

15 January 2007

---

## **LGA's Domestic violence project**

### **Decisions**

1. Members are asked:
  - to approve the final report and conclusions;
  - to agree that the project's achievement should be exploited, in conjunction with IDeA, to ensure that many examples of best practice are widely shared and continue to inform community safety and other areas of policy development.

### **Actions Required**

2. As determined by the Board

**Action by:** Safer Communities Board team

Contact Officer: Liz Hobson tel 0207 664 3229 email [liz.hobson@lga.gov.uk](mailto:liz.hobson@lga.gov.uk)

15 January 2007

---

## LGA's Domestic violence project

### Summary

1. This report sets out the progress made over the three-year Home Office funded LGA domestic violence project that was established with the aim of identifying and promoting good practice of councils and partner organisations in addressing domestic violence.

### Background

- 1.1. Domestic violence causes considerable damage to individuals, families, the community and impacts on a range of services, such as housing, education and social services. As such, domestic violence presents a considerable cost to the public sector.
- Domestic violence makes up 17–25% of all violent crime<sup>1</sup>
  - Domestic violence represented 13% of the total number of homelessness acceptances in England in 2005<sup>2</sup>
  - 52% of child protection cases involve domestic violence<sup>3</sup>
  - The total cost of domestic violence to services and the economy is £23 billion a year<sup>4</sup>
- 1.2 Local authorities have a vital and central role to play in tackling domestic violence; as well as direct service provision and raising awareness, councils are well placed to lead local partnerships – bringing all the agencies together to tackle this issue.
- 1.3 Since December 2003, the LGA has been running a three-year Home Office funded Domestic Violence project aimed at identifying and promoting good practice of councils and partner organisations in addressing domestic violence by:
- Developing and supporting local partnerships.
  - Sharing of good practice.
  - Raising awareness of domestic violence and councils' central role in tackling this problem.
  - Influencing national developments for a more co-ordinated response.
  - Identifying broader lessons for community safety.
- 1.4 Many local authorities have already developed excellent practice in this area. The project has built upon this success, looking across the spectrum of local authority

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas S, Povey D, Walker A and Kershaw C (2005) 'Crime in England and Wales 2004/5' Home Office Statistical Bulletin No 11/05. London: Home Office

<sup>2</sup> Summary information collected through the quarterly P1E returns on local housing authorities' activities under homelessness legislation. Published by the DCLG

<sup>3</sup> Farmer E and Owen M (1995) 'Child protection practice: private risks and public remedies'. London: HMSO

<sup>4</sup> Walby, S (2004) 'The cost of domestic violence', (University of Leeds) Women and Equality Unit, DTI

activity to provide consultancy, research and guidance. Priorities have been to assist effective partnership working, develop coordinated responses between children's and domestic violence work, and the promotion of safe housing options including schemes that enable victims to remain safely within their own homes if they choose to do so.

- 1.5 As the domestic violence agenda evolves it is essential that responses look more broadly than the criminal justice arena. The contribution that local authorities can make must be recognised as integral to the coordinated community response currently being developed by the Home Office Domestic Violence Unit. It is essential that the work of the project, and the innovations and achievements of local authorities are not lost – but instead continue to inform national developments.

## **2 Programme of consultancy**

- 2.1 A key project objective was to support the development of effective domestic violence partnerships. During 2004 the project ran a programme of engagement and support for 10 developing domestic violence partnerships. In September 2005, the LGA published research by the Tavistock Institute into this programme highlighting the implications, lessons and practical issues for other authorities and partnerships to share. A set of practical checklists for self-assessment was also produced and disseminated to all local authorities, receiving very positive feedback.

- 2.2 The main findings of the Tavistock research were that although a number of common problems were experienced by developing domestic violence partnerships, for example lack of support from parent organisations, inadequate resources and lack of leadership, these are all areas to which local authorities can usefully contribute. The report concluded that:

- In the lifecycle of domestic violence partnerships it is time for local authorities to play a central and vital role.
- Local authorities are in a key position to facilitate local partnership structures, which can maximise evolving opportunities to lever commitment, accountability and integration of domestic violence at both strategic and practical levels.
- Information exchange to raise awareness of the true costs of domestic violence locally will be important in demonstrating the benefit to all partners of prioritising domestic violence and the contribution that both voluntary and statutory agencies have to make in developing an appropriate response.
- Solutions do exist to this age old dilemma; it no longer needs to be avoided by the public sector. A difference can be made.

- 2.3 The checklist focused on:

- Sustainability and leadership.
- Different structures for partnership working.
- A realistic and achievable strategy.
- Practice development and service delivery – based on local priorities.
- The role of the domestic violence coordinator.

- 2.4 A second, year-long programme of work with local partnerships (phase 2) ran throughout 2006, making shorter, more focused interventions available to a greater number of partnerships. Phase 2 was based on the lessons learnt from our initial partnership work and the Tavistock research and checklist. This work was carried out in close collaboration with the Home Office, feeding into and building upon national initiatives to address domestic violence (such as the Tackling Violent Crime Programme and the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts programme).
- 2.5 **Summary of findings from phase 2:** This element of the project has been greeted enthusiastically. All the partnerships visited have been very positive about the support received and there is evidence of progress in all cases. All those involved feel the agenda has moved on and that domestic violence is accepted as a higher priority than in the past. What is also evident is that the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs) and the development of Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACS) have added to the debate and the progress of activity.
- 2.6 Some of the common issues are:
- The need for greater clarity about roles/responsibilities of different partners
  - Lack of influence of domestic violence coordinators.
  - Limited mainstream or significant funding.
  - The need for senior level engagement and buy-in.
- 2.7 Examples of the typical support requested by partnerships and delivered as part of phase 2 are as follows: involving and influencing senior partners and resource holders; resolving boundary issues; development of strategies; turning strategies into action i.e. making them operational; introducing effective and rationalised coordination; recruiting partners into new structures; resolving competing agendas/targets; restructuring of partnerships; progression towards SDVCs; developing the role of domestic violence coordinators; assisting the development and achievement of LAA targets; introduction of IDVAs and MARACS; and, data collection and information sharing.
- 2.8 In terms of the activity of partner agencies there remains a lack of consistency across England and Wales and engagement with wider partners can vary. Local authorities are undoubtedly increasing their influence over this agenda with some excellent practice (based on known models) being introduced. The advent of combined services for children has allowed a clearer focus. It seems to be clearly understood that domestic violence is a major factor in the wellbeing of children. Increasingly councils are seeking to intervene earlier with families and domestic violence is a key part of that intervention though obstacles remain in addressing domestic violence issues within schools.
- 2.9 In summary, the lifetime of this project has seen a growth in the acceptance of the importance of the domestic violence agenda. Many councils are mainstreaming funds and services. Partnerships still struggle with the concept of working together on

occasions but the current government policies and levers have undoubtedly been catalysts for improvement.

### **3 Children and young people affected by domestic violence**

- 3.1 The LGA believes that the needs of children and young people experiencing domestic violence must be explicitly addressed within the new structures for children's services and thus embedded within the prevention agenda for all vulnerable children. Many local authorities are taking up the challenge and developing joined-up approaches to working with children and adults. 750,000 children are estimated to witness domestic violence every year; some are directly harmed by the violence and abuse within the home, and others are harmed indirectly by witnessing it. Many have to leave home, some many times to escape the abuse. Many more are caught up in contact proceedings between separating parents where there is a history of domestic violence. 52% of child protection cases involve domestic violence and each of the five outcomes for children set out in Every Child Matters will be adversely affected by experiencing domestic violence.
- 3.2 In 2005, the LGA produced a pamphlet sharing council's experiences of developing joined-up approaches to working with children and adults affected by domestic violence. It sets out four examples where local authorities have taken up the challenge and developed innovative services. However, service provision remained patchy, funding uncertain and information about what works was not well shared. In response, the LGA hosted a Children and Domestic Violence Inter-Agency Group to highlight the varied needs of children and young people affected by domestic violence and to begin to develop a coordinated response. In October 2005, the group published a consultation document offering a template to incorporate the needs of children experiencing domestic violence in planning children's services.
- 3.3 The final commissioning guidance '*A Vision for Services for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Violence*' was launched at a joint meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Groups on Domestic Violence and Children on 24 May 2006. The guidance offers a pathway for services for children experiencing domestic violence which makes the links between domestic violence and the five outcomes for all children set out in Every Child Matters. It was produced by the LGA, ADSS, Women's Aid and CAF/CASS, with input from Refuge, and professional comments from advisors at the DfES, Department of Health and the Home Office. It offers a template which Directors of Children's Services, Cabinet Members with lead responsibility for children and their Local Safeguarding Children's Boards can use to incorporate the needs of children experiencing domestic violence in planning children's services. We know that commissioning guidance cannot of itself produce new resources to fill the gaps in services, but it does provide a tool to identify their needs, assess gaps and incorporate them into service planning and priority setting. The aim is that children affected by domestic violence also have their voices heard.
- 3.4 The guidance has been highlighted in the government's National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan, which aims to co ordinate action across government to reduce the

incidence of domestic violence and the harm it causes, and the DfES document '*Working together to safeguard children*'. Amongst members and partner organisations, the guidance has evoked an overwhelmingly positive response and has now been reprinted several times.

- 3.5 On 5 October 2006, the LGA hosted a multi-agency expert workshop '*Children and domestic violence: moving the agenda forward*'. The event was used to share knowledge about the range of recent developments, take stock of progress, highlight gaps in development work and identify where existing good practice needs to be disseminated. As a result of the workshop an expanded group is being established to continue to disseminate and coordinate practice developments, consider piloting the implementation of the guidance and work with government to establish a robust evidence base. Using the information from this workshop the Home Office focused their October 2006 Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence on the needs of children.

## 4 LAA's, targets and outcome measures

- 4.1 **Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs):** In 2004 the LGA published a report sharing council's experiences of adopting domestic violence stretch targets during the first round of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs). Using case examples it outlined the benefits and difficulties and set out the key considerations councils should take into account for second generation LPSAs highlighting the need for:
- Caution when setting targets based on repeat victimisation.
  - Data collection/information sharing arrangements to be carefully constructed.
- 4.2 **Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 225:** BVPI 225 came into force in April 2005. Its purpose is to assess the overall provision and effectiveness of local authority services designed to help victims of domestic violence and to prevent further domestic violence. It includes 11 questions covering a range of activities and is measured as a percentage of the number of questions to which an authority can answer 'yes'. The LGA has voiced its concerns about BV 225's usability as an indicator, especially the number of targets included, the omission of county councils and the lack of priority given to support, outreach and advocacy services for adults and children.
- 4.3 In April 2005, the LGA published guidance on the new indicator<sup>5</sup>. The report provided a commentary using a series of case examples to illustrate how local authorities have been developing their responses. Many authorities were already involved in innovative schemes to address the issues covered in the indicator. These ranged from projects that guarantee victims protection in their homes to building preventative approaches to domestic violence into the school curriculum. Councils also need to demonstrate that they are taking a partnership approach and sharing information effectively with other local agencies. The LGA guidance was designed to help councils make sense of the indicator and to give them examples of what their counterparts are doing. It also provided an outline of the main statutory provisions relating to domestic violence which apply to local authorities.

---

<sup>5</sup> LGA (2005), Implementing the new domestic violence Best Practice Performance Indicator, LGA: London

- 4.4 **Local Area Agreements (LAAs):** Work to tackle domestic violence is exactly the sort of cross cutting initiative that fits within the structure of the LAA framework. A number of local areas are already using LAAs creatively to pool funding and resources to tackle domestic violence. A web based resource to share local authorities' experiences of incorporating work to address domestic violence in their Local Area Agreements was launched in November 2006. The resource looks at how the LAA process works, where work to address domestic violence might fit within the LAA framework and then goes on to draw on the varied experiences of local authorities.
- 4.5 To date the inclusion of initiatives to address domestic violence in the LAA framework has been successful in improving responses by enhancing partnership working, pooling resources and encouraging coordination. Already a number of local authorities have been able to use the LAA process as a focus for positive initiatives to address domestic violence and reduce the harm it causes individuals and communities.
- 4.6 However, the current LAA framework with its range of mandatory indicators and targets can inhibit the ability to address the cross-cutting nature of the issue effectively. Most current targets are confined to the safer and stronger communities block, yet we know that successfully tackling domestic violence will help authorities meet a range of other indicators spread across all the four blocks. The LGA has been lobbying for a new performance framework for localities that is more focused on outcomes and less driven by a plethora of targets and indicators. The recently published Local Government Bill reflects many of the underlying principles of our proposals and proposes a simplification of the performance framework with a clear set of national outcomes, targets negotiated through the LAA and a streamlined approach to monitoring, intervention and support.

The LGA is working with central government to develop the new framework and as part of this we expect to see a clear set of national outcomes reflecting national priorities, developed through the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007 process. We hope that as a result councils will have greater freedom to innovate and tailor effective local solutions that will be able to reflect the complexity of this issue and the range of responses required.

## 5 Housing and homelessness

- 5.1 Nationally, violent relationship breakdown is the third highest homelessness acceptance category. In 2005, more than 12,000 households were accepted by local housing authorities in England as being owed a main homelessness duty where the reason for homelessness was fleeing domestic violence. This represents 13% of homelessness acceptances in England. Housing issues form a substantial part of BVPI 225, including refuge provision, reduction in the percentage of repeat homelessness acceptances as a result of domestic violence and the development of a sanctuary schemes.
- 5.2 **Sanctuary Schemes:** The sanctuary scheme is an innovative new way to address homelessness and domestic violence. It is a victim centred initiative, which aims to make it possible for the victims of domestic violence to feel safe and remain in their

own home – if that is what they want. The LGA believes that sanctuary schemes are one of a range of options that should be offered to victims of domestic violence. Obviously they will not be appropriate (or desired) for a proportion of individuals. The LGA is keen to encourage good practice in this area.

- 5.3 In 2005, the LGA hosted a workshop looking at how to set up and run a sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic violence. The event was aimed at those local authorities who were considering setting up a sanctuary type scheme and provided participants with practical information about best practice. It focused on the experiences in the London Boroughs of Harrow and Barnet. In Harrow, homelessness acceptances from this group have been reduced by over 50% since 2001/2 when the scheme was introduced.
- 5.4 Following on from the workshop we have been working with the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to produce joint guidance: '*Options for setting up and running a Sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic violence*'. The guidance covers the practicalities as well as support arrangements, risk assessment and a series of case studies showing how the scheme might work in diverse circumstances.
- 5.5 We have continued to work closely with the CLG to ensure that a range of safe housing options are promoted which are appropriate to local circumstances and the needs of the individual. Joint LGA and Communities and Local Government guidance on "Options for Setting up a Sanctuary Scheme" was published in December 2006 and it aims to help local authorities and other key stakeholders set up and run effective schemes designed to help victims of domestic violence. The paper includes a number of best practice case studies of those authorities that have developed innovative solutions to tackling this problem.

## **6 The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and domestic homicide reviews**

- 6.1 The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act received Royal Assent on 15 November 2004. The Act focuses on improving the legal and other protection available to victims of domestic violence. The LGA supported the measures to tackle domestic violence which, we believe should increase the protection the legal system can offer to victims. However, a number of important clauses in the Act have yet to be brought into force. The outstanding clauses have now been given a timetable for commencement by PM on 6<sup>th</sup> December Non-molestation orders and restraining orders will be commenced in July 07.
- 6.2 In addition, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 established a statutory basis for domestic homicide reviews. The aim of these reviews is for all agencies involved to identify the lessons that can be learnt from these fatalities. The reviews focus on the deaths of those aged 16 and above resulting from violence, abuse or neglect by a relative, a member of the same household or someone with whom the



victim had an intimate personal relationship. The agencies that will take part include chief police officers in England and Wales, councils, local probation boards, health authorities and primary care trusts. The LGA believes that it is important that the reviews support and capitalise on existing statutory partnerships with sufficient flexibility to enable them to be conducted in the most appropriate way locally. The learning from the reviews must be collated so that lessons can be learnt in a strategic, national context.

- 6.3 In February 2006, we hosted a one day conference looking at the proposed guidance for domestic homicide reviews. The conference examined the purpose and remit for the reviews, considering the lessons that can be learnt from the review process so that agencies can develop more effective partnerships to reduce or prevent domestic homicide by assessing and identifying risk and improving responses.
- 6.4 Following the conference, we have made a formal response to the Home Office consultation. Key points include: the need for clear guidance to demonstrate how these reviews will fit with other legal processes – in particular, the legal implications if a review is to be carried out concurrently with a criminal investigation, as well as the implications of the proposed review of Coroner’s Services. We believe a broad range of agencies and individuals must be involved within the review process and that effective family engagement is vital. However, the complexities of family involvement and the possibility of knowledge about, or collusion with, the violence needs to be taken into account. Resources need to be identified: both for reviews and follow through. A national aggregation of data and recommendations should take place so that local learning can be shared nationally.

## **7 Employment policies and the Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence (CAADV)**

- 7.1 Research has shown that the economic effects of domestic violence to UK business have reached over £2.7 billion. Typically, these costs are incurred through lower productivity, increased absenteeism and higher stress levels as a result of the experiencing domestic violence. As major employers, this will have a particular impact upon local authorities. Local authority action to increase staff security and reduce the economic impact of domestic violence in the work place will also send out a powerful message to local communities.
- 7.2 The Safer Communities Board recommended that the LGA works to promote the adoption of domestic violence employment policies by local authorities. We have therefore become members of the Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence (CAADV). CAADV aims to raise awareness of and take action to reduce the human and economic impact of domestic violence in the work place. Their vision is to create a work environment where employees have the opportunity seek practical support and advice and, ultimately, take positive action to end domestic violence. The LGA and Local Government Employers will also need to consider how to take this issue forward

as an employment policy for the LGA and the central bodies. Cllr. Ann Lucas serves as our representative on the Alliance, supported by an adviser from Devon County Council. The Alliance will be making a presentation at the LGA one-day domestic violence conference in January 2007.

## **8 Sharing good practice, raising awareness and support**

- 8.1 A key aim of the project has been to share good practice and raise awareness of local government's role in addressing domestic violence. We have hosted a range of successful events including three one day conferences to share best practice, look at the new domestic homicide reviews and review learning from the project. We have also spoken at numerous external events (for example speaking at each of the regional networks), run workshops (including one for elected members) and contributed to a range of external working groups. The LGA has input to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence and the All Party-Parliamentary Groups and Domestic Violence and on Children, as well as representation on a number of advisory boards, working groups and stakeholder meetings: for example, the CPS Domestic Violence Community Engagement External Consultation Group, the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts Task Force (and resulting resource manual) and the Respect Advisory Group (developing service standards for voluntary domestic violence perpetrator programmes).
- 8.2 The project has also produced a variety of publications (guidance, briefings, pamphlets, research and checklists) and articles, all of which can be found on the LGA website (the project pages on the LGA website will remain as a resource). A useful overview is our leaflet: '*Local government's role in tackling domestic violence*', which provides a summary of local government's key roles and responsibilities. The project developed its own sign-up bi-monthly bulletin with 233 individual subscribers as well as being circulated by a number of different networks including by the domestic violence leads in the government offices in the regions.
- 8.3 When the project was first set up the overwhelming demand for support and guidance from member authorities quickly became apparent. As a relatively new area of work for many authorities, some domestic violence specialists felt isolated and sidelined. As a result the information provided by the project, and the powerful advisers network, proved very popular. At the end of the project we have been seeking a way to keep these initiatives going. A National Domestic Violence Coordinators Network is being set up, which might be able to take on some of the support and information sharing roles previously undertaken by the domestic violence project. The Network is liaising with other organisations including Women's Aid and the National Community Safety Network (NCSN) to take this forward.

## **9 Conclusion**

- 9.1 The three years of this project have seen a significant change in the approach of local authorities to domestic violence. Responses to domestic violence now play a part in most community safety strategies and is often a theme within LAAs. Less frequently it is a priority within community plans but the need to respond to this issue is generally accepted amongst the statutory agencies, and particularly local authorities.
- 9.2 Leadership by local authorities is a key role in successfully combating domestic violence. Where this role is successfully assumed, alongside a strong relationship with other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector, there is clear evidence of a reduction in harm to victims and children.
- 9.3 It is still a challenge for partnerships to mainstream domestic violence because the drive for performance does, on occasions, militate against the long term, early interventionist approach needed to achieve fundamental changes in society's reaction to the issues of violence within the home. The growth of risk assessment (with safety planning as a corollary) and independent domestic violence advisers have been very powerful aspects of new responses to domestic violence. The Home Office, Courts Service and Crown Prosecution Service have given great impetus to the introduction of these components as part of the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts. This has had a dramatic effect in demonstrating the potential of an effective response to the crises which affect victims. The concentration on high risk cases is obviously correct with the limited funding available but there is a sense of frustration that the lack of funding at the softer end of domestic violence (e.g. education within schools about healthy relationships) misses opportunities to change cultures before the offending behaviour begins.
- 9.4 The next steps to be taken will undoubtedly be towards providing a model for a co-ordinated community response which councils will play a vital part in helping to create within their own boundaries. The realisation that domestic violence can only be resolved if every element of the problem is addressed in a cohesive way is becoming widely accepted.
- 9.5 Issues which can prevent successful partnership working include the need to be clear about roles and responsibilities both across local government boundaries (e.g. the division of responsibility between county and district councils) and within partnerships. Greater success is often achieved where there is clarity about these relationships, (for example where a county takes a lead with districts part of a county-wide approach. It also must be said that the voluntary sector can find itself in a subordinate position when the statutory agencies begin to devote their resources and bureaucracy towards domestic violence partnerships.
- 9.6 The advent of domestic homicide reviews will lead to an increasingly visible examination of domestic violence partnerships' efficacy. The early lessons from informal reviews clearly demonstrated that information sharing and effective policies, operated in a co-ordinated way, are essential to reduce homicides and serious assaults, the vast

number of which are preventable. This is likely to have a substantial impact on the policies of local authorities and their partners.

- 9.7 The linkage between the safeguarding children agenda and domestic violence is almost universally recognised and the role that the LGA played in producing the guidance on this issue (*'A Vision for Services for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Violence'*) was of great importance. Care should be taken that the understandable concern for children experiencing or witnessing domestic violence does not obscure the fact that it is the violence to the parent that is often the root cause of damage to children and this is the issue which must be addressed to provide long term solutions.
- 9.8 This programme of work has demonstrated that the role of local government in developing consistent and effective responses to domestic violence is absolutely crucial. The LGA needs to capitalise on this work by ensuring, in conjunction with the IDeA, that the many examples of best practice are widely shared through IDeA Knowledge and other mechanisms and by maintaining contact with networks of practitioners and advisers. In addition the learning from this project will continue to underpin policy development on wider issues of community safety, child protection and housing and homelessness.
- 9.9 Finally credit must be paid to the Home Office for recognising the important role local authorities play in combating the scourge of domestic violence and funding this project for three years. This has permitted the development and spread of best practice in a way which would have been impossible were it not for their involvement. As a result victims and their children will be safer across the whole of England and Wales.

## **Implications for Wales**

Policy responsibility rests with the Welsh Assembly rather than the Home Office though the project has worked closely with colleagues in Wales.

## **Financial/Resource Implications**

There are none arising from this report.