

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Report on Supporting Families and Children affected by Domestic Abuse

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Executive Summary

The report provides an overview of the impact and prevalence of domestic abuse on children and families and the role of the county council and partner agencies in providing support and safeguarding children.

Recommendation

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- i. Note the information contained in the report.
- ii. Formulate recommendations to further support the work undertaken by the county council to prevent, protect and promote recovery from domestic abuse.

Background and Advice

Definition of Terms

Domestic violence or abuse is defined as:
Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional. The definition of domestic violence and abuse includes forced marriage, honour-based abuse and female genital mutilation, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Government Position

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the Government who seek to address domestic abuse at every stage, from prevention to rehabilitation and to make it everyone's business. The Ministry of Justice and the Home Office are currently consulting on how we can best support those affected ('Transform the Response to Domestic Abuse' [Consultation](#)). The Government's strategy, 'Ending Violence

against Women and Girls' sets out their commitment and priorities. (2016-2020).
[Policy Document](#)

National Picture

Domestic abuse is persistent and widespread. It is the most common factor in situations where children are at risk of serious harm in this country. There are 6.5 million adults estimated to have directly experienced domestic abuse from the age of 16. If estimates included experience of domestic abuse in childhood, this number would be considerably higher. Women are more likely to be abused, to report abuse and to be killed by their partner. If we were to pick a random group of 16 mothers, there is likely to be one who experienced domestic abuse last year. For single mothers, it is much higher: one in four will have experienced domestic abuse. For fathers, it is one out of 24. Domestic abuse has been estimated to affect around one in five children in some studies. However, the experience of children in relation to domestic abuse may go unrecorded, unless they come to the attention of formal agencies, such as those in health, children's social care, the police or schools. Domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police accounted for approximately one in ten of all crimes in 2015–16. The police recorded 1.03 million domestic abuse-related incidents and offences in the year ending March 2016. Following investigations, the police concluded that a domestic abuse-related criminal offence was committed in approximately four in every 10 (41%) of these incidents (421,000).

Lancashire Picture

There were 19,972 contacts from the police about domestic abuse, (8,944 crimes) between January and December 2017. That's an average of 1,664 contacts per month. The number of contacts and crimes have been steadily rising over the last two years. There was a rise of 24% in domestic abuse crime from 2016 to 2017.

Domestic abuse is a priority issue for every district in Lancashire, within the Community Safety Strategic Assessment. Work undertaken recently shows that domestic violence is ranked second and domestic abuse fifth in terms of risk of harm in Lancashire (based on the recent Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) assessment).

There were 4,067 contacts submitted to the county council in relation to children where there were concerns regarding domestic abuse between April 2017 to March 2018.

The Children and Family Wellbeing Service worked with 562 families that have a domestic abuse flag for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. Within these families there were 667 individual children affected by domestic abuse.

Understanding the Effect of Domestic Abuse on Children and Young People

Domestic abuse can have a detrimental and long-lasting impact on a child's health, development, ability to learn and well-being. Children and young people suffer directly and indirectly if they live in environments where there is domestic abuse. Witnessing domestic abuse is very distressing and frightening for a child, and causes

serious harm. Children living in a home where there is domestic abuse are at risk of other types of abuse too. Children can experience domestic abuse or violence in lots of different ways. They might see the abuse; hear the abuse from another room; see a parent's injuries or distress afterwards; be hurt by being nearby or trying to stop the abuse.

The effects of domestic abuse are far reaching. It can pose a threat to an unborn child; result in children and young people suffering blows during domestic abuse incidents; result in the parent/carer being unable to meet the child's needs; lead to serious anxiety and distress; lead to behaviour, emotional and long term developmental problems; result in learnt behaviors; substance misuse, increased vulnerability to exploitation, both sexual and criminal.

Supporting Children & Families Affected by Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is a complex issue that needs agencies, including the police, health, schools, voluntary sector, probation and local authority to work together to help and protect children. The response to domestic abuse is determined by the assessed needs of the child and level of risk. At the lower level, the child's needs can be met by universal services or a specific agency. This may include work to support healthy relationships between parents, self-esteem work, direct work with children and group work with perpetrators. Where the child has significant unmet needs and is at risk of significant harm, a multi-agency coordinated response is required from statutory partners, and may include a child protection investigation under Lancashire's Safeguarding Children Procedures.

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The MASH facilitates multi-agency information sharing and decision making in respect of vulnerable people, through the co-location of professionals from the police, local authority (early help, education and social workers), health, Probation, Fire & Rescue and Independent Domestic Violence Advisor. This includes domestic abuse referrals relating to victims and their children.

During the MASH process, information is requested from all relevant services to inform decision making regarding the level of risk and response required. The decision is made by considering any previous history, the nature of the incident, agency information, risk-screening tools and safety planning measures, adverse impact on the child, and professional judgement.

Although referrals can come from any agency and members of the public, in Lancashire the majority of referrals into the MASH come from the Police via a Protecting Vulnerable Person's form (PVP) with a risk rating of the incident by the attending officer (high, medium or low).

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

Where domestic abuse is assessed as high risk, agencies will refer the adult victim (18+) to MARAC. They will also be referred to the adult victim service to be supported by an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA). The MARAC is a

meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of the police, health, children's social care, adult social care, housing practitioners, IDVA's, and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The MARAC considers how to ensure the safety of the victim and a coordinated action plan is developed. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim and managing the risk to that individual. The MARAC will also make links with other key agencies to safeguard children and other vulnerable persons and manage the behaviour of the perpetrator.

Preventing, Protecting and Promoting Recovery from Domestic Abuse in Lancashire

Role of Schools and Universal Services- Schools have an important role to play in identifying and supporting children and young people affected by domestic abuse and preventing it from escalating. In response to the issue of domestic abuse in Lancashire the county council commissioned, throughout, 2016 to 2017, a specialist support service which was open to staff in Lancashire maintained schools, and to targeted children and young people, in relation to domestic abuse. To help ensure that children are supported, schools are informed of domestic abuse incidents and work is underway via the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board to develop this approach further.

All front line health practitioners, such as school nurses, midwives, health visitors and GP's have an important role in identifying and supporting people affected by domestic abuse. There is a growing awareness within universal services of the impact on children and young people of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).

Children and Family Wellbeing Service -The Children and Family Wellbeing Service provide a targeted enhanced level of bespoke/ personalised support to individual children, young people or families. Domestic abuse is one of the identified priority groups. The service adopt a casework approach with key workers delivering intensive support underpinned by a quality assessment (Common Assessment Framework – CAF). They often work as part of a 'team around the family' and undertake the lead professional role where appropriate. Cases are stepped down to the service from children's social care where the domestic abuse risk has been de-escalated but support is still required for the child/family.

NEST Lancashire – Provides early support to children and young people affected by domestic abuse. NEST is part of the wider Lancashire Victim Services. This is commissioned by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and part of the funding is provided by the Schools Forum.

Emotional Wellbeing Service - Children and young people affected by domestic abuse can also be referred for therapeutic support from the Emotional Wellbeing Service that is commissioned by the county council.

Adult Victim Service – Medium and high risk cases of domestic abuse are referred to the domestic abuse victim support service that forms part of the wider Lancashire Victim Services. This is commissioned by the OPCC and the domestic abuse victim service is partly funded by the county council.

Refuge Service –There are nine refuges commissioned across Lancashire by the county council, these form part of a national network. Refuges provide accommodation and support for victims and their children who need to flee domestic abuse.

Working with Perpetrators - Lancashire domestic abuse perpetrator programme is a voluntary programme for male perpetrators, aged 18 and over. It is commissioned by the county council and aims to reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse, increase perpetrator and offender knowledge regarding the negative impact domestic abuse has on victims and children, reduce repeat incidents and reoffending, rehabilitate victims and offenders and safeguard children.

Working in Partnership

Pan Lancashire Strategic Domestic Abuse Board

The Board is chaired by a police Detective Chief Inspector and brings together representatives from police, health, local authorities, probation, OPCC, and specialist domestic abuse services. There is a Pan Lancashire [Strategy](#) and current priorities for the board are mapping services, understanding need, workforce development; review of MARAC and hearing the voice of service users.

Conclusion

Responding to domestic abuse continues to be a priority for all agencies. Cabinet have recognised the impact of domestic abuse on children and adult victims and have set up a lead member task group to work with officers across services to identify how the council best plays its part in preventing, protecting and promoting recovery from domestic abuse.

Consultations

N/A

Implications

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Domestic abuse has a detrimental and long-lasting impact on the health and well-being of children. It is therefore imperative that the council and partners work together to ensure that we are providing the most effective support to prevent, protect and promote recovery.

Risk management

This report has no significant risk implications.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

NA