

Domestic Violence and Abuse and Early Help
Report of the Head of Public Health Nursing

1. Purpose

This report provides an update for Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee members on work to address domestic violence and abuse across Devon with a focus on Early Help arrangements.

2. Domestic abuse figures and trends

The Community Safety Strategic Assessment brings together key information to assess crime, disorder and safety issues across Devon, including domestic abuse. The Assessment for financial year 2019-20 shows a 3% increase in incidents recorded by police linked to domestic abuse in Devon (11,000 incidents, 16.8 incidents per 1,000 population) on the previous year. However, the Office for National Statistics notes that police figures in recent years have been greatly affected by better reporting and increased willingness of victims to seek support. The Crime Survey for England and Wales suggests that there has been little change in the prevalence of domestic abuse in recent years. In the quarter (July-September 2020) there was a small increase in domestic abuse crimes recorded compared to the same period in the previous year, but a small decrease in the number of domestic abuse incidents.

It is certainly the case that there has been a steady increase in referrals and requests into domestic abuse services for specialist support for victims of domestic abuse in Devon in recent years, and a sharp increase since the Spring COVID-19 lockdown.

The Specialist Domestic Abuse Support Service for Devon commissioned by Devon County Council and led by Splitz Support Service saw a 60% increase in calls in April 2020 compared to April 2019. The demand has since eased but is still around 50% higher than the previous year. An increase in the complexity of cases has intensified the pressure caused by the increase in volume of demand. This includes mental health and drug and alcohol issues being worsened by lockdown pressures, child contact issues, perpetrators moving back into the family home and other factors. The Council has responded to these pressures by allocating an additional £250k of funding from the COVID-19 emergency funding received from government. This will enable the service to increase capacity in its helpdesk and recruit additional IDVAs (specialist advisers).

There has also been a substantial increase in the number of professionals seeking advice on how to support families experiencing domestic abuse. Calls to the Professionals' Helpline increased from 1-2 per week to 60 per week during the Spring lockdown. This was largely from professionals supporting families with children. Temporary additional funding was allocated by the

Safer Devon Partnership to enable the creation of a professional consultation team to provide training for teams and individual case consultations.

Two thirds of cases receiving specialist domestic abuse support include children. The needs of children as witnesses and victims of domestic abuse are being addressed in a number of ways. The Operation Encompass initiative, which alerts a child's school the morning after the child was present at a police-attended domestic abuse incident, has seen a 38% annual increase in the number of calls to schools – over 500 calls per month on average. The initiative enables schools to provide appropriate support for children at the earliest possible opportunity, dependent upon the needs and wishes of the child.

3. Action to respond to Domestic Abuse

The association between intimate partner violence and child abuse are now well known. Significant attention is given to breaking cycles of abuse and our services are careful to not overlook the needs of children when much of the focus is on the needs of the parents. Our Early Help and statutory children's services practice a child centred approach. Children are listened to so that their perspectives and experiences are understood because we know that their experiences living with domestic abuse differ, and whilst all children need to be safe, their need for support and help varies. Our involvement ranges from child centred preventative planning, child focused protection planning, and alternative permanency planning where concerted efforts are made to move children to extended family members or connected people (where it's safe to do so) so that their strong sense of identity is maintained.

Several initiatives are under way to prevent domestic abuse by identifying and intervening early and reducing repeat victimisation and perpetration. Behaviour Change Advisers working within the Integrated Offender Management programme have achieved very positive results. The approach helps perpetrators to recognise the impact of their behaviour, take responsibility for it and change it. A pilot in the Exeter area showed a dramatic reduction in repeat incidents of abuse. The programme has been extended to North and South Devon. The behaviour change approach is also being trialled with young people who show harmful behaviour in their relationships. Again, this initiative relies on fixed term funding.

4. Responding to the increased demands of Covid

In addition to the £250k referred to in section 2, the Council has allocated £150k of COVID-19 emergency funding to strengthen the ability of the multi-agency Early Help locality teams to provide direct support to families experiencing domestic abuse where appropriate. Additional funds have also been allocated to enable locality teams to commission support for children and families to recover from the impact of abuse. This includes Pattern Changing, Parent-Child Recovery and counselling for young people. The funding is for a fixed term, pending evaluation of impact in April 2021.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Devon and Cornwall has recently been allocated over £400k by the Ministry of Justice to support a range of initiatives to reduce or prevent perpetration of domestic abuse. In Devon, the “Active Bystander Communities” initiative developed by Exeter University will be embedded by creating a group of trainers who can cascade the approach to local organisations and communities. The Active Bystander approach gives members of the community confidence and techniques to speak up and challenge attitudes and behaviours that lead to domestic abuse.

Devon’s Vision for Ending Domestic and Sexual Violence abuse includes a clear focus on increasing the ability of front-line professionals across the public sector to identify and respond to signs of abuse: “making domestic abuse everyone’s business”. Devon is testing and evaluating the innovative CRAFT (<https://crafttraininganddevelopment.co.uk/>) framework for identifying, assessing and working with relationship conflict, violence and abuse. CRAFT builds skills and confidence of practitioners who are already supporting other family needs including Children’s Centres, Family Intervention Team and Together Drug and Alcohol Service. This work is also being extended to the Perinatal Mental Health Team. The CRAFT programme is benefiting from additional (but still fixed term) funding from the OPCC/Ministry of Justice.

Victims of domestic abuse are often frequent users of health services, which opens valuable opportunities to identify abuse and offer support. Devon has been trialling the nationally recognised IRIS approach, which embeds skills and capacity in GP practices to identify domestic and sexual abuse experienced by patients and offer support. The Devon trial covers only 30 GP practices with funding to March 2021. The Devon Clinical Commissioning Group is considering a business case for embedding the IRIS approach in all practices on a continuing basis.

The availability of safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and their children is affected by the severe shortage of affordable accommodation of all kinds. Devon’s district councils, within their duties to prevent homelessness, can provide temporary accommodation in some situations. Fixed term government funding has enabled the creation of three dedicated Places of Safety (2-bedroom flats) and two further sites are being discussed with a local housing association. The refuge run by North Devon Against Domestic Abuse has eight rooms (25 bed places). It is also important to enable victims and their children to remain safely in their own homes where this is appropriate, excluding the perpetrator. This approach is not always possible, but it can keep victims and their children close to their existing support networks, limiting trauma from separation and giving better opportunities for recovery.

5. Domestic Abuse Bill

At the moment, the Council has no specific statutory duty in the area of domestic abuse support services. The Domestic Abuse Bill currently before Parliament will introduce a new duty on the Council to provide domestic abuse support for victims and their children who are living in safe accommodation. To carry out this duty, the Council will be carrying out a need’s assessment,

cooperating with district councils and creating a new Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, leading to the creation and delivery of a strategy to provide that support. The duty will bring welcome new recurrent funding 4 from government for those specific types of support. However, it should be noted that most victims of domestic abuse seek and receive support when they are living in their communities. The broad range of initiatives listed above in prevention, action on perpetration, early intervention and recovery all take place within communities and have been made possible in Devon only through fixed term funding from a variety of local and national sources. Continuing to provide such services on a sustainable basis is a challenge to all members of the Safer Devon Partnership

6. Challenges and opportunities

Perpetrator work – our service system is orientated towards responding to victims of DVA rather than the people using violent and abusing behaviours. There is good work happening in Devon to safely explore ways of engaging with people to address their abuse behaviours, notably through CRAFT workforce development, Integrated Offender Manager Behaviour Change Pilot and, more recently, the Bystander Community Intervention to support citizens to safely challenge behaviours that can maintain a culture that gives rise to violence and abuse.

We know that domestic and sexual violence and abuse are experiences which are shown to contribute to poor health, physical and mental, social and economic outcomes for people. Colleagues across the system in Devon are increasingly exploring the value of ‘trauma informed systems’ to better understand what has happened to people and what matters to them in terms of their recovery and resilience.

Insufficient and inconsistent support for pattern changing is a valuable tool for helping victims of DVA to identify and address behaviours, vulnerability and risk factors which may contribute to them being involved in abuse relationships. Funding for this work is often from ad hoc, short term sources and results in it being difficult to build a coherent and consistent pathway of support.

There is a need to improve the availability and use of data and intelligence across the partnership – including building a real time understanding of the experiences of young people and feeding this data and intelligence into ongoing services and system development.

7. Sustainable funding for Early Help

Devon has seen an average 79.18% increase in demand for Early Help triage between March and October 2020 compared to 2019. Devon’s Early Help partnership response, through high frequency partnership triage meetings, has responded very effectively to increasing hidden harm, child poverty and financial hardship. To offer truly sustainable and impactful support to families, Early Help needs a secure workforce and to be able to plan for longer term delivery and outcomes. The Troubled Families Grant is fundamental to the

Early Help system budget, accounting for 51% of the Early Help system total spend in 2020/21. Some 44% of the staff team in Devon are funded through this grant and the annual renewal of the grant has inevitably impacted adversely on staff retention and longer-term planning for the system. This creates considerable risk to the sustainability of the work.

Devon County Council has worked hard to ensure that the 2021/22 local government settlement includes ringfenced funding for the Troubled Families programme so that Early Help services in Devon can continue to be delivered throughout the next financial year. There is a long-term funding commitment to the Troubled Families programme (or equivalent), ensuring that local authorities and partners are able to make long term sustainable plans to prevent children and families reaching 'crisis point', and support them to thrive into the future.

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Appendix A - Resources for children in Devon who have witnessed / experienced DV

Splitz- (including a young person's IDVA)- commissioned services County wide -available for Children 5+

Toolkits form Splitz for all professionals to use with 1-1 sessions or group sessions (year cohorts at schools for instance) for both primary aged children and secondary children.

North Devon against Domestic Abuse - North Devon

DART – Domestic Abuse Recovering Together- 7-14 year olds

Devon Rape Crisis- county wide - 13+

Children Centres (AFC) – County wide – under 8s

DACS Counselling (North Devon) – counselling for children aged 8 and over that have been affected by DV

South West Family Values (South -Teignbridge and South Hams) – Children's keep safe group and 1-1 sessions

Community Links – (West Devon- Okehampton and Tavistock) – 1-1 support for all children -mentoring / counselling sessions

SAFE -Stop Abuse for Everyone – Project 30- in Exeter and East Devon- all ages for children