

Domestic Violence

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

Domestic violence is one of the most pervasive crimes in our society, and preventative action by supporting victims and their families to reduce the number of incidents remains a priority for both local agencies and the Home Office. This report sets out the current policy and financial context in which councils are operating to tackle domestic violence, and outlines the findings from recent reports by the Early Intervention Foundation and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary into how responses to domestic violence could be improved.

Recommendations

That the LGA Executive:

- i. note the current context of the local approach to tackling domestic violence, along with recent reports into how that approach could be made more effective; and
- ii. comment on how the LGA could better support local authorities in addressing domestic violence.

Action

Officers to progress as directed.

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Domestic Violence

Background

1. Domestic violence is one of the most insidious crimes, accounting for eight percent of all crime, and with an estimated two million victims a year. These victims are predominantly women, with one in four women experiencing a form of domestic abuse in their lifetime. It has a major impact on children and young people who witness incidents and which can often lead to its perpetuation. It also imposes a significant cost on society, which has been estimated to be over £15.7 billion a year.
2. A significant part of this cost falls on the public services that deal with the consequences of domestic abuse, predominantly local authorities, the police and the health service. In developing their community budget proposals Cheshire West and Chester estimated the cost of domestic abuse to be £16.5 million a year to statutory partners, while Essex estimated the costs of domestic abuse to agencies in the county at £48.24 million, with some £2 million of that falling on councils. They also calculated that of the £5.92 million spent on domestic abuse services in Essex, the councils in the county contributed some £2.19 million or 37 per cent, compared with less than £800,000 from the health service and the criminal justice system, when domestic abuse collectively costs these agencies some £27 million.
3. This picture of councils being important commissioners of services for domestic abuse victims is seen across much of the rest of the country. Councils recognise both the moral and financial case for investing in services that help domestic abuse victims, and prevent further incidents. At the same time the funding streams previously available to councils to provide services to victims of domestic abuse have been reduced. The community safety funding that went to community safety partnerships was reduced by 60 per cent and then transferred to police and crime commissioners in April 2013. Councils have therefore changed the way they commission services for victims of domestic abuse, making more use of non-specialist providers like housing associations.
4. This has led national charities like Women's Aid to criticise councils for reductions in specialist services. However, the change in commissioning practice has not meant a reduction in the availability of services for victims. For example the Women's Aid's 2013 survey of domestic violence services found that there were 98 more bed spaces in refuges in 2013 as compared to 2010, that the number of outreach support staff employed in these services had increased by 30 over the same period and 53 per cent of the services surveyed expected to get the same amount of funding or more in 2013/14 from their local authority compared to 30 per cent expecting a reduction. It is clear that councils continue to play an important role in the provision of services to tackle the consequences of domestic abuse.

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

5. As well as being a priority at a local level, tackling domestic violence has also been a priority for this and previous Home Secretaries and governments. Both the 2009 Home Office strategy and the 2011 Home Office strategic vision to reduce violence against women and girls set out a wide range of measures to address domestic violence, and

the Home Office has developed a series of annual action plans to deliver on the commitments in the 2011 strategic vision. The action plan for 2014 was published in March and is funded by £28 million that the Home Office set aside for such work during the course of this parliament. It is centred around preventing violence against women and girls through early intervention, ensuring victims receive good quality services (by for example supporting local partners to become better at commissioning services) and improving the experience of victims in the criminal justice system and bringing perpetrators to justice. Within these areas there are strands on tackling female genital mutilation; increasing the use of perpetrator programmes, continuing to part-fund independent domestic violence and sexual violence advisers and multi-agency risk assessment conference co-ordinators and tackling forced marriage and honour-based violence.

Early Intervention Foundation Review of Domestic Violence

6. The importance of intervening early to reduce domestic violence was recently highlighted by the Early Intervention Foundation's (EIF) report published at the start of the year into the impact on domestic violence and abuse on the outcomes for children and young people. It found that effective prevention and early intervention offered the opportunity to reduce the impact of domestic violence on children and young people and deliver long-term savings for the bodies involved in working with the victims of domestic abuse.
7. The EIF report outlined three key ways in which public services could look to prevent domestic violence in the longer term. Schools and the health system provide one way as they can offer a means of embedding an understanding of good relationships in children and adolescents; while support to young mothers identified as being at higher risk also provides another way to prevent domestic violence or intervene as it is starting to occur. Finally, even where there is a longer history of domestic violence in a relationship, supporting the victims and working with the perpetrators offers a way to reduce incidents in the future, lowering re-offending rates.
8. The EIF however concluded that there was not enough evidence yet about what interventions worked best, or the evidence suggested the interventions currently being funded, such as those working with perpetrators, do not work well. Going forward the EIF therefore recommended that while councils, police and crime commissioners and health services should include prevention and early intervention measures in local strategies and plans, Whitehall should assist by helping develop and trial approaches to preventing domestic violence, for example in relation to perpetrators and changing young people's attitudes.

Regional approaches to tackling domestic abuse

9. One of the key partners repeatedly identified by the Home Office and others looking at the issue of violence against women and girls are Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). Many PCC police and crime plans make reference to tackling domestic violence and a number of PCCs have given particular prominence to tackling violence against women and girls including Vera Baird (Northumbria), Katie Bourne (Sussex) and Sue Mountstevens (Avon & Somerset). Vera Baird for example has agreed a regional strategy to tackle violence against women and girls with the PCCs for Durham and Cleveland. A major element within the strategy is working with employers so they better support staff who have been the victims of domestic violence (by for instance moving the member of staff to a different branch where this is an option to help end any

contact with a perpetrator). PCCs will also become significant funders of support to domestic violence victims from October, when they take on responsibility and the budgets for commissioning victims' services at a local level.

Quality of response to domestic violence – HMIC report

10. In order to facilitate improvements in local work to prevent domestic abuse as part of the violence against women and girls action plan, the Home Secretary commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in September 2013 to review the police response to domestic violence. This report was published in March 2014.
11. HMIC inspected the police response to domestic abuse in all 43 territorial forces in England and Wales over the autumn of 2013. During the inspections HMIC focused on the outcomes for victims, whether the risks to victims were adequately managed and what lessons could be learnt from different police approaches to domestic violence. The inspection process involved speaking to 70 victims of domestic violence, and surveying another 500 victims along with 200 professionals working with victims.
12. HMIC's conclusion following the inspections was that the overall police response to domestic abuse is not good enough. While the final report noted there had been considerable improvements in the services provided to victims over the last decade, especially high risk victims, it also identified weaknesses in the services provided to victims. These included:
 - 12.1. domestic violence being a priority on paper but this not being translated into operational reality;
 - 12.2. a lack of visible leadership and direction by senior officers;
 - 12.3. lack of collection of evidence by officers attending domestic abuse incidents and lack of information about the victim and perpetrator when officers arrive at the scene;
 - 12.4. poor management and supervision in the police that fails to reinforce the right behaviours and attitudes; and
 - 12.5. lack of skills and knowledge amongst officers that would enable them to tackle domestic abuse effectively, such as the inability of some officers to identify dangerous patterns of behaviour in perpetrators.
13. While the inspections centred on the police, the HMIC report acknowledged the vital role multi-agency approaches had to play in tackling domestic violence, and the recommendations made reference to this. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) were highlighted for the impact they had on improving local responses to high risk cases. HMIC said there had to be better information sharing on lower risk cases and suggested that multi-agency safeguarding hubs provided a mechanism to do this. The report's recommendations themselves did not specifically refer to the work of partners, but did suggest there were multi-agency inspections of the services provided to victims going forward, and that the results of domestic homicide reviews should be used to inform local action plans, with PCCs tracking the implementation of the review's recommendations. The Home Office, HMIC and the Association of Chief Police Officers are already putting in place plans to ensure the recommendations are implemented.

Implications for local authorities

14. Although much of the Home Office's focus has been on the police role in tackling domestic violence, and PCC's will be responsible for funding victims' services at a local level, the skills, experience and expertise in local authorities, as well as their new responsibilities for public health, mean they have a central role in dealing with domestic violence. Much more so than the police, they are well placed to prevent domestic violence being perpetuated, and also have more opportunities to intervene early to reduce incidents by identifying and supporting high risk victims through programmes like Troubled Families.
15. Local authorities are also at the forefront of measures to improve the quality of service provided to victims, while also driving down costs. Both Essex and Cheshire West and Chester have domestic violence programmes within their community budget pilots, and have done a considerable amount of work on identifying the costs of domestic violence to public and voluntary sector agencies in their areas. As a result of the changes made in the way Cheshire West and Chester and its partners deal with domestic violence, which now centre around having one project based on integrated early support, it is projecting net savings of £51 million over five years.
16. The LGA continues to work to support local authorities in addressing domestic violence by:
 - 16.1. By providing strong political leadership, and ensuring that local authorities understand the financial case for allocating budgets to this work and can make the case to their relevant PCC;
 - 16.2. Supporting local authorities and partners improve their approaches to domestic violence. We are currently in discussions with Avon & Somerset about supporting a force wide integrated approach to domestic violence and wider violence against women and girls issues, and Oxfordshire about developing a social enterprise to extend the domestic violence champions approach to training frontline staff across a range of agencies in identifying domestic abuse. In addition we have been in discussion with Thames Valley Police about clarifying approaches to domestic violence across the force area, and with Essex about extending their community budget approach to include neighbouring counties.
 - 16.3. Working with the Home Office on the development of a commissioning framework to assist commissioning bodies in drawing up service specifications so that victims are provided with a high quality service, and we have been identifying examples of effective joint commissioning of services at a local level to provide case studies for this work.
 - 16.4. Developing a 'one stop' database to assist councils in sharing the learning from domestic homicide reviews. This will enable councils to see what other reviews have been conducted, what the key features of the case are and who to speak to about for further information. We are looking to base the database and information contained on it from one developed by the West Midlands councils for sharing the learning from individual reviews amongst the councils in the West Midlands area.

- 16.5. Commissioning the Centre for Public Scrutiny to produce a guide for overview and scrutiny committees, as well as police and crime panels, on scrutinising their own authority's work to tackle domestic violence and that of local partner agencies.

Next steps

17. Members are asked to:
 - 17.1. note the current context of the local approach to tackling domestic violence, along with recent reports into how that approach could be made more effective; and
 - 17.2. comment on how the LGA could better support local authorities in addressing domestic violence.

Financial Implications

18. There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any activity resulting from it will be met from existing resources.