

Title: Domestic Violence

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviours which can include physical, sexual and psychological attacks used by adults or adolescents against their current or former intimate partners or family members. It can happen to anyone regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, disability, economic status, or mental health.

The following evidence reveals why domestic violence should be a priority issue for the council;

- Domestic Violence is a volume violent crime in Brent making up about 35% of all violent incidents; Brent has one of the highest levels of reported incidents per thousand of the population in England and Wales;
- We estimate that it costs the borough £80million a year in housing costs, A&E costs, police responses, criminal justice interventions, loss of economic earning and human costs;
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 13 men will experience domestic violence in their lifetime;
- The impact upon children witnessing domestic violence is immense and is the common denominator for many children being placed on the at risk register;
- 4 Brent residents (two of whom were children) have died since 2004 because of domestic violence;
- The average victim will have experienced 35 incidents before they report to the police;
- Survivors are at most risk during and immediately after they leave an abusive partner.

Despite these alarming statistics we know that Domestic Violence is hugely underreported by victims and under recorded by professionals. This means that notoriously domestic violence struggles to raise its head above the radar of the local authority when priorities are agreed and resources are awarded to crime issues.

In addition the stigma attached to the issue combined with our normal method of consulting with residents around priority issues i.e. through a door to door questionnaire or a residents meeting, does not allow for this discussion to take place. As a consequence, domestic violence can become lost among the other more obvious community safety concerns.

At the heart of the community the local authority has a key role to play in assisting victims to manage the risk that they face; often we are called upon to provide services to victims in crisis i.e. housing, children and families services, benefits as well as in the dissemination of information to victims about local specialist services.

How does it link to the council's corporate strategy?

Tackling crime and community safety is one of the most important issues for local residents and was one of the five priorities in the 2002-2006 corporate strategy. It will also be a feature in the new corporate strategy. Improving outcomes for adults and children who encounter domestic violence also meets the Council's objectives in relation to the Every Child Matters.

What is the policy background?

In response to mounting pressure from central government domestic violence has been elevated to a level more commensurate with its true impact. This was heralded with the passing of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2005. Since this important piece of legislation policies have appeared by all statutory agencies encouraging partnership working to best protect victims while holding perpetrators to account more consistently.

Why are we looking at this area? Have there been recent legislation/policy changes? Are there any performance or budgetary issues?,

The last two years have seen the council's response to domestic violence improve greatly. We have seen the production of the council's first corporate domestic violence strategy and manual, launched in November 2005. The Council has led the local crime and disorder reduction partnership in developing a borough wide Domestic Violence action plan. This Action plan has resulted in some tremendous developments including the establishment of an independent Advocacy Service, a DV Operational forum, LAA stretch target for domestic violence, being awarded a Specialist Domestic Violence Cluster Court by the Home Office, the development of Multi Agency Risk Assessment panels, multi agency training, launches, publicity, the roll out of a prevention pack into some schools and capacity building within the local Domestic Violence Forum. This activity has created the momentum for real change in how domestic violence is responded to across the borough.

However this growing awakening has been driven from within one team (Community Safety) but it brings with it greater demands upon the direct service providers across the Council as well as an insatiable appetite for training and professional development. Like many others this issue also requires high quality partnership work to be effective – with the police, PCT, courts, probation, and voluntary sector.

There is therefore a need to review the impact of the DV strategy across the Council one year on from its publication and to identify where it has been successful in creating an improved service, where the gaps may still lie and where further resources are required to make it effective. This should also encompass a review of how the Council works with its partners.

What should the review cover? Give brief outline of what members could focus on, which partners to engage with, how residents/public can be involved.

- Audit of Councillors awareness of local domestic violence interventions available to residents;
- Audit of local issues for domestic violence service provision i.e. Access, equality and diversity issues, sustainability, types of culturally supported abuse;
- How each Council department has responded to the strategy;
- Partnership work with PCT, Police, Courts, probation, voluntary sector, NHS;
- Gaps in service provision/areas of good practice.

Underlying issues would be consideration of:

- How each department records disclosures/information re DV;
- Opportunities for earlier intervention versus crisis reaction;
- Prevention work with children.

As well as internal departments the review would need to involve partners from the police, courts, voluntary sector etc. Survivors/victims from Brent who have been involved in key services would be key witnesses.

What could the review achieve?, influence policy change?, improvement to service delivery?, budget savings?, develop partnerships?.

The key objectives of such a review (in order) would be to:

- Improve service delivery to victims;
- Budget savings through more effective earlier intervention;
- Increase accountability of Council departments/staff;
- Capacity build the existing partnership;
- Increase awareness.