

SOLIHULL LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

REPORT TO SAFER COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP

1. Background

- 1.1 The LSCB held an annual conference in September 2009 and subsequently a group of professionals have met to consider what further work needs to be undertaken locally to improve service provision as well as the co-ordination of work to support victims of domestic abuse and in particular supporting female victims with children. The recently appointed Chair of Domestic Violence Strategic Group is a member of the LSCB and has been requested by the LSCB to formally present to the Safer Communities Strategic Group a report in respect of current local challenges with regard to domestic abuse training. This report also raises the other important issues in respect of the co-ordination of activity to support victims of domestic abuse.

2. Report

- 2.1 The LSCB is aware that the Safer Communities Strategic group is the lead strategic group within the Solihull Partnership for domestic violence, however, domestic abuse affects other strategic groups e.g. Children and Young People's Trust Board. The LSCB also has a particular interest in the issue of domestic abuse given the impact on children and young people's welfare of living with domestic abuse.
- 2.1 National and international research has consistently shown that domestic abuse will affect 1 in 4 women at some point in their lives. Locally, this means that around 25,000 women in Solihull have experienced or are now experiencing domestic abuse. Many of these women will have children, and studies have shown that where children are living in a household affected by domestic abuse, 75%-90% of these children will be in the same or the next room when the abuse takes place (Hughes, 1992; Abrahams, 1994).
- 2.3 Presence of domestic abuse is considered a powerful indicator of child physical abuse with estimates ranging that in between 30% to 66% cases of domestic abuse, child physical abuse was present (Hester et al, 2000; Edleson, 1999; Humphreys & Thiara, 2002). Unborn children are also affected by domestic abuse; research has shown that 30% of domestic abuse starts in pregnancy (Lewis & Drife, 2001 and McWilliams & McKiernon, 1993)
- 2.4 The DCSF biennial analysis of Serious Case Reviews (2005-7) found that over half of children subject to Serious Case reviews lived with past or present domestic abuse and fleeing domestic abuse was given as a reason for some children being continually on the move.

- 2.5 Locally, in July 2009, the LSCB established an inter-agency pilot involving children's social care, and police professionals (known as the triage model) to consider the safety and welfare of children and young people living with domestic abuse identified via police call. Staff from these agencies regularly meet to "screen" cases using an assessment tool established by Barnardos.
- 2.6 NSPCC research into the notification system (Stanley et al, 2010) supports the need for agencies to work together to share more information and calls for more supportive services for those children and families who do not reach the thresholds for receiving intervention from children's social care but for whom domestic abuse is a persistent feature of their lives. The research recommends that inter agency approaches to filtering notifications which involve staff sharing access to police and children's social care information should be further developed and evaluated.
- 2.7 The need for inter-professional training was also advocated as a means of ensuring that staff in all organisations are aware of the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and have knowledge of other agencies roles and procedures.
- 2.8 The "triage model" is currently being evaluated in Solihull and the report is scheduled to be presented to the LSCB in May 2010. It may well be that the evaluation contains further significant information in respect of future service provision for children and young people living with domestic abuse.
- 2.9 In its ensuring effectiveness work including audit activity in respect of children subject to Child Protection Plans, the LSCB has identified that domestic abuse is a key issue affecting the lives of children and young people and has highlighted this in its response to the Children and Young People's Plan Consultation.
- 2.10 However, as the Safer Communities Partnership is the lead strategic group the LSCB wants to bring to their Group's attention that;
- (i) A borough wide domestic abuse strategy is required.
 - (ii) A domestic abuse training programme including specific courses on the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people, is urgently required.
 - (iii) An agreed model (and good practice guidelines) to identify and respond to the needs of children and young people affected by domestic abuse (for use by anybody who works with children and young people) is required.
- 2.11 Some agencies including statutory members of the LSCB, as well as specialist services, have highlighted the need to ensure that there is an

effective infrastructure, coordination and communication across the Solihull Partnership so as to promote better outcomes for those affected by domestic abuse. This includes ensuring appropriate representation at the domestic violence strategic group and consultation in respect of key documentation.

2.12 The LSCB has also been made aware of the limited capacity of services providing support to victims e.g. Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid's Floating Support service typically has a waiting list of around 25 women for a service with just 2 workers. Furthermore, the local refuge operates to capacity. Whilst the Sanctuary support scheme provides a "signposting service" it does not provide a support service and more recently the borough no longer benefits from having an IDVA. In light of the LSCB wishes to bring to the attention of the Safer Communities Partnership that:-

- (i) The Terms of Reference (including the reporting and membership) arrangements of the Domestic Violence Strategic Group need to be reviewed so as to promote a co-ordinated response to domestic abuse across the Solihull Partnership.
- (ii) Data collection should include children and young people affected by domestic abuse.
- (iii) Significant gaps exist in terms of local service provision for victims of domestic abuse and therefore sustaining and developing specialist domestic abuse services is recommended as a priority area of business.

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Safer Communities Partnership is asked to note the contents of this Report and to formally advise the LSCB of its response to the issues raised.

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