

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel

Briefing Note

To: Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel **From:** Bev Houghton, Manager
Subject: Domestic Abuse **Dept:** Community Safety
Date: 15th October 2014

Overview

This briefing is to inform the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel of the many community safety initiatives dealing with issues of domestic abuse that are currently taking place in Redditch.

Domestic abuse involves the misuse of power to control an intimate partner or a family member. It can take the form of physical & sexual violence, intimidation, psychological abuse, social isolation and economic coercion. Abuse is often hidden and is rarely a one-off occurrence.

During 2013/14 the Police in Redditch recorded 744 crimes and incidents linked to domestic abuse and in the UK as a whole, almost 1 in 4 women and more than 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

The Community Safety Team, in partnership with other agencies, delivers various projects and campaigns throughout the year. The projects aim to provide direct support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse; promoting recognition, reporting and recovery.

Sanctuary Scheme

Since 2008, Redditch Sanctuary Scheme has delivered appropriate, relevant and cost-effective security advice and improvements at the homes of people who have left abusive relationships. The project seeks to help protect them from further victimisation, reduce the need to seek alternative accommodation and restore feelings of safety for survivors and their children.

The risk of harm to clients is known to increase as the abusive relationship ends and for some time afterwards. Perpetrators often visit the home of their former partner to continue the abuse and may seek to gain entry by force, intimidation or other tactics.

Referrals are received directly from clients and a wide range of agencies. Each case is assessed with appropriate multi-agency input and the security offered is tailored to the needs of the client, the circumstances of the property and the nature of the risk posed by the perpetrator.

Security upgrades include locks, door viewers, external lighting, fencing, replacement front and rear doors, external letterboxes and fire-proof letter bags. In high risk cases a "safe room" can be created inside the property by replacing an internal door with a high specification door that could withstand a sustained attack for a time period long enough for the victim to summon help.

Support is available to all residents irrespective of housing tenure, subject to landlord consent and it is also necessary for the perpetrator to have been excluded from the property before any improvements can be made.

Between April 2013 and March 2014 the Community Safety Team received 33 Sanctuary referrals from various agencies and organisations. As a result, security improvements at 26 properties were made at a cost of £8,936.88, with an average per case of £388.56.

At present the scheme is mainly funded by a grant from the West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner with additional support from some landlords, including Redditch Borough Council, on a case-by-case basis.

Figures below show the growth of the scheme since 2008/9 to the last financial year.

<u>Financial year</u>	<u>New cases where security improvements completed</u>
2008/09	3
2009/10	8
2010/11	10
2011/12	11
2012/13	13
2013/14	23

Feedback from clients is very positive and many describe the “liberating” effect that the improvements have, both for them and their children. There are a number of cases where it is known that the perpetrator has attended the property after security works have been completed and access has been prevented as a result.

In a small number of cases, we are aware that clients have resumed their relationship with the perpetrator after security improvements have been made. This pattern of behaviour is recognised in studies of Domestic Abuse as part of the long process some victims and survivors will go through in order to break free from abusive and controlling partners. Whilst it is concerning that a small number of clients may return to their relationship; it is right that if assessed as suitable, Sanctuary support is offered based on the applicant’s circumstances at the time of seeking help. This aspect of the project is fully considered throughout the risk assessment process.

Research undertaken following Freedom of Information requests in July 2014 shows that 7 households who received support from the scheme are also currently affected by the Housing Benefit under occupancy reduction (“bedroom tax”), none of whom receive Discretionary Housing Payment. This is two fewer households than in 2013 and it is known that in at least one case, the impact of Housing Benefit reductions has led to a client moving to alternative accommodation forfeiting the protection of the security improvements.

Workplace Domestic Abuse Policy

Development of a workplace policy follows a conference called “Domestic Abuse – The Hidden Cost to your Organisation” hosted by Worcestershire Forum against Domestic Abuse in October 2012 which was attended by Cllr Debbie Taylor and Lindsey Wood, Acting Human Resources Manager. The Community Safety Team has prepared a draft policy for consideration and adoption by both Councils; this has been passed to Human Resources for comment during August 2014.

The policy aims to promote consideration of the potential of Domestic Abuse as part of managing staff safety whilst at work; helping staff to spot the signs of abuse and promoting a sympathetic and effective response to any disclosures by staff.

The draft policy provides a checklist of practical actions that will allow colleagues and managers to assist staff who are affected by abuse; such as improving workplace security, adjusting job duties, protecting employee personal information and supporting financial independence.

The draft policy also states that any employee who is experiencing, or has experienced domestic abuse will not be discriminated against because of this, in terms of their existing employment or career development.

CRUSH Schools Programme

The CRUSH programme was developed by West Mercia Women's Aid and offers group support and empowerment for young people aged between 13 and 19 years, who have witnessed, experienced or are at risk of domestic abuse. The programme aims to help young people gain the skills and knowledge to be able to avoid abusive relationships and exit an abusive relationship safely. In addition, the project helps young people exposed to domestic abuse at home.

The programme is delivered to groups via a weekly session led by specialist, trained facilitators over a period of ten weeks.

Sarah Kelsey, Community Safety Project Officer, has qualified as a CRUSH facilitator and works with Middle and High Schools in Redditch and Bromsgrove to introduce the programme to the school curriculum. One aim is for the project to be delivered in all High Schools across Redditch and Bromsgrove by the end of the academic year.

Plans are in place to deliver the CRUSH programme at Arrow Vale Academy and Woodfield Middle School, in partnership with Early Help, from January 2015. Also, both Trinity High School and Tudor Grange High School have agreed to include the project in the 2015 curriculum; however, the delivery details are still being finalised.

An awareness session on healthy relationships and domestic violence will also take place at Ipsley Middle School in the New Year.

White Ribbon Campaign 2014

As in previous years and as part of the membership of the Worcestershire Forum against Domestic Abuse; the Council's Community Safety Team along with a number of local agencies will take public action to show opposition to all forms of domestic abuse, irrespective of the victim's gender.

The campaign begins on 25th November - UN International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women & White Ribbon Day and runs until the 10th December which is Human Rights Day and is symbolised by the White Ribbon.

By those involved publically showing that they recognise and oppose abuse, the campaign aims to encourage people experiencing domestic abuse to seek support and take actions to protect themselves. All the events that take place centre around one or more of the key campaign learning areas in the context of domestic abuse: recognition, reporting, recovery and access to support.

The theme of this year's campaign will again be "Step into Their Shoes", encouraging people to think about and empathise with the experiences of victims and survivors and how find out how they can support them. A number of activities have been organised including:

Worcestershire Heels Walk – Each year teams of men from across Worcestershire walk a mile around Redditch town centre wearing women's shoes to publicly show their opposition to domestic abuse. The participants carry placards, wear t-shirts and hand out literature showing the campaign messages. In 2013 approximately 30 men took part in the walk, supported by female volunteers and students from NEW College.

This year's Heels Walk will take place on Friday 28th November, with a briefing from 1pm and setting off at 2pm. Male Elected Members are welcome to participate in the walk and Female Elected members are welcome to join the support team accompanying the walkers. For further information or to sign up, please email saferrredditch@redditchbc.gov.uk.

White Ribbon Theatre – In 2013, the Council's Community Safety Team organised public theatre performances in the Kingfisher Centre. Actors told stories in character as survivors and a perpetrator of domestic abuse and performed these to members of the public. There was a strong response from members of the public, which led to good quality interactions and engagement with support services.

This year, the team has worked with colleagues in Wyre Forest to commission theatre performances in three High Schools across North Worcestershire with the aim of increasing knowledge and awareness of domestic abuse amongst teenagers. Between 200 and 300 young people aged 14-16 in each school will see the performances and take part in a variety of activities designed to challenge abusive beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.

The commission has been funded by West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner via North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership and performances will take place at the following locations:

Redditch – Tudor Grange Academy
Bromsgrove – Bromsgrove North High School
Wyre Forest – Baxter College

Step into Their Shoes – In schools where theatre performances are not taking place, the Community Safety Team will visit to deliver short assemblies on the impact of Domestic Abuse. During these visits the young people will also be encouraged to make a pledge and take a "Shoe Selfie". These photos will be used to help promote the campaign in the future.

Wearing the White Ribbon – as in previous years, the Community Safety Team and colleagues around Worcestershire will be wearing and distributing White Ribbons for people to show their support for the campaign.

Diamond Club for Black and other Minority Ethnic Communities

The Community Safety Team has commissioned Early Help to design and deliver a programme of support for women from black and other minority ethnic communities. The programme seeks to identify women who are thought to be at risk of experiencing domestic abuse, but who may not have recognised or disclosed this.

Participants attend group sessions with activities based on art therapy and life coaching to help them recognise the presence of controlling attitudes in relationships, abusive behaviour and identify the early signs of risk, offering access to additional support where required to enhance their own personal safety and that of their children.

Early Help have been delivering the Diamond Club for a number of years with some financial support from the Community Safety Partnership. Early Help Support workers identified a gap in provision for women from minority ethnic communities, for a variety of cultural and practical reasons, and the Community Safety Team sought funding from the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver a bespoke version of the project for minority ethnic women. By tailoring promotion and group activities to specific cultural groups, the project seeks to reduce cultural and practical barriers to minority ethnic women seeking support.

The project covers the North Worcestershire area and the first cohort was set up in Redditch in September 2014, working with the Polish community.

The project will seek to support 2 other cohorts from different community groups and in the longer term, will also help to identify and support the establishment of a network of community based mentors/champions, who could then go on to assist future service users and advocate on their behalf

The success of the pilot will be evaluated using practitioner and participant interviews, leading to detailed case studies and the identification of areas where agencies need to target further resources and/or improve service delivery.

For More Information

If you have any queries about any of the Domestic Abuse Initiatives highlighted, please contact

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