS, where police notifying a child's school of a domestic abuse incident first thing the following morning so that the school can provide support to the child and family.

Children's social services and Early Help have no dedicated support commissioned for children and young people, but recently a successful partnership bid to the Department of Communities and Local Government by a range of partners led to North Devon District Council to provide more integrated support.

Legal aid

There is some concern from local services that children may not be protected from an abusive parent because legal advice is not available or affordable to some victims. To help in this situation, Splitz and North Devon Against Domestic Abuse (NDADA) have just completed a new TALK toolkit aimed at parents struggling with a child contact, which has had input from a local family solicitor.

Universal Credit

The introduction of Universal Credit presents a number of issues for victims of domestic violence and abuse.

- Universal Credit can only have one claimant named, whereas currently the system allows joint claims. This will mean more victims could be exposed to financial abuse.
- Currently in the areas in the UK where Universal Credit is in operation, claimants are waiting 6-8 weeks for an initial payment. This could mean that victims will not feel safe enough to leave dangerous relationships, particularly if children are involved, due inevitable poverty.

- Universal Credit caps benefits at £500 each week this will mean that women with three or more children may not have sufficient money to pay the rent in refuges as they will also have to pay for their original property from Universal Credit.

Safe accommodation

Devon has been developing a Places of Safety model since 2016. This is a partnership between Devon Domestic Abuse Support Services, Housing Options and the eight district housing authorities. The model provides housing units across the county that offer 12 week accommodation, on licence, to victims, regardless of gender, children or complex needs. Devon Domestic Abuse Support Service provides wrap-around support to the victims. There are currently two places of safety, with the aim to expand to six places by the end of July 2018.

Residents are currently entitled to claim housing benefit when occupying the refuge or Places of Safety units and this money goes part of the way to paying the rent. Universal Credit does not allow for short stays and regular changes to rent and therefore DCLG & DWP have proposed that short-term supported accommodation (including refuges) are funded via a ring-fenced grant to local authorities from 2020. The report can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-for-supported-housing>

There is one voluntary sector-funded refuge in North Devon operated by North Devon Against Domestic Abuse (NDADA) which can accommodate eight women and 17 children at any one time. Typically 40% of residents are from outside Devon. However, it is almost always full and is often approached to provide a response to crisis at evenings and weekends.

Domestic Homicides

It is a statutory responsibility of Community Safety Partnerships to undertake domestic homicide reviews. Currently, Devon County Council undertakes these on behalf of the District Councils. The statutory guidance was updated last December to include suicides where domestic abuse may be a factor, which has involved close working with HM Coroner. The cumulative workload associated with these complex independent reviews has increased significantly, although the incidence is relatively stable at approximately two homicides per year. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is currently undertaking a review of arrangements across Devon and Cornwall.

Councillor Roger Croad

Cabinet Member

Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services