

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee - 7 September 2021

Subject: Domestic Abuse

Report of: Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

This report requested by the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny details a summary of recent work to address Domestic Violence and Abuse, including the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Recommendations

The Committee are invited to consider and comment on the information contained in this report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	The Domestic Abuse Strategy aims to improve the lives of those in our city that are affected by domestic violence and abuse through better co-ordinated services that safeguard and support victims and any children impacted by living with abuse.

A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 (attached)

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – draft statutory guidance

GM Gender-based Violence and Abuse Strategy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide Committee members with an update on progress during 2021 to date on the various aspects of the domestic violence and abuse agenda.
- 1.2 In particular, the report introduces Committee members to the updated Domestic Abuse Strategy for the city and describes work to date on local adoption and implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- 1.3 The report also describes some of the work done across the city in response to the Covid pandemic and challenges it brought to bear upon those victimised and otherwise affected by domestic violence and abuse

2. Background

2.1 Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy

- 2.1.1 'Delivering Differently – Manchester's Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy' was launched on the 17th June 2016. It had, upon its launch, three ambitions, which were:
 - Improve the lives of those affected by DV&A through better co-ordinated services that can respond sensitively and efficiently
 - Ensure a more co-ordinated approach that enables early identification and improved response that safeguards and supports victims and their children
 - Reach out to under-represented groups and hard-to-reach communities by finding new ways to address this important issue
- 2.1.2 Additional to the second of these ambitions was an intention to place greater focus on perpetrators of abuse, through robust challenge and enforcement but also provision of appropriate programmes for those who acknowledge their issues and are motivated to change their behaviour.
- 2.1.3 The Strategy also acknowledged the need to do more to help victims who have been supported while in crisis to recover and rebuild, and the need to simplify the commissioning processes for domestic violence and abuse service provision.
- 2.1.4 The Strategy reached the end of its lifespan in December 2020 and a refreshed and updated version has been in production over recent months.
- 2.1.5 A project team of officers has carried out the work to produce the updated version and have, in doing so, consulted and engaged extensively over several months with survivors of abuse, service providers, the DVA Forum, Provider Forum, Age Friendly Manchester, various other community bodies and organisations, and elected members.
- 2.1.6 That consultation and engagement has comprised numerous 1-1 discussions, focus groups and workshops, the majority held online due to the restrictions of

the pandemic though some more recently face to face where easing of restrictions has permitted.

2.1.7 Elected members have been extensively involved and engaged, through an initial set of two well attended workshops in late March and two productive follow-up task and finish sessions in June and July.

2.1.8 The final version of the updated Strategy is reflective of that engagement and consultation and is attached to this report for endorsement by Board members and those of Scrutiny Committee today.

2.2 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

2.2.1 After being introduced as a draft Bill in early 2019, and a lengthy passage through Commons and Lords processes, the DA Act came into effect on 29th April 2021.

2.2.2 The Act encompasses a wide range of new measures, across the whole of the domestic abuse agenda, including victims, perpetrators, policing and the criminal justice system.

2.2.3 The Act has three main **aims**, which are:

- To raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families
- To further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice
- To strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies

2.2.4 The Act has also introduced a new, updated definition of domestic abuse, the most notable aspects of which are the inclusion of economic abuse for the first time, and, also for the first time, defining children as victims in their own right, rather than them being described as 'having witnessed' or 'been exposed to' domestic abuse.

2.2.5 Some of the other key **features** of the Act are as follows:

- Creation of a new offence of non-fatal strangulation or suffocation, punishable by up to 5 years imprisonment
- Extension of the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse
- Extension of the 'revenge porn' offence to cover the threat to disclose intimate images
- Clarification of the law further to deter claims of 'rough sex gone wrong'
- Proposal of a statutory DA perpetrator strategy (expected towards the end of 2021)
- Creation of a statutory presumption that victims of DA are eligible for special measures in the criminal, civil and family courts

- Establishing the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme ('Clare's Law') on a statutory footing, with associated requirements upon the Police
- Introduction of a new, strengthened set of Domestic Abuse Protection Notices Orders

2.2.6 A number of measures relating to domestic abuse and the criminal justice system have been introduced, chiefly including:

- No cross examination of victims by perpetrators in civil and family courts
- Statutory presumption that victims should have special measures in criminal, civil and family courts
- Improvement to the court environment and waiting rooms
- All child contact centres to be accredited
- Restriction of vexatious family proceedings that further traumatise victims
- Prohibition of GPs and other health professionals from charging a victim of DA for a letter to support their application for legal aid
- Availability of funding for emotional and practical support services based inside courts

2.2.7 Chief amongst **duties and responsibilities** for local authorities is, under Part 4 of the Act, the Duty to provide support for victims and their children in refuges and safe accommodation (known as the Safe Accommodation Duty). Key to local authorities ensuring their discharge of that Duty are the following tasks:

- Establish a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board
- Conduct a Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment
- Publish a Strategy, informed by the Needs Assessment, that sets out how the Duty will be met
- Ensure that all eligible homeless victims of DA automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance, and do not lose a secure lifetime or assured tenancy
- Ensure that the same accommodation response to minority groups, including older people and disabled people is improved and developed
- Report back to Government (MHCLG) as requested on progress with implementing the Duty
- Feed into the National Oversight Board chaired by DA Commissioner

2.2.8 Further information about our work to date in readiness for and to implement the Duty is detailed in section 3 below.

2.2.9 The Act also formally introduces **the role of Domestic Abuse Commissioner**, with Nicole Jacobs being the first incumbent and having been in post in shadow form since mid-2020. Key aspects of the Commissioner's role include:

- Standing up for domestic abuse victims and survivors
- Providing public leadership on the agenda
- Encouraging good practice at national, regional and local levels

- Improving the provision of support to victims (including children who are victims)
- Raising awareness of domestic abuse and the harms and impacts caused
- Monitoring the response of LA's, the justice system and other statutory agencies

3. DA Act readiness and implementation work

- 3.1 Colleagues have been working hard over the course of the past nine months to ensure readiness for the Act coming into effect and continue to work on key tasks required to ensure the Safe Accommodation Duty is being adequately met.
- 3.2 A new Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has been established and held its first meeting on 10th August 2021. The Board has assumed most of the responsibilities of the former DVA Strategy Group and incorporated the bulk of its membership. As required by the Act, however, the membership has been extended to incorporate representation of the interests of victims, children and the voluntary and community sector.
- 3.3 A comprehensive Needs Assessment has also been produced. This has taken a wider form than that required by MHCLG in the DA Act guidance, taking the opportunity to extend the process and capture information about wider need across all aspects of the domestic abuse agenda.
- 3.4 That Needs Assessment has informed the setting out of a strategy indicating how we will ensure discharge of the Safe Accommodation Duty. As the requirement to do this tied in with our ongoing process to refresh and update our whole-agenda Domestic Abuse Strategy, the detail in respect of safe accommodation has been inserted into that broader document.
- 3.5 The Safe Accommodation Duty was accompanied by an allocation of funding from MHCLG, and colleagues from Community Safety and the Integrated Commissioning Team have been working together to put arrangements in place to ensure that funding is spent appropriately and in line with the findings of the Needs Assessment.
- 3.6 To date, funding has been directed principally towards putting in place a coordinated Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation Pathway that allows for an integrated holistic assessment, linked to a range of housing and support options which includes:
- Integrated specialist front door and support planning which will combine domestic abuse and homelessness knowledge to best assess the suitability of various housing and support options
 - Enhanced safe accommodation and support offer, which will provide specialist support to adult and child victims of Domestic Abuse and include survivors with protected characteristics and / or complex needs. e.g., translators and interpreters, faith services, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support, and immigration advice

- Move on and recovery, to support victims/survivors of domestic abuse as they continue their recovery

The pathway is demonstrated pictorially at Appendix 1

- 3.7 In addition, the funding will support work with housing providers and private landlords/agencies to support victims who want to stay in their home, through the provision of the Sanctuary scheme and access to civil and criminal remedies.
- 3.8 A separate but related pot of funding from MHCLG will enable the provision of briefing and training (including materials and resources) to managers and staff across our Council departments and partner agencies, to ensure staff at all levels are as informed as possible about all aspects of the DA Act and how they may impact upon their day-to-day work.

4. Domestic Abuse and Covid – Response into Recovery

- 4.1 The pandemic brought with it real challenges for victims of domestic abuse, including children who are victims, and for the agencies and services working to protect and support them.

- 4.2 Our local agencies and services swiftly and effectively adapted their ways of working in order to maintain levels of contact and support for victims, developing innovative solutions and alternatives to their more traditional forms of delivery. For example:

- Additional telephone helpline capacity was secured by Independent Choices through Covid monies, to ensure victims phoning for advice and information would be promptly listened to
- Manchester Women's Aid developed and provided online versions of their groupwork programmes, as did NESTAC with their FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) programmes
- Manchester Women's Aid worked with Manchester Move, housing providers and voluntary & community sector partners to establish the Priority Move-on Project, which has been instrumental in over 100 victims and 70 children being able to be placed more quickly into safe, affordable accommodation, thus freeing up vital refuge space for people in crisis. MCC Covid grant monies have supported continuation of the project into 2021-22

- 4.3 The pandemic did act as a catalyst for some innovative national responses, which we ensured were effectively amplified and locally promoted. Examples included:

- Rail to Refuge - this scheme, a partnership between the Rail Delivery Group and Women's Aid, was originally launched in lockdown 1, was highly successful through 2020-21 and has been extended into 2021-22. During 2020-21 over 850 women were able to use the scheme to help them flee abuse and travel to a refuge. We actively promoted Rail to

Refuge through our Safer Manchester social media channels and our regular newsletters to services and VCS organisations.

- Safe Spaces – this campaign, launched in 2020 under the hashtag #UKSAYSNOMORE, gathered considerable momentum during the latter half of the year and, from an initial footprint in national pharmacy chains Boots and Superdrug, expanded to include other major retailers such as Morrisons and TSB Bank. In Manchester, we worked with colleagues in the NHS to promote expansion of the scheme to over 50 independent pharmacies and also to other major retailers with presence in our neighbourhood centres

4.4 We continue to liaise closely with all of our in-house and commissioned service providers, to ensure that any issues and challenges associated with the gradual return to ‘business as usual’ are captured and, where necessary and appropriate, support provided to address them.

4.5 Agencies, services and community organisations provide regular updates at the Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum, with any significant and emerging issues also being fed into the monthly Residents at Risk Recovery Group, which reports up to the MCC Senior Leadership Team and Elected Members. These meetings will continue until December 2021, at which time their need for further constitution will be reviewed.

5. Other service developments

5.1 Additional investment in domestic abuse provision agreed by Members in 2020 has been used to commission a range of new services designed to address identified gaps in provision. Whilst the process of developing service specifications, tendering for and commissioning these services was more challenging than usual due to Covid, those services are now all in place and operational, and we are starting to see some early data highlighting their outputs and outcomes. Those new services have included:

- Children’s therapeutic service - Resolve is an emotional health and wellbeing service that works with children between the ages of eight and eighteen who have witnessed or been subjected to domestic abuse. The service aims to reduce the long-term impact of domestic violence and abuse on children and young people (CYP) through psychosocial intervention delivery, counselling, and elements of play therapy. The additional investment has enabled an increase in numbers of children who can be worked with on Resolve, for a further two years and three months.
- Child to Parent Violence and Abuse Service - Extensive research carried out during 2019 highlighted the need for a package of intervention and support to tackle this emerging and damaging issue that, despite being significantly under-reported, resulted in over 300 calls from Sept 2019 to Sept 2020 to police regarding incidents where a young person was the perpetrator and a parent or carer the victim. The Council identified funding to commission delivery of a nationally accredited programme by Talk Listen Change. That programme is now under way across the city, with the aim of working with approximately 150 children, young people and

families over a two-year period, and providing over 750 professionals with knowledge and training in the issue.

- 5.2 Home Office monies identified and allocated to local authorities during the pandemic have also led to increased capacity being built into the Bridging to Change service provided by Talk Listen Change, enabling more perpetrators of abuse to access programmes to help them address and change their behaviours.
- 5.3 Those Home Office monies have also enabled the local piloting in the South area of the city of the nationally accredited DRIVE programme, designed to challenge and address the behaviours of high risk, high harm perpetrators, and to provide protection and support to their victims and children. DRIVE was developed in 2015 by Respect, SafeLives, Social Finance – the DRIVE Partnership. Its ambition is to change the way statutory and voluntary agencies respond to high-harm, high-risk perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse. It aims to do by:

- Reducing the number of new and repeat victims
- Reducing the harm caused to victims and children
- Reducing the number of serial perpetrators of abuse
- Intervening earlier to protect victims and families

Those identified as suitable for inclusion in the programme are worked with to challenge and, if necessary, disrupt their behaviours, with the provision of behaviour change intervention being a key element of the approach. While the perpetrator is being worked with the victim and children benefit from ongoing specialist support.

DRIVE is funded for two years, has been operational since April and over 20 perpetrators have been referred onto the scheme to date.

6. Current and emerging Issues and Challenges

6.1 Continuing high risk demand and pressure on services

- 6.1.1 Domestic abuse continues to be an issue that causes significant risk and harm to victims and children across the city. Both the volume and risk profile of victims and perpetrators have increased year on year, with emerging aspects of the agenda growing in concern and the pandemic having an added impact on demand for support and services. For example:

- The city's three MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) have seen referrals increase from 1469 in 2018-19 to 1887 in 2019-20 and 2456 in 2020-21
- Referrals being dealt with by the city's IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) service for the period September 2020 to April 2021 increased by 18.2% compared with the same period from 2019 to 2020
- Referrals into community outreach services increased from 2397 in 2019-20 to 2985 in 2020-21

- Numbers accessing support through our IRIS scheme in GP practices across the city increased from 826 in 2018-19 to 964 in 2019-20

6.1.2 Figures collated for quarter 1 of 2021-22 show that the increases in volume of high-risk work show no sign of abating, with case numbers at each of the three MARACs being at an all-time high

6.1.3 The drawn out nature of the pandemic, particularly the tie-in of restrictions being relaxed with still-high levels of transmission due to the Delta variant, have seen such increasing volumes of inward traffic put a significant strain on our local services, in particular though not exclusively the IDVA service.

6.1.4 These pressing demand issues have been discussed at a senior level by all concerned agencies and services in the city, and some short-term relief measures funded and implemented. The situation in Manchester generally reflects that in other districts across Greater Manchester and it has been the subject of two multi-agency meetings led by the Deputy Mayor's office to understand the picture fully and consider potential sustainable solutions.

6.2 Plethora of short-term funding but limited certainty beyond 2021-22

6.2.1 The Covid pandemic has shone a sharper light on the issue of domestic abuse, through increased media coverage of its impact on victims, children who are victims and wider families. This has resulted in increased focus on domestic abuse and responding to it amongst Government departments and the release of some welcome funding packages to address particular aspects of the agenda. These have been put to a range of uses, some of which are described in section 4 above.

6.2.2 The concern remains, however, that these packages of funding continue to be short term in nature and are 'sticking plaster fixes'. They also require considerable effort to access them at very short notice and then to organise subsequent tendering and commissioning processes. The demand to produce bids for such processes is even more pressing on our already stretched voluntary and community sector provider agencies. There are limitations on what the funds can be spent on and very little, if any, guarantees as to any extension beyond the financial year within which they were launched.

6.2.3 Some monies have been released to local authorities to aid their meeting of the Safe Accommodation Duty, though again part of the way through a financial year and with no guarantee as to whether the allocation for next or any subsequent year will be at the same level. This limits the scope to design and deliver or commission services over a long enough term for their impact to be fully realised. It also continues the age-old issue for service providers in the domestic abuse field of short-term employment, which offers dedicated staff little in the way of stability and security.

6.2.4 It remains to be seen which of the Government's other commitments in the DA Act will be accompanied by funding, how much of it there will be, for how long and what the conditions associated with it will be

6.2.5 Real, lasting and sustainable shift in the emphasis of response to domestic abuse, from high risk, high cost crisis intervention to prevention, earlier identification and intervention takes time, money and courage of conviction to wait for the impact to be realised. The light shone on the agenda, and the related release of funds has been welcome, but a longer term, cross-department strategic view from Government, backed by sufficient and sustained funding, is urgently required. It is hoped that the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner will be able to use her role to act as a strong voice of the sector and promote real change at national level.

6.3 Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews

6.3.1 The requirement to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) has placed a significant capacity burden on the Community Safety Unit over the past 12-15 months and will continue to do so going forward, with two new reviews having to be commissioned in the past month. DHRs are a statutory process and must be undertaken if the circumstances of a death meet Home Office criteria.

6.3.2 A further issue for the CSP is that the pool of individuals available to perform the role of DHR Chair / Author, already smaller than ideal, has shrunk in recent months due to some of those individuals choosing to take retirement. Measures are being taken to liaise with colleagues in other parts of the country to identify potential chair / authors further afield, and the matter has also been raised with the Local Government Association and Home Office, with the aim of highlighting the issue and prompting greater steer nationally.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 As our refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy acknowledges, there has been considerable progress on a number of aspects of the agenda during the past four years, though there is still much to be done and the climate within which Council colleagues, partners and providers are endeavouring to respond to domestic abuse remains particularly challenging.

7.1.2 We know that there is still considerable under-reporting of some aspects of domestic abuse, and of domestic abuse generally in some communities and age groups, yet the volume of work coming into our services remains extremely high, as does its complexity and risk profile.

7.1.3 The Covid pandemic brought with it further, unexpected challenges that all those colleagues, partners and providers needed to quickly respond to. They did that admirably and continue to do so as restrictions ease and we move out of the response and into the recovery phase. That flexible and adaptable local response to the issues caused by the pandemic generated many good examples of new initiatives and ways of working to be learned from and built on as we move forward.

7.1.4 Despite the continuing challenges of high volumes of work for Council colleagues, partners and providers to deal with in the city, there remains great commitment and determination amongst all of them to work together to robustly tackle the issue and reduce its impact on victims (including children who are victims), families and communities across the city.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 The Committee are invited to consider and comment on the information contained in this report.