

**Report of the Chief Executive**

**DOMESTIC ABUSE**

1. Purpose of report

To inform the committee of the Council's domestic abuse provision.

2. Detail

A new Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator was appointed on 24 March 2020. The Officer is based in the Housing Options Team in the Housing department.

Over the last nine months working practices have needed to be amended to ensure that service provision could continue whilst adhering to government Covid-19 guidelines. Despite these challenges, the Officer has both delivered a supportive and effective service, as well as developing and improving how the service is delivered.

The model for provision is based on close partnership working with other agencies, and the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator acting as a single point of contact to liaise between survivors of domestic abuse, Council department's and other professionals involved.

Details of the service, including the provision of refuge accommodation and the sanctuary scheme can be found in the appendix.

3. Financial implications

The post of Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator is funded by the General Fund.

**Recommendation**

**The Committee is asked to NOTE the report.**

Background papers

Nil

**APPENDIX****Housing Service**

The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator, based within the Housing Options Team is responsible for providing a sensitive, person centred, discrete service for domestic abuse survivors. The Officer liaises between clients, teams within Housing and partner agencies to coordinate the Council's response to domestic abuse and raise the profile of the issue internally and externally through partnerships initiatives.

The main role for the Council in domestic abuse cases is to provide advice and assistance to those fleeing violence and requesting rehousing support. The Housing Options Team are the team that manage those cases where the approach is made. The Team ensure that the survivor is aware of their options and provide advice and assistance in accordance with the Council's Homeless duties. This could include assisting the survivor to find emergency rehousing in a refuge.

The Housing Options Team ensure that these cases are managed sensitively and that all appropriate referrals are made. Safe areas are risk assessed by all departments and other agencies where necessary to determine the safest place for the survivor and their family to reside.

**Partner Agencies**

The Council work with Juno, Equation, Broxtowe Women's Project, other Local Authorities, Police, Fire Service, Social Services, Change, Grow, Live (CGL), Supported Accommodation providers, medical professionals and anyone else working with survivors of domestic abuse, which can vary on a case by case basis.

The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator acts as a single point of contact to liaise between survivors, other teams within the Council and other professionals involved. After obtaining consent the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator will share information with other professionals to explain what an individual's housing options are and how we can best assist them in their situation. If approached directly by a survivor the Council can refer to Domestic Abuse charities co-ordinating access to assistance and additional support for a survivor and their family.

**Refuge accommodation**

When emergency housing is required, refuge accommodation is recommended to allow the survivor to receive the support they need alongside receipt of temporary housing, this is accessed by calling the Women's Aid helpline to access current available spaces in refuge. This can be accessed anywhere in the country depending on availability.

If needed schemes such as 'rail to refuge' can be accessed to facilitate travel to a place of safety or taxi when a survivor remains in the county. Refuge allows individuals to obtain a place of safety not known to the perpetrator and remains completely confidential to safeguard the survivor. Whilst accessing refuge the survivor is able to continue to access the HomeSearch scheme and the Housing

Options Team, even though they may no longer be in the local area to help them find suitable and sustainable accommodation.

### **Sanctuary Scheme**

The Sanctuary Scheme is co-ordinated by the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator. Referrals are welcomed by any professional working with a survivor of domestic abuse and actioned the same day. Initial contact is made and immediate interventions, such as emergency lock changes, are agreed straight away and a telephone assessment of the referral within 24 hours where possible. Sanctuary Scheme works are completed in accordance with the Sanctuary Scheme Policy.

A site assessment is arranged where appropriate, to ascertain the need for additional security interventions that ensure the safety and wellbeing of the survivor to remain in their current home. This can be a social housing property, owned, or privately rented. When the Council do not own the property, permission is sought from the property owner before work can commence. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator is trained to assess properties, without the need for additional intervention.

The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator and the Housing Repairs team work in partnership to ensure works are carried out without unnecessary delay. At every step of the process both the survivor, referrer and any other domestic abuse or support agency involved are communicated to and asked for feedback when completed.

Between March 2020 and September 2020, 11 cases of sanctuary interventions have been successfully implemented. Currently average response times for Sanctuary urgent intervention is 24 hours. Length of time to complete the interventions needed varies depending on the professional contractors needed to carry out the works.

### **MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)**

Every two weeks the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator represents Broxtowe Borough Council at MARAC, presenting research available on the Council's information systems and discussing actions and service implementation for cases within the area. MARAC includes all domestic abuse charities, Police, Children's Services, Social Services, Medical Professionals, CGL, Support Services and other Local Authorities, working together to agree a plan of action to enhance the safety of domestic abuse survivors and their families.

### **Make a Stand**

The Chartered Institute of Housing introduced Make a Stand as three pledges housing providers can make to tackle rising domestic abuse. The pledges are to:

- Make information about national and local domestic abuse support services available on the website and other appropriate places so that they are easily accessible for staff, members customers and clients
- Put into place a HR policy, or amend an existing policy, to support members of staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse

- Appoint a champion at a senior level in the organisation to own the activity to support people experiencing domestic abuse and promote the campaign with your members, customers or clients.

This runs alongside the White Ribbon campaign and alongside the work that is taking place on a multi-agency basis. As part of the referral and service process survivors are made aware of the services available to them and where appropriate referred into any applicable service.

### **Workforce Policy**

A review of the Council's Domestic Abuse Policy commenced in 2019.

An updated policy has been submitted for consideration to elected Members and the Trade Unions at the next Local Joint Consultative Committee in November. Should the policy be agreed, it will then be subject to ratification at the Personnel Committee on 1 December 2020.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on the service**

Throughout Covid-19 lockdown the Council continued to provide its support and projects to assist survivors of domestic abuse.

Some of the initiatives have had to change and adapt, such as more support being provided over the phone and meetings and events taking place virtually.

The White Ribbon days of action are still being planned, with an emphasis on using more virtual technologies and methods of engagement rather than the more traditional events that have taken place in previous years.

It is recognised that the Coronavirus lockdown has had a potentially disproportionate impact on those suffering domestic abuse, so it is important that the Council's promotion and supportive approach to tackling this issue has continued.

Although the Council have seen a rise in domestic abuse cases, having a single point of contact for agencies and a clear line of communication has helped us provide a clear and consistent service throughout this difficult period.