

Report title: Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 3 February 2022	For: Consideration and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
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County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

This is a report of the one-off meeting convened in the form of a whole-committee Task and Finish Group looking at information available to local members to help them signpost to services.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) **This report; and**
- (ii) **Identify any follow-up scrutiny actions**

3. Background

- 3.1 At the full committee meeting in October 2021, Members requested that it would be helpful in their role as local members to know where to signpost and refer people when they came to them for advice on domestic abuse. The Lead Officer had also indicated that this would help the service area to deliver on its strategy.
- 3.2 Furthermore, such a review aligned with and supported strategic measures within Everyone's Essex: Our Plan for Levelling Up Essex, 2021-25 to facilitate Essex being a Good Place For Children and Families to Grow, and Health Wellbeing and Independence for All Ages.
- 3.3 Consequently, a one-off briefing with Clare Burrell - Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy was held on 13 January 2022 which was attended by most of the Committee (attendees listed in Appendix 1).

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4. Report of the briefing session held

Session objectives

4.1 The session was structured to enable members:

- to increase their knowledge about domestic abuse;
- to raise their awareness of issues around domestic abuse;
- to raise their awareness of Partnership arrangements and functions in Essex and of commissioned services and programmes of work;
- to increase confidence in recognising potential domestic abuse and how to support and signpost to services available.

Session content

4.2 Members were briefed on some typical signs that someone might be being abused and these included both physical and behavioural signs.

4.3 Members were advised that the different types of domestic abuse included:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

- Intimate Partner Violence
- Abuse by Family Members
- Teenage Relationship Abuse
- Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

- Stalking & harassment
- Honour Based Violence
- Forced marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Modern Slavery

Any of the above could consist of a **single incident** or a **course of conduct**, and would apply to any person 16+.

4.4 Members were advised of some of the signs that someone might be being abused:

Signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, black eyes, lacerations, rope marks

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- Broken bones
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Broken eyeglasses/frames, or any physical signs of being punished or restrained

Behavioural signs of abuse

- Unexplained changes in behaviour or personality
- Becoming withdrawn and/or seeming anxious
- Apologetic and excusing behaviours
- Uncharacteristically aggressive
- Stops seeing friends
- Hiding injuries
- Being jumpier or more on guard
- Having difficulty with sleep or having nightmares
- Withdrawing and not wanting to be around other people
- Losing interest in activities they once liked

4.5 Existing local partnership arrangements were outlined:

- The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) had five 2020-2025 key priorities:
 - Helping people to form healthy relationships;
 - Supporting those experiencing and at risk of abuse and help them rebuild their lives;
 - Supporting and disrupting perpetrators to change their behaviour;
 - Communities, professionals and employers being able to recognise abuse at the earliest opportunity and have the confidence to take action. It was this last priority that particularly aligned with the purpose of the member session.
- The Essex Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was a regular meeting to discuss how to help victims at high risk of murder or

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serious harm. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) were in place where statutory services worked together with other key partners to identify, assess and manage violent and sexual offenders. Operation Encompass, a police and education early information safeguarding partnership to offer immediate support to children experiencing domestic abuse, was due to be piloted in Essex.

4.6 The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act had placed new duties on Essex County Council:

- To appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to:
 - assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support
 - develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support
- To deliver the strategy through commissioning and de-commissioning decisions:
 - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
 - report back to central government

The provision must provide support to victims and their children residing in:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary schemes
- Move-on or second stage accommodation
- At home if robust safety plans in place

The County Council must make provision for:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| ○ Advocacy support | - Plans |
| ○ Prevention advice | - Support |
| ○ Specialist support | - Protected characteristics/complex needs |
| ○ Children's support | - Therapies and advocacy |
| ○ Housing-related support | - Advice |

4.7 Members were briefed on top tips for difficult conversations with those who may be suffering from or perpetrating domestic abuse including good listening skills.

4.8 During discussion the following key points were highlighted, acknowledged and/or agreed:

- Significantly more females than males suffered domestic abuse;
- Many services still seemed to be focussed on supporting women. e.g. women's refuge not for men;

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- LGBTQ members of the community facing domestic abuse could also have additional barriers to overcome and may instead go to specific LGBTQ services for support which may mean there could under reporting or not complete formal reporting of domestic abuse for this part of the community.
- More people speaking about domestic abuse, and a higher profile given to it, would make it easier for more people to come forward for help;
- Victims did not always know they were being abused and can take a lot of prompts before they accept it.
- The preferred default is to support victims to continue to stay at their own home if it is possible and safe;
- £2.763 million of specific government financial support had been received but the settlement for any similar financial support post April 2022 was unknown at the current time.
- There had been domestic abuse adviser posts at hospital A&E which had been jointly funded with the NHS. Funding had been withdrawn and the posts no longer retained although this was now being revisited.
- Contingency and Covid specific response plans had been put in place to give greater flexibility to the resources available.
- Officers worked closely with district councils with many employing a domestic abuse adviser within their housing teams to help identify cases amongst those presenting as homeless.
- Members were tasked with further raising awareness of domestic abuse in their respective local communities and the help lines available.

Signposting to support services

- 4.9 Members were advised of the contact details for immediate support and advice and details of awareness training available (see Appendices A and B attached)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Members were very grateful for the comprehensive presentation and briefing given.

It was **agreed** that more information should be provided to the full committee providing:

- (i) A further breakdown of the figures on domestic abuse including:
 - indicating the number and/or trend in relation to same-sex relationships;

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- distinguishing between where coercive control had been identified and physical abuse;
 - the extent of child on parent abuse.
- (ii) A list of schools in programme.
- (iii) The prices of the training programmes available.
- (iv) Research findings of Multi-disciplinary Team project in Tendring pilot.

Draft Recommendations (to be finalised):

1. To accept the offer from the Healthwatch Essex representative to include speaking to representatives from the Trauma Ambassador Group as part of future evidence gathering for future relevant scrutiny sessions.
2. That an all-member communication be sent advising of the availability of domestic abuse awareness training.
3. That information on COMPASS should be reproduced on business cards for members to use and hand-out.
4. That parish councils be offered J9 training so that they have the option and capability to become local places of safety for those suffering domestic abuse. Members also welcomed Healthwatch Essex's offer of assistance in relation to supporting appropriate training.
5. That the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee be advised how the case backlog in Courts was impacting on domestic abuse issues and support.
6. That the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee be further updated on local support services, the roll-out of new early intervention services and meeting the new statutory duties, in a few months' time.

6. Appendices

- A. Signposting to support services
- B. Awareness Training
- C. Attendees at one-off briefing with Clare Burrell - Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy which was held virtually on 13 January 2022.

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Appendix A – Signposting to support services



Immediate advice and support

Contact Children's Social Care

If you're worried that a child is being abused or neglected call Children's Social Care on 0345 603 7627

Contact Adult's Social Care

If you're worried about a specific concern about abuse and safety call Social Care Direct 0345 6037630

Emergency Services

If a child, young person or adult is in immediate danger call 999

Resources and information for everyone

SETDAB

<https://setdab.org/>

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Appendix B – Awareness Training



Provide awareness and training sessions online and are for those working within any workplace or community group.

Provide understanding, information, and build confidence and skills in recognising the signs of domestic abuse and reaching out to someone who may be affected.

Places can be booked individually via [Alpha Vesta's Eventbrite page](#).

Contact enquiries@alphavesta.com if you would like to book a private session for your whole workplace, community organisation or a larger group.

J9 Initiative



J9 training sessions are intended to raise awareness and increase knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse for staff in public and voluntary sector organisations.

In the course of their work, these staff may come into contact with someone they suspect is a victim of domestic abuse, or a client may reveal that they are suffering abuse.

The training aims to ensure that staff are equipped to respond appropriately and effectively. <https://setdab.org/j9-initiative/>

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Appendix C - Attendees

County Councillors:

Ray Gooding (Lead Member)
Lynette Bowers-Flint,
Mark Durham,
Jane Fleming,
Carlo Guglielmi
Marie Goldman,
June Lumley,
Aidan McGurran,
Ross Playle,
Andrew Wiles
Peter May,
Susan Barker
Laureen Shaw

Also present: Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex

Apologies for absence:

County Councillors Simon Crow and Wendy Stamp.

Supporting Officers:

Clare Burrell - Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy, Essex County Council
Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Essex County Council