

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 1 October 2020

PRESENT: Councillors Ben Curran (Chair), Tim Huggan (Deputy Chair), Sue Auckland, Penny Baker, Dawn Dale, Karen McGowan, Peter Price, Kaltum Rivers, Andrew Sangar, Richard Shaw and Adam Hurst

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Anne Murphy.
- 1.2 The Chair wished to say a few words around the sad passing of fellow Councillor Pat Midgley. A minute's silence was held in her memory.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

- 2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 No interests were declared at this meeting.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th February 2020, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

- 5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. UPDATE ON DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE DURING COVID 19

- 6.1 The Committee received a report providing an update of the current situation with regards to Domestic and Sexual Abuse and the impact on these issues during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 6.2 Present at the meeting was Alison Higgins, Strategic Commissioning Manager for Domestic and Sexual Abuse, along with Ann Ellis of Sheffield City Council, Fozia Shabir and Julie o' Rourke of Sheffield Women's Aid, Sam Goulding of IDAS and Ghazala Razzaq and Shireen Rehman of Roshni, Sheffield Asian Women's Resource Centre. Cabinet member Councillor George Lindars-Hammond was also in attendance as the portfolio lead.
- 6.3 Alison Higgins outlined the report and gave the background information. Sheffield over the years had done a lot of work around Domestic Violence and had seen

- vast improvements over the last 10 years. It was advised that abuse referrals were down over the lockdown period, however as the lockdown was eased referrals started to rise. IDAS had received 110 referrals per week. Cohesive control was on the rise and had been brought into focus over the lockdown period as more family and friends were now reporting issues on the behalf of other people. It was advised that children were also involved in this. The lockdown had the unintentional effect of enabling perpetrators of domestic abuse to increase over their victims/survivors, and their children who were not at school.
- 6.4 Homelessness preventions from March to July this year where the main reason was loss of home due to domestic abuse rose by 28.4% from the same period last year: 211 presentations in 2019 and 271 in 2020.
- 6.5 The Sheffield Safeguarding Hub for reporting concerns about children saw a reduction in contact from 2130 in February this year to 1682 in May. However, domestic abuse cases rose from 22% of contacts in February to 29% in May.
- 6.6 The committee were advised that there had been a rise in support for LGBT people as contact had increased over lockdown from 2.6% to 3.8%.
- 6.7 Council staff could also be experiencing issues whilst working from home and all managers were checking in on staff regularly. Employees that were experiencing domestic abuse may be more at risk of isolation and the abuser using lockdown to control them further.
- 6.8 It was advised that the proportion of service users who are BAME had fallen during lockdown. The pandemic and lockdown had potentially increased barriers to accessing support amongst the BAME community. The higher level of incidence of Covid 19 in the BAME community had also raised issues of the risk of isolation and coercive control by family members could be heightened as they argued that the victim/survivor should not leave the home to go to work in fear of them being exposed to Covid in the workplace.
- 6.9 There was a voluntary programme for perpetrators called Inspire to Change and this had seen increased issues for their clients with regards to substance misuse during the pandemic. There had also been a large rise in referrals relating to alcohol especially during the bank holiday periods of lockdown. The service was running online drop ins and had posted lots of digital content and videos via its YouTube channel, it was advised uptake was positive.
- 6.10 The impact on lockdown was likely to be felt for some time for people impacted by domestic and sexual abuse, it was expected that service capacity would come under pressure for several months at least. Voluntary sector services and specialist teams in statutory services had been responsive and flexible during the pandemic. Domestic and sexual abuse was not created by the pandemic of all ages and whilst these issues had no doubt had terrible impacts on individuals during lockdown, but they did so beforehand as well. The services needed to continue with developing joined up multi agency responses to domestic and sexual abuse that takes heed of emerging best practice and take a whole family approach.

6.11 Members of the committee made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were given as follows: -

- The Council were currently working on a page on the website which would include all the SCC policies, this would then report through to other agencies throughout Sheffield.
- Roshni reported that no extra support had been provided to them throughout the pandemic, however they were in talks with the council with regards to trying to get any spend reimbursed. It was advised that Roshni were trying to recruit a part-time Community Worker. They had suffered staff shortages and any extra support and funding would be welcome.
- In terms of pregnant women, guidance states that midwives should see Mum at least 3 times alone to ask questions and this is something that would be brought up with health colleagues. It was advised that there were local helplines run by IDAS available between 8am-7pm, however they were currently trying to extend these hours. There was national helpline, however this would only signpost people to local services.
- It was advised that capacity for safe zones was a concern. It had been identified that there was a gap in funding for men. A new service would be launching next week for men to use and their needs would be reviewed over the next 6 months. Conversation were taking place with the cabinet member to hopefully secure more funding going into next year.
- IDAS and Roshni worked closely together and this helped to offer different refuge areas to women. There was still work to be done in pulling organisations together.
- Safe accommodation was under pressure and conversations were happening with the cabinet member about commissioning services, funding was tight, but was being protected. The Council would do what it could, and the cabinet member was an advocate for this. There was still a lot of work to be done but encouraging things could be seen from government.
- A lot of work was being done with the perpetrators and work on coercive control. Training was being rolled out by IDAS and work was being done with the police on identifying issues. It was advised that if a perpetrator was convicted in court then the probation service would commission a programme. De-hood boxing club had also received funding to do some work with young men/boys.
- Work programmes are being offered in school around coercive control and how young people could challenge bad behaviour. Chaucer School were currently rolling out the programme. The Council were also working with Learn Sheffield and there was information on their website around domestic violence and bullying.

- 10 notice boards regarding information on Domestic and Sexual Abuse were available around the City and these would be periodically moved to different locations. Councillors could get in touch with Sam Goulding directly to let her know where they could be placed within the different wards in Sheffield.
- The key challenges going forward was funding for men that comes to end in March 2021 and political support would be greatly received for more funding for all the services.
- In terms of abuse towards children, it was advised that no increase had been seen over the period.

6.12 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee (1) notes the issues caused by the Covid crisis and the implications relating to the impact on services relating to domestic and sexual abuse and (2) expresses its thanks to all the attendees for their all the hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic. They also wished to extend their thanks to their respective wider teams.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

- 7.1 The Committee received an update of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Deborah Glen), who apologised for the lack of a formal work programme, this was still work in progress.
- 7.2 The Policy and Improvement Officer outlined the suggested items for the work programme.
- Social Housing
 - Homeless and People with recourse to public funds
 - Violent crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Hanover Tower
- 7.3 The Policy and Improvement Officer advised that Hanover Tower was an item to be discussed at the next meeting.
- 7.4 Councillor Sangar requested a progress report from the Police Board on selective licensing.
- 7.5 Councillor Rivers advised that Hanover Tower report should be urgent, but she also wished to see the Youth Strategy for future discussions. The Policy and Improvement Officer advised that this item was already on the Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny Committee's work programme, but a discussion could be held with them regarding a joint review.
- 7.6 Councillor Shaw requested an update report from Housing services on how they

doing in respect of council housing service repairs and he wished to know what the impact has been on housing service and tenants.

7.7 The Chair wished to discuss scrutiny going forward and suggested that holding six meetings of the committee this municipal year would enable the committee to consider all the issues suggested for the work programme.

7.8 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:-

- (a) agreed to include all the issues discussed, in the Work Programme over six meetings; and
- (b) requests the Policy and Improvement Officer discuss the possibility of carrying out a joint review with Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee regarding the Youth Strategy.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will take place on a date to be arranged. The Policy and Improvement Officer would circulate a potential date. It was advised that meetings of the Committee would be held monthly going forward.

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