

12 September 2016

Portsmouth/LGA domestic abuse project

Purpose

For discussion and decision.

Summary

The LGA recently commissioned Portsmouth City Council to investigate the costs of domestic abuse to councils and explore the savings that might be made through investment in prevention and intervention strategies. This paper summarises their findings and presents some options for next steps.

Officers from Portsmouth will also be attending the Board meeting to discuss their report.

Recommendations

That the Board:

1. Review the briefing report and consider the findings presented by Portsmouth City Council officers
2. Discuss and agree next steps.

Action

Officers to action as directed.

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Background

1. Domestic violence and abuse have a profound effect on victims and their families. Whilst supporting those directly impacted by abuse rightly remains the key concern for public agencies, research has also explored the financial impact of domestic abuse, both on wider society and public services.
2. In the context of limited resources, local areas are keen to ensure their budgets are used as effectively as possible. To help inform local decision-making, the LGA commissioned research to explore in more detail the extent of domestic abuse and the financial impact on local government, and look at how this might support areas when considering how to invest in domestic violence prevention and intervention strategies.
3. A team from Portsmouth City Council were appointed to undertake this work, as they had already been exploring some of these issues in their area. Their research, attached as a briefing report, considers some of the direct costs associated with domestic abuse on local authority housing and social care departments, and the potential for cost savings in the long term. The report provides a summary of academic research, including a detailed literature review and a summary of their own research into costs at seven local authorities.

Summary of briefing report

4. The report covers the following key issues:
 - 4.1. Levels of domestic abuse
 - 4.2. Impact on local authority services
 - 4.3. Evidence/estimates of costs to local authorities
 - 4.4. Challenges in evidencing costs
 - 4.5. Recommendations for improving recording
 - 4.6. Potential impact of interventions.
5. Levels of domestic violence and abuse are substantially under-reported. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) suggests that 1.3 million women and 600,000 men aged 16-59 experienced domestic abuse over the last 12 months, continuing a downward trend in prevalence since 2005. However an analysis undertaken earlier this year by Professor Sylvia Walby suggests that levels of domestic abuse incidents (rather than victims) may instead be increasing, marking an upward trend since 2008¹.

¹ The ONS is currently consulting on proposals to change the CSEW's methodology for recording high frequency repeat victimisation going forward. Future data releases may therefore help to determine trends in repeat victimisation at a national level.

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6. The financial impact of domestic abuse on local authority services is far reaching, reflecting the complex multiple needs that victims of domestic abuse often have, including:
 - 6.1. Housing costs, such as emergency accommodation, relocation, repairs or target hardening measures
 - 6.2. Children's social care costs, for example assessing/taking action where children are living in a household where domestic abuse is or becomes known
 - 6.3. Adult social care costs, including protecting vulnerable adults from abuse and dealing with the impact of past or current abuse, such as responding to mental health needs and substance misuse.
7. There are particular challenges in identifying local prevalence levels and service take up, which makes estimating the cost of local service provision to victims of domestic abuse very difficult. Seven local authorities agreed to share data as part of this research, however none could provide comprehensive data about service users, because domestic abuse was not necessarily the presenting factor in all cases and/or because data records were not updated if subsequent disclosures of domestic abuse were made. This raises further issues about responding to the hidden nature of abuse and coordinating support across services.
8. The report recommends that local government services should be encouraged to enquire about domestic abuse, ensure their systems can be updated to record disclosures made after initial service engagement, and should routinely monitor domestic abuse. This would further assist efforts to provide more holistic support to victims with complex needs, while also providing a fuller picture of the impact of domestic abuse across local authority services.
9. Acknowledging the difficulties in collecting data, the report uses estimated unit costs to local authority services and police-recorded incident data as a proxy for service take-up in order to estimate costs. The report suggests therefore that any calculations provided are likely to be a significant under-estimate of actual costs. On this basis, estimated financial costs for housing, children's social care and adult social care across England and Wales are suggested to be at least £468m per year.
10. The report comments on some studies which have attempted to calculate the financial cost savings of providing IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisers/Advocates) services and MARACs (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences), concluding that significant savings (and decreased levels of repeat victimisation) might be achieved through further investment.

Commentary

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11. The report provides a useful summary of previous studies and estimates of costs for local authorities but suggests that councils struggle to demonstrate the prevalence of domestic abuse and costs to their authorities because of how data is recorded.
12. The report's findings are of particular relevance as the Government develops a National Statement of Expectations (NSE) for local authority provision around domestic abuse. The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy for 2016-2020 sets out a commitment to develop the NSE, comprising a set of defined core expectations for local service providers on VAWG, and a framework and toolkit to support local commissioning. A key element of this will be understanding local need and using this to inform service commissioning. It is likely that the NSE, currently being developed by DCLG, will include expectations around the collection and use of data to support a strategic partnership approach that meets local needs.
13. Fully understanding local need will require data to be collected and pooled by a number of partners, both externally, including eg police, health, commissioned providers, and from across council departments. The outcomes from the Portsmouth research suggest that processes for capturing data will need to be strengthened across council departments in order to support the objectives of the NSE.
14. The report highlights some studies that have considered the impact of domestic abuse interventions. It is important to draw this together with work undertaken by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to explore what works in terms of prevention and intervention strategies. The VAWG Strategy, which places increased focus on early intervention and prevention, sets out a commitment to undertake additional work with the College of Policing and EIF to capture further evidence about effective approaches.
15. It will also be useful to monitor work in some areas which has begun to explore the costs on local services of "troubled adults". The full impact of domestic abuse on council services can be difficult to disaggregate from the broader complex needs of those accessing council services. This work is considering how local services can best be provided for those with multiple needs, with a view to providing effective holistic support focussed on individuals.

Next steps

16. As well as assisting local authorities to focus their resources most effectively, the findings from this work can usefully complement other work to support councils in working towards the NSE. The Board is therefore asked to consider the following options for further work:
 - 16.1 Share the findings with DCLG and recommend that the NSE toolkit should include support for local areas to assess prevalence and costs, rather than assuming that they are already doing so

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- 16.2 Recommend that DCLG commissions further work to explore some of the difficulties in local data recording, and develop tools to support this. This might include developing and piloting a reporting template and protocols in a sample of local authorities; those involved in Portsmouth's work to date may be interested in participating. Subject to resources, this may be something that the LGA could look to commission if DCLG is unable to
- 16.3 Support the dissemination of the outcomes from this work, and ensure that any improvement in data recording is used to inform assessments of prevention and intervention measures being developed by the EIF/College of Policing as part of their "what works" programme.

Financial implications

17. Work with DCLG on the NSE and to disseminate the findings of the research can be accommodated within normal staffing budgets. There is a limited directorate budget potentially available to commission further external work.