



DOMESTIC ABUSE

Final Report of the Task and Finish Group
DECEMBER 2014

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Chair's Foreword

We all have a safeguarding responsibility: employers, employees, neighbours, friends and family, all faith groups and social communities to acknowledge and recognise that domestic abuse is a crime and to report it. Initial reports should be treated seriously and immediately by those who receive the information. It takes a lot of courage for victims to reveal domestic abuse and many may not seek help at first and in all probability the abuse has occurred over a long period of time and on many occasions. It is imperative that all LBC frontline staff, those working with children and families and the Police where disclosures are often made are trained on how to respond to victims of domestic abuse and take the time to show a level of understanding and ask the relevant questions which should be followed up, actioned and referrals made if necessary.

We must not forget the effect and impact of domestic abuse on children who either witness the abuse or are victims themselves where factors such as: behavioural, emotional and social problems are common¹, notwithstanding the impact it can have on attainment levels which can result in truancy. Schools have a safeguarding duty to recognise signs and make referrals where necessary, and to raise awareness through the curriculum to include healthy and unhealthy relationships to ensure children and young people are made aware of the different forms of abuse.

The Task and Finish Group welcomes the announcement by the Home Secretary to criminalise coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships, which is long overdue and reflects domestic abuse goes beyond physical violence. The change in the law now gives the Police additional powers to prosecute perpetrators who control their partners through threats or restrict their personal and financial freedom. It is hoped the change will encourage more victims to recognise the different forms of abuse and come forward which in turn will increase reports of domestic abuse occurring in the home.

I would like to thank Members of the Task and Finish Group and all the witnesses invited to give evidence which contributed to the review. The Task and Finish Group would also like to thank the Democracy and Scrutiny Officer for her support throughout the review.

I hoped the report increases awareness among the most vulnerable victims in society of the importance of reporting domestic abuse, and highlights what support provision is available in Luton.



Councillor Hinkley

¹ CADD (2014) 'in plain sight'

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group are outlined below:

- 1. The Task and Finish Group acknowledge domestic abuse training is delivered to all LBC front line staff including those working with children and families and requests the Domestic Abuse Delivery Board ensures this training is on-going rather than on a periodical basis. All front line staff and those working with children and families should be aware of and have access to the information on the website to ensure an appropriate response or for victims to be signposted to the relevant agency for help and support. (page 19)**
- 2. The Task and Finish Group acknowledge the work and funding in place to support high risk victims and their children which should be for longer than 1 to 2 years (at least 5 years) and request the Community Safety Partnership recognise the importance of supporting low to medium risk victims and explore ways in which these victims can be further supported. (page 20)**
- 3. That the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group ensures a programme of sex and relationships education is delivered in the curriculum in all Luton High Schools for consistency in the delivery of PSHE lessons to raise awareness and to challenge and dispel stereotypical myths surrounding violence against women. (page 23)**
- 4. That the Domestic Abuse Strategic Group/Delivery Board looks into initiatives such as the White Ribbon schools programme and for this to be rolled out in all schools to further raise awareness and reinforce issues around domestic abuse and teen partner violence in personal relationship. The initiative would enable young people to identify with the different forms of abuse and help teachers become confident and knowledgeable in delivering programmes on sensitive issues and to respond appropriately when disclosures are made. (page 24)**
- 5. That the Domestic Abuse Delivery Board ensures all staff employed in schools working with children receives domestic abuse training to recognise signs and make referrals where necessary. Schools need to put in place clear and transparent signage around the school for the Designated Safeguarding lead for pupils to raise issues and concerns. (page 24)**
- 6. That the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service ensures all staff working in the customer service centre (including staff dealing with housing issues) and external agencies are trained on the Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession ruling for 'no recourse to public funds', and the Eastern European legislation concerning the eligibility criteria for housing and housing benefits. This would ensure consistency**

in the delivery of information to those seeking advice and support. (page 25)

7. That the Task and Finish Group acknowledge an extensive directory of support services/organisations for domestic abuse is available on the Council's website and the Domestic Abuse Delivery Board be requested looks into ways in which information can be more visible and accessible to the public, LBC frontline services, staff that come into contact with children, the Police and professional agencies. Information on the website should also include awareness of behaviours such as threatening and coercive control. (page 27)
8. That the Council through the Community Safety Partnership/Domestic Abuse Delivery Board lead and fully supports initiatives such as the 'White Ribbon' campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse during the violence against women (VAW) week an annual event held in November and for this to be reflected in promotional materials such as: posters, brochures, leaflets and newsletters. (page 27)
9. That the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board be requested to ensure all partners within the Community Safety Partnership are made aware of the information sharing protocol in place for effective partnership working to continue to take place. (page 30)
10. That the Executive notes the concern of the Luton Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) regarding the inconsistency of agency attendance at MARAC meetings is acknowledge by the Task and Finish Group. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Group is required to encourage representation from all core agencies which is vital in maintaining a collaborative approach to ensure high risk victims and their children are fully supported. (page 31)
11. That the Community Safety Partnership fully understands the necessity and importance of the post of the Domestic Abuse Coordinator and request consideration is given to reinstate and fund the position to ensure an effective collaborative approach is maintained across voluntary and statutory agencies to influence change to tackle domestic abuse in Luton. (page 31)
12. That the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customers Services ensures all staff working in the customer service centre (including staff dealing with housing issues) are aware of the council's protocol for translation services. Details of this service should be visible and accessible to all staff working in the customer service centre (including housing staff dealing with housing issues) for a consistent response to be made to customers approaching the council where English is either a second or other language. (page 32)

13. **That the Task and Finish Group acknowledge more work is needed in some BME communities in raising awareness of the different forms of domestic abuse to recognise signs. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Group be requested to look at ways of engaging with these communities and work with faith and community leaders to address sensitive issues such as domestic abuse in their communities and where help and support can be found. (pages 32)**

Membership of Task and Group

The Task and Finish Group consisted of six elected members from all three political parties: Councillor Hinkley (Chair)(Lib Dem), Foord (Con), Knight (Lab), T. Malik (Lab), O'Callaghan (Lab) and Sharif (Lab).

List of Advisors/Witnesses

Name	Organisation
DI Richard Tilling	Bedfordshire Police
Nikki Middleton, Community Safety Partnership Manager	Luton Borough Council
Laura Church, Head of Business & Consumer Services	Luton Borough Council
Caroline McKenna, Interim Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Manager; Caroline Barrett, Business Manager, Luton Safeguarding Board; Olivia Ives, Children Safeguarding Manager	Children & Learning Department, Luton Borough Council
Maureen Backler, Tenancy Manager	Housing &Community Living, Luton Borough Council
Anita McArthur, Anti-Social Behaviour Officer	Housing & Community Living, Luton Borough Council
Gerry Taylor, Director of Public Health	Public Health, LBC
Gabby McAuley	Luton Women's Aid
Melanie Skyers	Luton All Women Centre
Ruth Carter Yvonne Sinclair	The Non Violence Alliance
John Wrigglesworth, Head Teacher; Family Worker and Health Education Coordinator	River Bank Primary School
Jo Neale	University of Bedfordshire
Councillor N. Ayub, Executive Lead Member for Community Safety	Luton Borough Council
Joy Leighton, Team Leader	Victim Support (IDVAs)
Patricia Jennings, Strategic Safeguarding Manager	Adult Social Services, Luton Borough Council

Marcia Richards, Service Manager	
Hilary Wilson, Hub Manager	Building Blocks Children Centre
Karen Godfrey, Project Director	Stepping Stones, Luton
Janie & Shirely	Onevoice4Travellers Ltd
John Woodward, Interim Housing Service Manager	Housing and Community Living (Temporary Accommodation), LBC

Executive Summary

In December 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Board set up a Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group to initially run for six months. The aim of the Task and Finish Group was to look at policies, practices and procedures by the Council, voluntary agencies and its partners. An extension of three months was sought and obtained from the Overview and Scrutiny Board to include the results of the consultation with agency providers and women and young people.

The most widely used definition for domestic abuse is the one released by the Home Office:

“any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional²”

Changes to the definition made in March 2013 seen the inclusion of young people over the age of 16 to raise more awareness among younger victims and to assist support services in recognising the different forms of domestic abuse which goes beyond physical violence. The changes also included behaviours such as coercive control and threatening was not previously reflected in law but since January 2015 has now become a criminal offence

Domestic abuse occurs across all societies with no regard for religion, ethnicity, age, gender or class. It is a hidden crime where victims feel unable to disclose to friends, family, colleagues or seek support from agencies; due to feelings of shame, blame, the promises of it never happening again, perceptions of agencies and fear leading to isolation. There is no evidence to suggest domestic abuse is more common in some communities than others or that they are more at risk. Common factors which prevent victims from seeking help are: language (English a second language or not spoken); the lack of awareness of support services; religion/cultural beliefs; the abandonment of contact with families and friends; dishonour and rejection within the community, insecurity of immigration status and financial dependency.

² Home Office March 2013

Domestic abuse is an underreported crime which often takes 35 incidents of violence before a report is made to the Police³ and therefore vital the response is quick to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

Domestic abuse is a key priority for the Government set out in the “*Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*” published in November 2010. The document identifies four key areas which provide the framework and action plan for long term commitment for organisations to work towards: (1) prevention of violence, (2) provision of support, (3) working in partnership and (4) ensuring perpetrators are brought to justice. In 2012 the Government ring-fenced £40m to fund specialist local support services and national helplines, and Clare’s Law was rolled out across the country to enable the checking of police records of abusive partners. The Government in 2013 extended the definition to include 16 and 17 year olds and behaviours such as threatening and coercive control.

The Government also recognised children living in domestic abusive households are a matter of concern and key children’s services agencies were tasked with safeguarding responsibilities to include service provisions within their policies and procedures for children affected by domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is the responsibility of everyone and within the Council all actions plans underpin the community safety objectives within Luton 2026: Luton’s Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2026; the Children & Young People’s Plan; Luton’s Domestic Abuse Strategy 2012-2015; the Health and Wellbeing Strategy; the Council’s Corporate Plan, Community Safety Partnership Plan 2014-2017 and Community Involvement Strategy.

Luton’s strategic priorities in relation to domestic violence are outlined below:

- Victims – to improve services and support to victims of domestic abuse, forced marriage and honour based violence;
- Children and young people – to recognise the needs of children and young people whose lives are affected by domestic abuse and offer appropriate support and protection;
- Offender management – to promote clear and consistent messages that domestic abuse is not acceptable and that perpetrators are responsible for their actions and will be held accountable;
- Community and partners – to increase awareness of the impact and extent of domestic abuse, honour based violence and forced marriages across the local community and within the partner agencies.

³ Crime Survey England and Wales

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose and objectives set by the Task and Finish Group were:

- To gain an understanding of domestic abuse and the impact in Luton;
- To increase confidence in the community to report incidents of domestic violence through raising awareness and what support provisions are available;
- To identify the Council's priority objectives for domestic abuse;
- To identify whether sufficient resources and funding are in place to support victims domestic abuse in Luton;
- To produce a final report with conclusions and recommendations to submit to the Council's Executive, Community Safety Partnership and Domestic Abuse Strategic Group to action and monitor.

Expected Outcomes

To fully communicate support provisions available in Luton and where such provisions can be accessed.

Guiding Principles

While it is recognised domestic abuse is experienced by women and men, women are more likely to have repeated incidents of violence; and therefore it is important for all victims to recognise the signs of abuse which is a crime and report to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

Exclusions

The Task and Finish Group acknowledge domestic abuse is not exclusively aimed at women and that can be experienced by men, LGBT groups and those with a disability. The views of these groups were excluded from the review and further work is needed to include their experiences if the Overview and Scrutiny Board wish to commission further work in this area.

Methodology/Approach taken by the Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group held eight meetings in total in public where evidence was received from a range of witnesses identified in the project plan. The Task and Finish Group agreed to undertake consultation with service providers which was carried out between 7th and 29th August 2014 using a quantitative approach through an online questionnaire and 36 completed questionnaires were received. The consultation with women and young people took place between 20th October and 6th November 2014 and a qualitative approach in the form of focus groups and one to one interviews was chosen specifically to allow participants the freedom to discuss issues of importance to them in a setting of their choice and interpreters were

present where necessary. The interviews with young people were carried by a trusted professional agency accessed by young people and one interview by the Youth Offending Service. All participants were fully briefed before interviews went ahead and signed a confidentiality consent form.

Domestic abuse is a sensitive and emotive issue where victims are vulnerable. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Council's Ethics Panel before interviews went ahead. The aim of the consultation was to ascertain the experiences of women and young people in accessing services, support and responses received and support provisions for children living in domestic abusive households.

Twenty-five women and six young people in total were interviewed and their views should not be regarded as a representative view of all users who access domestic abuse services in Luton. Due to the small number of young people interviewed it was not possible to take meaningful messages. However; some of the comments made were reinforced in messages received in the interviews held with the women participants.

Assistance with the fieldwork was made to over 20 agency providers and council services with community safety and safeguarding responsibilities on several occasions in terms of identifying women and young people willing to take part in the consultation. However, due to work load commitments and lack of resources many were unable to assist. The one to one interviews and focus groups which took place with the women and young people were provided from: Luton's Young Offending Service, Building Blocks Children's Centre, Stepping Stones and Luton all Women's Centre.

Other Research Undertaken

Desktop research was carried out on the following documents: soLUTiONs Partnership Plan 2013-14, Luton Domestic Abuse Strategy 2012-15, Luton JSNA 2011, Government document on Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Violence Crime and Victim Act 2004.

Public Involvement

A press release by the Task and Finish Group was published on the Council's website and an article was placed in the local papers to raise awareness of the scrutiny review to encourage public participation. All the meetings were held in public at the Town Hall and minutes of meetings were available on the scrutiny pages on the Council's website.

National Context

- Domestic abuse is a an underreported crime where only 6.5 per cent of incidents reported to the police results in a conviction and a quarter of cases passed to the Crown Prosecution Service result in no action taken⁴.
- 1 in 4 women will experience physical abuse in their lifetime and 2 women a week in the UK are killed because of domestic abuse⁵;
- The 16-24 years age group is regard to be the highest at risk for domestic abuse⁶;
- In 90% of family households where domestic abuse occurs children are in either in the same room or overhear the abuse⁷;
- Children who witness domestic abuse are 2.5 times more likely to have serious social and behavioural problems⁸
- 77% of children and young people say they don't receive enough information about domestic abuse⁹

Local Context

- Incidents of domestic abuse reported to the Police in Luton show an increase in the year 2014/2015 totalling 1,279 when compared to the previous year 2013/14 figures which was 1,084.
- Statutory agencies in Luton are committed to the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) which targets high risk victims and their children at risk of serious harm.
- The Community Safety Partnership funds and supports 7 independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) of which one specifically works with victims affected by drugs and substance misuse and one works with children and young people affected by domestic abuse.
- Luton has 4 refuges run by Women's Aid and funded by the Council with a total of 19 bed spaces for women and their children. One refuge is dedicated to South Asian women.
- In the year 2013-14 the number of referrals made to MARAC was 365 which is a slight increase upon the 363 referrals made in 2012-13.
- Luton has a specialist domestic violence court which meets every Thursday in the Magistrates Court

⁴ Women's Aid

⁵ Crime Survey England & Wales

⁶ www.nspcc.org.uk

⁷ www.nspcc.org.uk

⁸ www.nspcc.org.uk

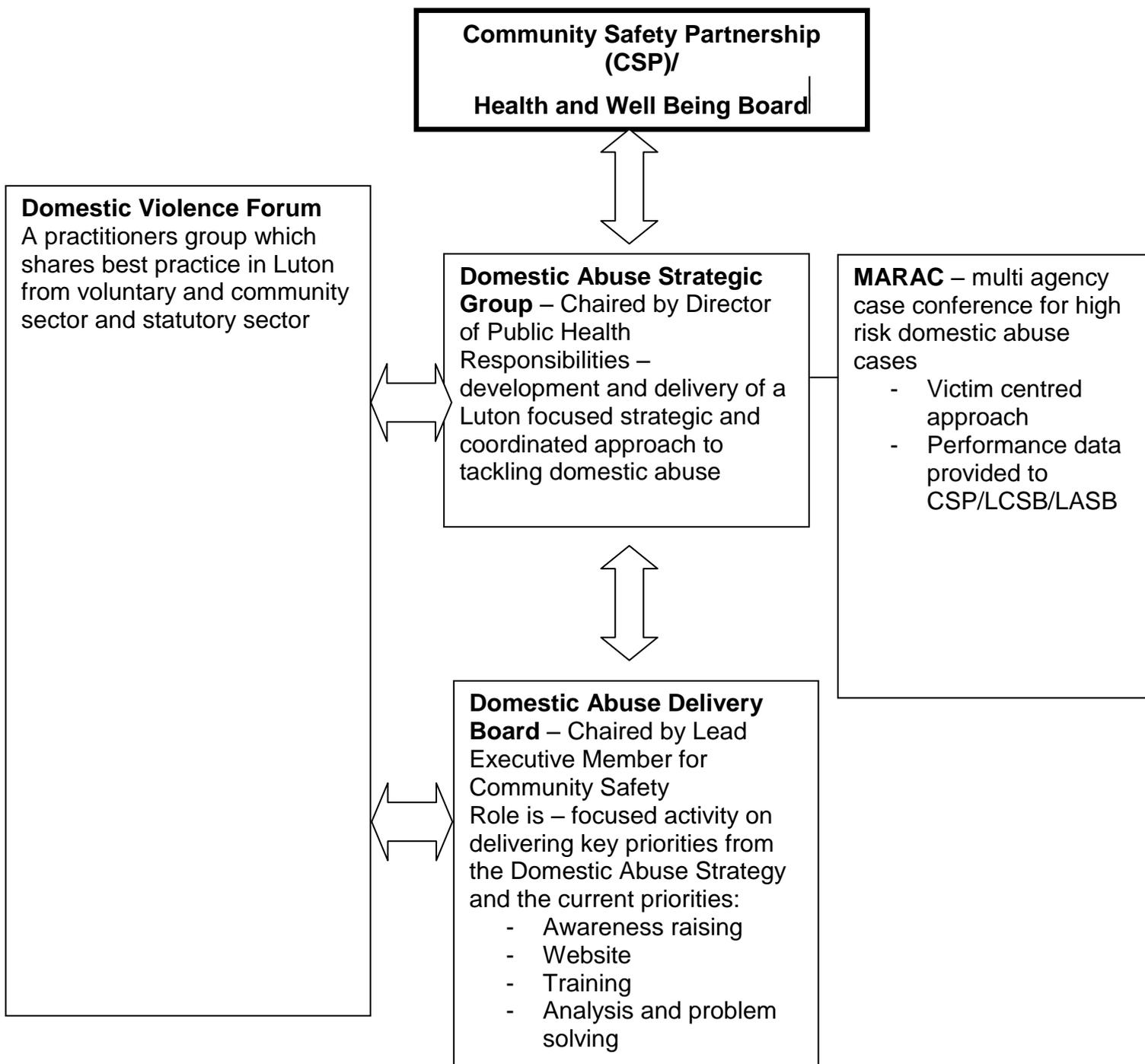
⁹ www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

- In Luton the number of children subject to a child protection plan in 2014 were categorised as emotional abuse (37%) and neglect (44%).

Findings of the Task and Finish Group and Recommendations

The Council does not directly provide a specialist service for victims of domestic abuse but does commissioned work through specialist agencies. The council does have a supportive and preventative role delivered through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and other bodies within the Council including the MARAC process.

Below is the structure in place for the domestic violence partnership governance currently operating in the Council.



Community Safety Partnership

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) commissions and funds specialist services to support victims of domestic abuse and their children. The Partnership does commission a domestic abuse services coordinator and domestic abuse website to draw together information about services for victims.. The CSP supports the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process which identifies, supports and risk assesses high risk victims and their children affected by domestic abuse. The Partnerships vision is for all agencies and services in Luton to work together to prevent domestic abuse and to reduce its impact by providing high quality support services for all women and young people affected by domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse Strategic Group

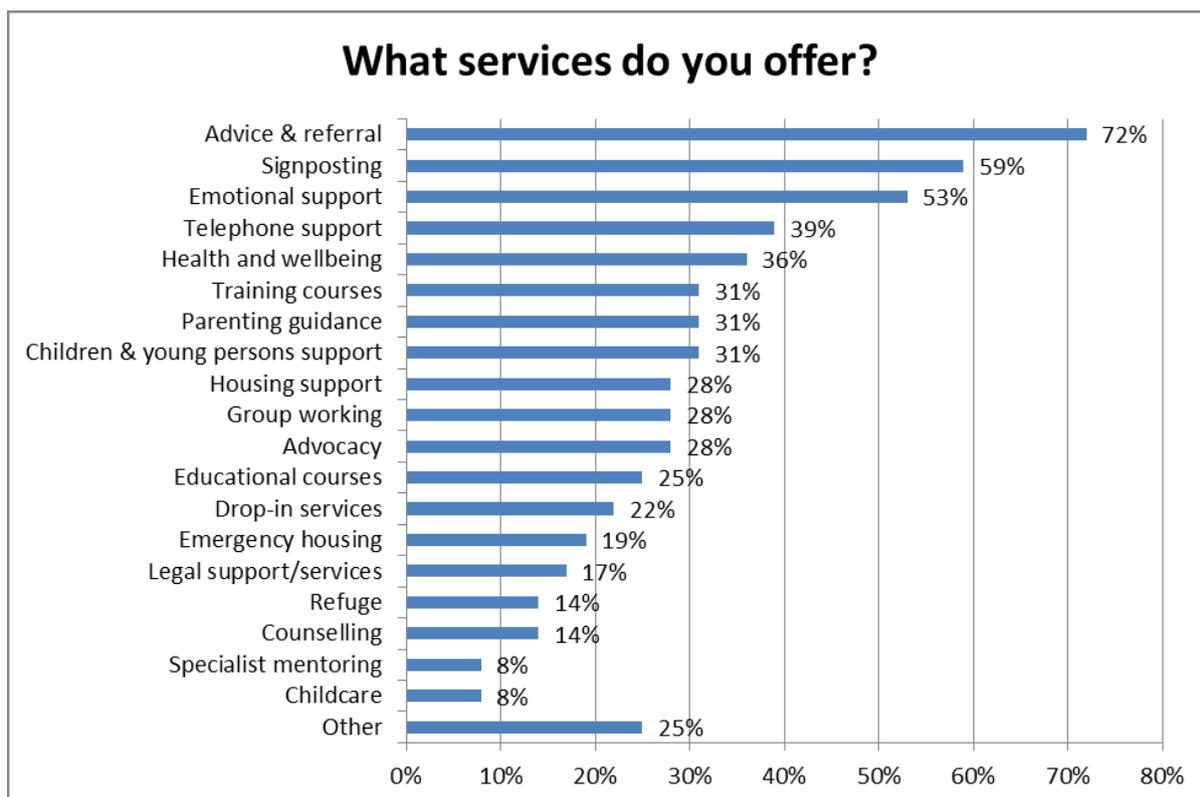
The Director of Public Health chairs the Domestic Abuse Strategic Group (DASG) which reports to the Community Safety Partnership. DASG was established to take a strategic and co-ordinated partnership approach in preventing and identifying domestic abuse, planning and implementing improved outcomes for victims in Luton. The DASG is also responsible for delivering the recommendations from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and provides progress reports to the Health Inequalities Delivery Board of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

MARAC has been operational in Luton since 2007 for high risk cases and provides a coordinated response from voluntary and statutory agencies to increase the safety of high risk victims of domestic abuse and their children. The core partners of MARAC determined by the Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) a national charity which provides practical help and support to professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims are: Bedfordshire Police, Bedfordshire Probation Trust, Community Health Services, Children's Social Care, Specialist Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), Housing Services, Mental Health Services (SEPT) and Drugs and Alcohol Services. Cases that are referred to MARAC are DASH assessed and only those which score 14 points or over are referred to MARAC where levels of risks to victims and their children are considered sufficient enough to warrant an intervention. In such instances these an action plan is developed with key agencies which put in place support and safety provisions for high risk victims and their children.

Support Services in place in Luton

The consultation undertaken with service provides found a wide range of services to support victims and their children. The table below gives an indication of the variety of services offered by agencies in Luton with the top three being: advice and referrals (72%), signposting 59% and emotional support (53%). The percentages in the chart do not add up to 100% due to the agencies offering more than one service.



Source: 36 respondents

Women's Aid

The Task and Finish Group received evidence from Women's Aid which is a well-known organisation which has been in Luton for many years. Women's Aid provides an independent frontline service led by women for women to support the needs of survivors of domestic abuse within the community. A confidential helpline is also offered which is available between 10am and 5pm Monday to Thursdays and 10am to 4pm on Fridays. Women's Aid received funding from the Council to support and run the four refuges in Luton which houses 19 bed spaces in total, and one refuge is dedicated to South Asian women. Other services offered by Women's Aid were: support, guidance, advice and advocacy on issues affecting women, a 12 week freedom programme which helps women understand the beliefs held by abusive partners and to illustrate the effects of domestic abuse on children and drop in sessions.

Luton All Women's Centre

Luton All Women's Centre has been established in Luton for 21 years and provides similar services to Women's Aid which is open to all women across Luton. Luton All Women's Centre specialise in supporting women experiencing cultural, social and emotional issues surrounding forced marriages and honour based violence. For instance the Owl Project is a confidential one to one support, advice, advocacy and outreach project particularly targeted towards victims of forced marriage and honour based violence. The Centre also delivers outreach work in the form of workshops in schools for young people aged 14-16 year olds to raise awareness of forced

marriages and honour based violence and this programme is also delivered in the colleges in Luton. A parenting programme 'Triple P' (positive parenting programme) is also delivered by the parenting coordinator employed by the centre to help parents learn techniques to manage their children's behaviour as a result of domestic abuse. More information offered by Centre can be found on their website www.lutonallwomenscentre.org.uk. Drop in morning sessions were also available by appointments only from Monday to Friday.

IDVAs

The independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) receive funding through the CSP and are located within Victim Support of which there are 7 in total. Five full time IDVAs support high risk victims, 1 CiDVAs works with children and young people affected by domestic abuse and 1 specialist IDVA supports victims affected by drugs and alcohol and the traveller's community. All victims are DASH (Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment) assessed which is a checklist used by the Police and partner agencies to identify and assess high risk factors associated with serious harm and murder. IDVAs also offers advocacy support and advice for housing, the law regarding civil and criminal routes and work closely with the Police where all clients are encouraged to report incidents or to keep a log of incidents of events.

IDVAs also deliver domestic abuse training in conjunction with the Council which is targeted at all staff who come in contact with service users and members of the public and those who work directly with children and young people, families and adults. The training includes the role of IDVAs, understanding domestic abuse and the MARAC process; raising awareness of domestic abuse and the impact on children and young people and responding to concerns. The IDVAs work closely with the MARAC support assistant and the MARAC coordinator and attend MARAC meetings to present cases on behalf of clients. Drop in surgeries held by IDVAs at: Luton & Dunstable Hospital on Fridays to highlight the escalation of domestic abuse in pregnancy; the Children's Centre at Beech Hill Primary School where a high percentage of referrals are received and Shantona Women's Group.

Shantona Women's Group

Desktop research on the Shantona Women's Group found it to be a locally based group in Luton which provides confidential advice and guidance support to families. A majority of its clients are from Asian and BME communities and translators in Bengali, Urdu and Hindi are on hand to support women where English is not their first or second language. The Groups objective is to enable users to gain self-confidence, so they can empower themselves and support their family and friends to become a productive member of the community. Their work is focused towards women who do not have access to the usual opportunities to be involved with social, cultural and community activities and funded by received through the Stronger Families Team within the Children and Learning Directorate.

Bedfordshire Police

In March 2014 HM Inspectorate Constabulary (HMIC) released a report which evaluated responses by Police Forces across the country for victims of domestic abuse. Bedfordshire Police were criticised for their response to victims of domestic violence and for having only one dedicated officer for domestic abuse. Following that report an action plan was developed by Bedfordshire Police to address the areas of concerns raised in the report and progress updates are made back to the Home Office.

The Police work in partnership with various agencies within Luton to build relationships and trust with victims and are an integral part in MARAC process. The Force's priority is now refocused to provide a victim centred approach across the whole of Bedfordshire and prevention measures are in place delivered through the Public Protection Steering Group. All frontline Officers' receive training on domestic abuse using the Streetwise Max programme which includes scenarios focused on domestic abuse to enhance skills and understanding of the issue. The training is not extended to PCSOs but does include all staff in the call centre an area of concern mentioned in the HMIC report.

The Police reviewed their domestic abuse standards operating procedures which led to the creation of three Independent Domestic Abuse Support Worker posts which were currently on hold (funded by the Police & Crime Commissioner) at the time of writing the report. Once appointed have been made the post holders would work closely with the IDVA service in Victim Support as an additional resource to support low to medium risk victims.

Bedfordshire Police continue to work with the newly formed domestic abuse voluntary perpetrators programme which is to be implemented in the autumn of 2014 and is targeted at high risk perpetrators that avoid court proceedings. Through partnership working the Police are working towards setting up a children's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to be run in a similar way to MARAC which will be a single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns for children and young people. The MASH will bring together professionals from services with responsibilities for children, young people and families to make use of their knowledge to keep children safe from harm. The partner agencies within the MASH will have access to all information held on a database to assist with identifying low-level repeat referrals made by other agencies.

At the time of writing the report the Police were in the process of running a pilot Relay Scheme to be trialled in Luton schools to raise awareness of domestic abuse in the home. The scheme was trialled in a few schools in Central Bedfordshire and was successful and now rolled out across all schools in Central Bedfordshire. The Relay scheme raises awareness in schools of the importance of recognising children and young people who may be affected by domestic abuse and to report suspicions to the relay team by 8.30am each day. Resources were in place to handle enquiries

in the form of 3 Domestic Abuse Referral Assistants located within Victim Support and managed by the IDVAs. The scheme provides support to children and young people where domestic abuse occurs in the home but which does not meet the threshold for intervention by children services.

In the interviews held with the women service users the response by the Police was rated good. Most women felt that when reports were made they were taken seriously the Police were helpful and took some of the women to a safe place such as a hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation. For the women who were not taken to a safe place the Police ensured perpetrators were either arrested or left the home. Below are some of the comments from the interviews held with women service users:

“I found the Police very helpful and their attitude was good. I was assigned a support worker who kept me updated every day”

“I called the Police as I was lost and didn’t know where to go as I didn’t know the Luton area. The police took me to a hostel and then I was transferred to a refuge”

“I found the police response good when they came to the house they took photos and helped me to write a detailed statement which was instrumental when I went to court and lead to my partner being convicted and going to prison”

“my 6 year old called the Police the response was quick and my husband was arrested and is now in jail”

Interviews held with women service users in October 2014

Housing Provision

Legislation and guidance which governs local authorities provisions for homelessness services is set out in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2006 with further supplementary guidance issued in 2009, 2011 and 2012 which relate to intentionality, the Localism Act and suitability for accommodation respectively. Relationship breakdowns which includes domestic abuse is a common cause of homelessness or potential homelessness and persons experiencing domestic violence can approach the council as well as other agencies for advice to explore options for temporary or permanent re-housing. The Task and Finish Group heard that a set procedure was in place which all frontline staff follow for disclosures made through the customer service centre. Referrals were made directly to a Housing Solutions Officer where advice on housing is given or signposted to a local refuge (Women’s Aid). In the last two years there were between 10 and 15 referrals made to Women’s Aid. Provisions in place for people presenting as homeless due to domestic abuse are initially placed in temporary accommodation if no local connection is found whilst further investigation takes place to determine eligibility and whether a duty is owed. Once all investigations are complete and a duty is owed temporary/permanent accommodation would be offered through the choicebase letting scheme from a housing association or in the private rented sector.

“the Council gave me information about Amigo letting agency which is a private landlord and I was placed on the choice base letting scheme”.

One to one Interview held with white British women on 28th October 2014

The Council also operates a Homesafe Scheme through the 'bobby' service which runs in conjunction with Bedfordshire Police to allow council tenants to remain in their home. The scheme provides replacement locks, door modifications and/or replacement window locks, panic alarms, victims are issued with a mobile phone with a direct link to the police station and a secure letter box is installed. In severe cases of domestic abuse a safe room is created within the home to act as additional safety for victims and their children.

All Housing Solutions Officers are trained on domestic abuse delivered through the safeguarding team and IDVAs. The train includes: the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), DASH (domestic abuse, stalking and harassment) checklist and how to respond to disclosures. Evidence to the Task and Finish Group found training was delivered on a periodical basis the last being in 2012.

Recommendation

The Task and Finish Group acknowledge domestic abuse training is delivered to all LBC front line staff including those working with children and families and requests the Domestic Abuse Delivery Board ensure this training is on-going rather than on a periodical basis. All front line staff and those working with children and families should be aware of and have access to the information on the website to ensure an appropriate response or for victims to be signposted to the relevant agency for help and support.

The Task and Finish Group found victims who approached the council for advice and assistance in terms of homelessness were seen by a Housing Solutions Officer where an application is made to determine priority need. The following comment was made by the Tenancy Manager in evidence given to the Task and Finish Group.

“Domestic violence does not in itself create a priority needs unless it renders the person “vulnerable” in relation to the Housing Act. Where a person is homeless and in priority need, they would be placed in temporary accommodation.

LBC Tenancy Manager giving evidence to the Task and Finish Group on 24th June 2014

The Council does have provisions for domestic abuse in the Choicebased Letting scheme under which states:

“Where the circumstances are insufficient to determine the applicant at serious risk and/or homeless but the Council is satisfied the household or a member of the household is being subjected to any of the above (and will continue to be as long as they reside in their current home). The Council will seek evidence of the harassment from external agencies e.g. Police, Social Services, GPs etc”.

Housing Solutions Officer also provide advice on court procedures and on obtaining ‘occupation orders’ previously known as ‘ouster orders’ which regulates who can live in the property and can restrict abusers from entering the surrounding area.

Funding

The Task and Finish Group found funding for domestic abuse on a national and local level was directed towards high risk victims. There was a gap in provisions for low to medium risk victims which was left to voluntary sector to provide where the lack of funding was seen to add additional pressures on voluntary organisations in terms of resources to support these victims. These pressures were further compounded by the reduction in grants from local authorities as a result of Government cuts and changes to welfare reforms and legal aid.

The Task and Finish Group found funding in place by the council was targeted towards Women’s Aid who received a donation from London Luton Airport Limited of £86,000 under the Community Safety theme; and a further £143,426 under the theme of Wellbeing and Prevention for housing related support e.g. refuge provision. The community safety partnership also receives funding from the Home Office for specialist services such as IDVAs and the MARAC co-ordinators post which ends in March 2015. The council also commissions and funds specialist services for women, children and young people but at the time of writing the report it was unclear which services these related to.

Recommendation

The Task and Finish Group acknowledge the work and funding in place to support high risk victims and their children which should be for longer than 1 to 2 years (at least 5 years) and requests the Community Safety Partnership recognise the importance of supporting low to medium risk victims and explore ways in which these victims can be supported.

Safeguarding Children

The Task and Finish Group found safeguarding arrangements were in place for children experiencing domestic abuse which is monitored by the Luton Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and governed under Section 14 of the Children's Act 2004. The statutory objective of the LSCB is to coordinate work carried out by each person or body represented and to ensure the effectiveness of that work. Regulation 5 of the LSCB 2006 requires the development of policies and procedures for safeguarding to promote the welfare of children which all safeguarding bodies must adhere by, works with Bedford and Central Bedfordshire safeguarding boards to ensure consistency of procedures are followed. The LSCB produces an annual business plan which provides leadership to fulfil their statutory obligations which is published on the council's website:

[http://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.co/pdfs/sg_ch_com_abuse.pdf#search="domesticabuseprotocol](http://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.co/pdfs/sg_ch_com_abuse.pdf#search=)

The five key areas prioritises in the business plan are:

- The impact of domestic violence on children
- To maintain efficient standards of safeguarding practice
- To evaluate the impact of the Early help and Prevention offer on outcomes for children and in particular where neglect is a concern
- Child Sexual Exploitation through multi agency working
- To continue an effective programme of training and workforce development

Schools

The Task and Finish Group invited the lead Head Teachers for Primary and Secondary schools to give evidence on a number of occasions to discuss provisions within schools for children and young people affected by domestic abuse and no response was received from the schools.

However, the Task and Finish Group were able to meet with the Head Teacher of River Bank Primary School, family worker and Health Education Co-ordinator. The Task and Finish Group were informed schools had different strategies in place for children affected by domestic abuse and disclosures were usually made through the family worker where a referral is made to social services and the police. All teaching staff working with children including midday supervisors was required to complete the Level 1 safeguarding training which includes a domestic abuse module. Domestic abuse is not directly included in the curriculum in primary schools but discussions are held around wellbeing, what makes a child upset and managing emotions. Riverbank Primary school found signing useful for engaging children with emotional behaviour and was easier for younger children to explain emotions such as: stress, under pressure or unhappy. The school also used signing with children with behavioural problems and were not confident in articulating themselves. Other useful techniques used by the school were the SEAL programme (social, emotional aspects of learning) which is linked to the curriculum.

Good communication links were essential in schools with children centres where information is shared on pupils in need of extra support and with family workers in high school in preparing years 5 and 6 pupils for their transition to high school. Discussion on good and bad relationships is expanded upon in more detail in secondary schools.

Public health recently funded a Health Education Coordinator post (thirteen months) to work with secondary schools in Luton. The post is located within the children and learning directorate and works closely with the IDVA service to develop a workshop for teaching staff in schools to raise awareness of dominating and controlling behaviours in young people's relationships. A review in March 2014 carried out by Public Health of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) in Luton high schools found PSHE education remains a non-statutory subject. Section 2.5 of the National Curriculum framework document states:

“all schools should make provisions for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) drawing on good practice.”

Further guideline issued by the DfE states:

“PSHE is an important and necessary part of all pupils' education. Schools should seek to use PHSE education to build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in the statutory guidance on: drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education”.

In January 2014 the DfE announced all schools must publish their school curriculum by subject and academic year and should include provisions for PSHE. The review found sex and relationship education was not included in the PSHE curriculum and pupils who were consulted felt that there was insufficient importance and time was given to PSHE lesson which would have benefited from more information on sex and relationships education. The schools which did provide sex and relationships education focused on friendships and families and teaching on relationships dimensions of sexual relationships was less well covered. Coverage on sexual exploitation and domestic abuse was covered in years 10 and 11 and included forced marriage.

The comments from the interviews held with women and young people found there should be programmes in schools which teach young people about healthy and unhealthy relationships and there was a need for an identifiable person to which young people could talk to and approach for support in schools.

The interviews also found some young people affected by domestic abuse were referred to services such as CHUMs who specialises in child bereavement, trauma and emotional well being and provide one to one support with a clinical psychologist and a therapeutic music group. Stepping Stones was another service which supports women and young people affected by domestic abuse, drugs and alcohol, mental health and social care related.

“one to one sessions at Stepping Stones on healthy and unhealthy relationships really helped me”.

“I spoke to the family worker at my child’s nursery who referred me to Stepping Stones who agreed to go with me but didn’t take it any further so I made a self referral to stepping stones”

Interviews with women and young people held in October/November 2014

Recommendation

That a programme of sex and relationships education is delivered in the curriculum in all Luton High Schools to ensure consistency of PSHE lessons to raise awareness and to challenge and dispel stereotypical myths surrounding violence against women.

Desktop research found children who witness domestic abuse in the home exhibit signs of fear, inhibitions, depression as well as high levels of aggression and anti social behaviour which can continue into adolescence and adulthood.

In the interviews held with the women found support provisions were inconsistent with some mothers offered support for children whilst others had no support and were reliant upon paying for a private child psychologist. For those women who did receive support this was in the form of: counselling, Cidvas (who worked with children in schools and in the home), behavioural therapy and child and mental health services (CAMHs). All of the women interviewed stated the importance for children affected by domestic abuse to receive support and help to manage their emotions and behaviour in school. Emphasis was also made for family therapy which would have benefited the whole family.

“both my children were badly affected and had behavioural problems which was hard to control and was not given any help”.

“My 17 year old received counselling which was arranged by the youth offending service”.

Consultation with Women held on 21st October 2014

“My child was assessed and received therapy from a psychologist and my son received behavioural therapy”.

One to one interview held with white British women on 28th October 2014

“I spoke to an IDVA who arranged help and support for my children and put me in touch with a Cidva who came to the house and talked to the children. They also went into the school to support the children”.

“I was referred to CAMHs for my son who helped with his emotional behaviour”.

“My son and daughter were badly affected and had behavioural problems, which I found hard to control and wasn’t given any help.”

“My son was diagnosed with learning difficulties and received help from CAMHs through play therapy.

Interviews held with women service users, held in November 2014

Desktop research carried out found the White Ribbon Campaign runs schools programmes for primary and secondary aimed at developing an ongoing relationship with schools for them to become White Ribbon Schools. The initiative requires schools to provide evidence they are taking a whole school approach in tackling all issues related to domestic abuse, teen partner violence and violence against women and girls. Work is facilitated by working towards achieving the White Ribbon Schools Awards Scheme which provides schools with the support required to achieve that status. Teaching about domestic abuse and healthy relationships is acknowledged to be important in violence and prevention and a difficult subject to approach. The programme enables teachers to feel confident in their understanding and know how to respond to disclosures from pupils experiencing domestic abuse at home and from older pupils experiencing teen partner violence in their personal relationships.

Recommendation

That the Domestic Abuse Strategic Group/Delivery Board look at initiatives such as the White Ribbon schools programme to be rolled out in all schools to further raise awareness and reinforce issues around domestic abuse and teen partner violence in personal relationship to enable young people to identify with and for teachers to become confident and knowledgeable in delivering programmes on sensitive issues and know how to respond appropriately when disclosures are made.

Recommendation

That all staff in schools that work with children are fully equipped with the skills needed to recognise signs of domestic abuse and make referrals where necessary. Schools need to ensure signage for the designated safeguarding lead is transparent for issues and concerns to be raised by pupils.

Children Centres – Beech Hill Primary School

Children centres in Luton have a wide remit to support families with children aged 0-5 years old. Evidence to the Task and Finish Group found the Centre received referrals from MARAC and Health Clinics. All staff at the Centre was made aware of their statutory obligation for all users attending the Centre to inquiry about domestic abuse. This particular centre is located an area where a high percentage of their users are from the Asian and Polish communities and have had to adapt their services to meet the needs of the communities, which means running domestic abuse programmes in three different languages. Staff at the Centre offer support and assistance for women to find refuge accommodation, benefit application forms and obtaining court orders. All disclosures which are made DASH (Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour Based Violence) assessed to determine the level of intervention required or whether a referral to MARAC is needed.

Due to the numbers of disclosures made from the Polish community the children centre has had to employ a trained Polish worker to work support these women. The Centre also offers one to one programmes on protective behaviour to women as well as Relate counselling which is commissioned. Drop in surgeries are also run at the Centre by Luton Rights and the IDVA service.

There are currently 13 family workers and 3 outreach workers employed at the Centre which receives funding for a 2 year ESOL programme which includes employment support.

All staff working in the Centre receives training on the emotional wellbeing of children and on the impact of domestic violence which is delivered by the IDVAs. Challenges faced by the centre are circumstances and knowledge around destitute domestic violence (DDV) concession regarding no recourse to public funds as many of their users are married to British Citizens and unsure of their rights. The Centre also faces challenges around the eligibility criteria regarding Eastern European women and there is a need for better understanding of such issue across all agencies and the council in how to deal with such issues when they arise.

Recommendation

That all staff that work in the customer service centre (including staff dealing with housing issues) and external agencies are familiar with the Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession regarding ‘no recourse to public funds’ and the Eastern European legislation around the eligibility criteria for housing and housing benefits. Which will ensure consistency of information is delivered to those seeking advice and support

Children who attend the centre who are affected by domestic abuse are supported through referrals made to children independent domestic advisor (Cidva) and the Centre works closely with the All Women’s Centre that run an extended family programme.

Accessing information

The Council's website has a wide range of information on specialist services and organisations for victims of domestic abuse which can be found in the 'Community and Living' section under the heading of 'crime and community safety' or via the A-Z directory. There is also a newly formed link to the domestic abuse webpage (www.lutondomesticabuse.co.uk) set up by the Community Safety Partnership in 2014. The webpage is designed as a one stop shop to help with access to information and support. Information on safeguarding for adults and children including child protection is also available; as well as information for parents and young people in teenage relationships where there is a link to the 'this is abuse' webpage. There is also a link to 'hideout' webpage created by Women's Aid to help children and young people understand domestic abuse and how to take positive action.

In the interviews held with the women participants many had no clear idea of where to look for information or what services were available. Many associated domestic abuse with physical violence, and were unable to make links with the other aspects of abuse contained within the definition which often led to delays in seeking support. It was only when support was sought and for some attending a Freedom Programme that it became apparent they were experiencing domestic abuse and what support provision was available.

"I had no idea of where to go for information or where to find such information.

"I had to find the information myself and not aware of what help or support was out there for victims and information was provided from friends and from reading leaflets.

"I received help from the All Women's Centre and legal advice from a solicitor and became aware of the different forms of domestic abuse through the freedom programme"

"I didn't think of approaching the council to find information I thought it was there for housing and paying bills."

"I didn't think about using the internet to find information and didn't have access to a computer or laptop."

Consultation held with women service users, held in November 2014

Recommendation

The Task and Finish Group acknowledge a directory of support services/organisations for domestic abuse is available on the Council's website and request the Domestic Abuse Delivery Board looks into ways in which this information can be more visible and accessible to the public, LBC frontline services, staff that come into contact with children, the Police and professional agencies. The information should also include awareness of behaviours such as threatening and coercive control.

For many of the women services users information on where to seek support and advice was received from: friends and family, GPs, health visitors, social workers, family workers, school/college, nurseries, children centres, police, the council and solicitors. For one particular group of women they came across information on through a social media site from a private source due language barriers which prevented them from looking for information on the council's website. At the time of writing the report this particular group of women would have found a link in different languages (English not being their first language) useful on the domestic abuse webpage. From January 2015 a link is now available on the domestic abuse webpage to a specialist polish helpline service.

In terms of disclosures for many of the women service users disclosures were made on numerous occasions to doctors, social workers, health visitors and family workers who failed to recognise the signs and resulted in no referrals made or signposted for specialist support.

"I received some information from the family worker, but would not have known where to go and was asking for help which didn't come."

"There isn't enough information out there on where to go or who to contact, which is especially difficult when you can't speak the language."

"I told me doctor who diagnosed me with depression"

"I didn't see any leaflets anywhere"

"information on domestic abuse needs to be made more widely available and easy to find"

Consultation with women held in November 2014

The Task and Finish Group found a wide range of information and support advice available for domestic abuse on the council's website which was not considered a place to look for information. The Community Safety Partnership Plan 2014-17 states the website was created to provide local information on services for victims of domestic abuse to be easily accessible.

The consultation with service providers found a number of agencies in Luton work with domestic abuse victims on a regular basis. In the main support provision was specifically aimed at women with some agencies providing family support. Over half of the agencies who responded did provide support services for children affected by domestic abuse specifically aimed at children aged 0-9 years old, and young people aged 10-17 years old. Some agencies provided support for male victims of domestic abuse and this was also the case for perpetrators.

The consultation with women service users highlights a need for information to be more accessible and visible to raise awareness of the support provisions available and also in alternatives forms posters and leaflets in places such as: libraries, supermarkets, local shops, benefit officers, GP surgeries and schools and advertising on the radio and television.

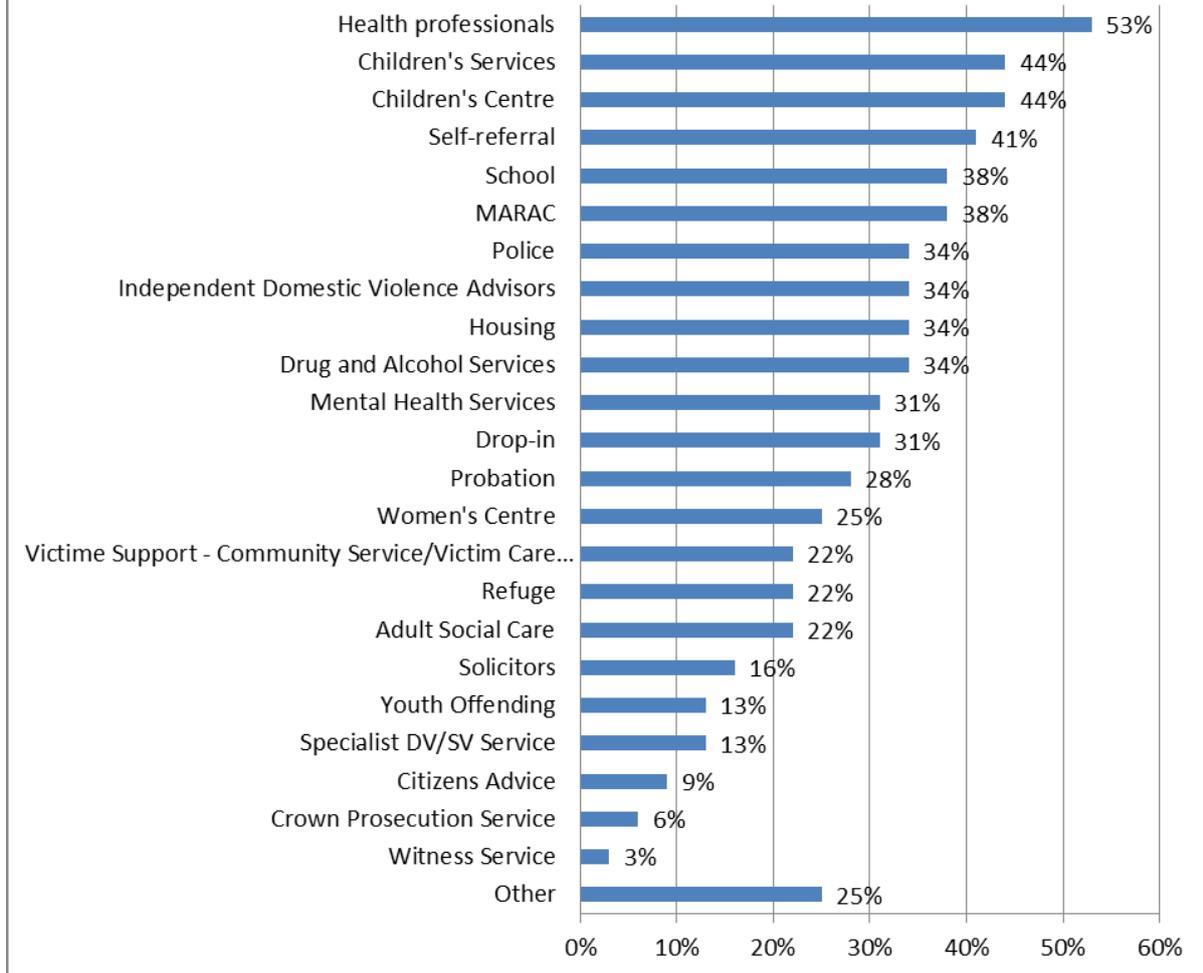
Recommendation

That the Council through the Community Safety Partnership/Domestic Abuse Delivery Board lead and fully supports initiatives such as the 'White Ribbon' campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse during the violence against women (VAW) week an annual event held in November and for this to be reflected in promotional materials such as: posters, brochures, leaflets and newsletters.

Where referrals come from?

The consultation with service users revealed referrals came from a wide range sources outlined in table below where the percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple boxes on the questionnaire being ticked. In the evidence to the Task and Finish Group for many of witnesses referrals were made from the police, socials services and the council's customer service centre.

Where do you get DA referrals from?



In the evidence to the Task and Finish Group referrals to adult social care came from a variety of sources such as: the LBC customer service centre, the Police, GPs, East of England Ambulance Service and Luton and Dunstable Hospital. The Customer Services Team (CST) always contacts the Safeguarding Adults Team when domestic abuse concerns are raised regarding an individual. If the safeguarding team determine it does not meet its threshold then the CST would sign post the call to: the Police, Women's Aid, the LBC housing team or children's services as appropriate. If the call meets the Adult Social Care criteria a referral form (ICES) is completed if the case is not already known to a team or social worker. Domestic abuse victims receive information on services and made aware of the role of the local authority and its partners.

The customer service centre is the first point of call for the public to access and raise concerns regarding domestic abuse and seen in a private interview room and consideration is given to the gender of the member of staff who carries out the interview.

Risk assessments are carried out on referrals of domestic abuse using the DASH (Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment and Honour based violence) risk identification checklist.

Performance Monitoring

The Task and Finish Group found no specific community safety performance data which are monitored to ascertain the true extent of domestic abuse in the town, other than local data monitored and collected by the Police. It is unclear to what extent this information is shared among partners.

MARAC does provide quarterly performance report on number of referrals to the Luton's Safeguarding Children's Board to provide assurance that local agencies are identifying and providing appropriate support to safeguard children at risk as a result of domestic abuse.

Partnership Working

31% of service providers who responded to the consultation rated partnership working as very good. CAADA also assessed Luton's MARAC as a well-run effective partnership. Effective partnership working and information sharing was found to occur in meetings of the Domestic Abuse Forum and the Luton Safeguarding Children's Board.

"the working relationships with other agencies and the multi-agency working seems to work well within Luton. Individual working relations are good and the MARAC promotes this.

"There is a really good partnership approach".

Consultation with Service Providers, August 2014

Some of the agencies consulted felt within the partnership there was unwillingness to share information which was perceived as a barrier that prevented effective partnership working from taking place.

Recommendation

That the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board is requested to ensure all partners within the Community Safety Partnership are made aware of the information sharing protocol in place for effective partnership working to continue to take place.

However, concerns in the Annual Report of Luton Safeguarding Board with regards to the inconsistency of agency representation at MARAC meetings. In particular the Children and Learning Department were not always represented at some meetings and; SEPT (South East Partnership Trust) had zero attendance at MARAC meetings which is a core agency determined by CAADA. Luton Safeguarding Children's Board consider a collaborative approach is integral between partner agencies to develop and deliver services that provide support to victims and to hold perpetrators accountable. The deletion of the post of the Domestic Abuse Coordinator was also a

concern raised by LSCB regarded as instrumental in supporting the coordination of work within the partnership.

“The demise of a dedicated Domestic Abuse Coordinator post to support and coordinate the collaborative approach may be less joined up and effective. The LSCB recognises the challenging budgetary decisions, partners have had to make but would recommend the decision be reviewed in light of the prevalence of domestic abuse incidents in Luton and the impact this has on all services locally.”

Luton Safeguarding Children’s Board Annual Report 2013-14

“the MARAC partnership is working well together however, it does need consistent attendance from some services.”

Consultation with Service Providers, August 2014

Recommendation

The concerns of the Luton Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) regarding the inconsistency of agency attendance at MARAC meetings is acknowledge by the Task and Finish Group. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Group is required to encourage representation from all core agencies which is vital in maintaining a collaborative approach to ensure high risk victims and their children are fully supported.

Desktop research of the Community Safety Partnership Plan 2014-2017 found the partnership commissions a domestic abuse services coordinator to draw together information about services for victims on the website. However, it is unclear whether the remit of the post extends to provide support and coordination of a collaborative approach within the partnership working. A scrutiny review in 2005 found a Domestic Abuse Coordinator post was part funded by the council and the Home Office and recommended the post be deleted and replaced with a more strategic role. The responsibilities of the domestic abuse coordinator were included in the role of the CSP Manager who line manages the MARAC Coordinator, a post currently funded from a Home Office grant which ends in March 2015. Evidence to the Task and Finish Group from the CSP Manager highlights the need to retain the post of the MARAC Coordinator to ensure high risk victims of domestic abuse receive support from MARAC and for information to be shared risk assessed. The CSP is looking at alternative ways to secure funding to retain the MARAC Coordinators post once Home Office funding ceases in March 2015.

Recommendation

That the Community Safety Partnership fully understands the necessity and importance of the post of the Domestic Abuse Coordinator and request consideration is given to reinstate and fund the position to ensure an effective collaborative approach is maintained across voluntary and statutory agencies to influence change to tackle domestic abuse in Luton. (page 32)

Barriers/Gaps in Services

- Information especially in areas of 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) was considered a barrier which came from the consultation with agencies and service users. In that there were no clear guidelines within the partnership and often led to in agencies giving conflicting information. There was a need for all partner agencies and LBC staff to be aware of the destitution domestic violence concession regarding NRPF which was introduced by the Border Agency in April 2012. The concession clearly states the qualification for concession in terms of temporary leave normally 3 months stay in the country, which allows access to public funds such as: job seekers allowance, income support and housing benefit. Further information on the concession can be found on the UK Border Agency website: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visa-immigration/settlement .
- The lack of provision for male victims of domestic abuse in terms of a safe house/ male refuges the nearest refuge was located in Cambridge and only a small amount of local support offered services for male victims fleeing domestic abuse.
- Language was a major barrier mentioned in the agency consultation and in the interviews held with women service users, especially where English is a second or other language. In terms of women approaching the council for advice language was a major barrier particularly if an interpreter was not provided. In some instances some agencies used children to interpret which was inappropriate or friends who were not fully briefed on the extent and level of detail they would be required to interpret.

Recommendation

The Task and Finish Group requests the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customers Services ensures all staff that work in the customer service centre (including staff dealing with housing issues) are made aware of the council's contract/protocol for translation services. These details should be visible and accessible to all staff that work in the customer service centre (including housing staff dealing with housing issues) to respond to the needs of customers approaching the council for assistance where English is either a second or other language.

- In the interviews held with women service users there was found to be a lack of understanding around domestic abuse which was also concern mentioned in the agency consultation where it was felt front line services, social workers, schools and the police did not fully understand or recognised the signs of domestic abuse. There was also an expectation for frontline services to be more perceptive in indentifying domestic abuse and to ask questions for disclosures to be made more easily. However, this was complicated by the women themselves not recognising they were in an abusive relationship. The women who were interviewed also felt some front line services did not

routinely come across domestic abuse and therefore did not fully understand the issues that surround it sufficiently to support victims which were particularly noticeable in areas of social care where child protection was involved which focused on the welfare of the child. More work was needed to explain child protection procedures to victims the reasons why children are subject to a child protection plan.

- In the interview held with women from the BME communities cultural difference were perceived as a barrier which prevented them from seeking help and support especially with women within the Asian community who were not familiar with the customs and laws of a new country. Many felt isolated in the home and did not disclose until their children started school.

Recommendation

The Task and Finish Group acknowledge more work is needed in some BME communities to raise awareness of the different forms of domestic abuse and in recognising the signs. The Domestic Abuse Strategic Group is requested to look at ways of engaging with these communities and work with faith and community leaders to address sensitive issues of domestic abuse in their communities and raise awareness of where help and support can be found

Conclusion

In conclusion the review highlights more work is needed around the following areas:

- Access to information - to be made more visible on the website and for the information to meets the needs of Luton's diverse community. The Council needs to take the lead on domestic abuse in terms of promoting more awareness of the support provision available in Luton through posters and leaflets in public places which would encourage more reporting.
- Prevention and early intervention - to ensure victims of domestic abuse are able to recognise the signs and receive the help and support at an early stage. This was especially important in disclosures made where children are involved where prevention and early intervention was necessary before child protection was enforced. There was also a need for consistent and clear messages from council departments and agencies on the advice which is given in areas of 'no recourse to public funds', housing benefits and on the eligibility criteria relating to housing.
- Schools need to raise awareness around health and unhealthy relationships which should be delivered through the curriculum and work with specialist agencies within the town to ensure these messages are delivered.