

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACES

19 March 2014

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACES

Review of Support for victims of Domestic Violence/Abuse

1. Purpose of the Report

To inform the Committee of developments and progress made in the review of services and support for victims of domestic violence/abuse.

2. Information and Analysis

This Committee's Crime and Disorder Working Group is responsible for overseeing the activities of the County Council and its partner organisations in alleviating crime, disorder and associated issues. The working group is currently concentrating on reducing domestic violence, and the impact this has on victims and their families. The Committee Chair and Vice-Chair have had initial meetings with senior officers whose responsibilities link with those of this Committee. They met with the Council's Head of Community Safety who referred to a Department of Health initiative which encouraged large organisations to provide support to any of their employees who were victims of domestic violence/abuse.

It was decided that this was an area which the working group should investigate further and a meeting was held with officers from the Human Resources Division and the Community Safety team to discuss the ways in which the County Council can offer support to its employees.

It was reported to this Committee, at its meeting in September 2013, that a survey of the Council's employees was to be undertaken to establish how the Council could help and support any member of its workforce who was – or had been – subjected to domestic violence or abuse.

2.1 Survey Format

To promote the survey as widely as possible a payslip insert was circulated to all staff in their September pay envelopes. A “Dnet” article was also published at the same time but the payslip insert ensured that the details of the survey were received by every employee, irrespective of whether they had access to the Dnet system.

In order to encourage as many people as possible to take part in the survey it was crucial, given the sensitive nature of the subject, that strict confidentiality was guaranteed. This was achieved by using the in-house “Survey Monkey” system (which uses an anonymous, electronic questionnaire) for those participants who could access the survey online.

Not all DCC employees have access to the internet - and some that did may not wish to use their home computers to complete the survey for fear of this being discovered by the perpetrators of their abuse. In these circumstances, paper versions of the questionnaire were available which were dispatched in plain envelopes and could be sent to an alternative address if required.

So that these paper versions were not handled by other employees of the Authority (again, to retain confidentiality) the Derbyshire Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service (formally North Derbyshire Women’s Aid) offered to post these out on behalf of the Council. Pre-paid envelopes were supplied by the Council for both dispatch and return of the surveys.

Given the sensitive and emotive subject of the survey, it remained “live” from September 2013 until the end of January 2014. The Christmas and New Year period was included in this time frame. Sadly, this time of year usually sees an increase in domestic violence incidents and the survey remained open after this time should anyone feel they wished to participate after the holiday break.

2.2 Survey Results

At the closure of the survey, a total of 18 responses had been received. Whilst this seems a small figure, compared to the total number of DCC employees, the nature of the subject of the survey would be expected to generate a smaller than usual number of respondents.

Practitioners who regularly undertake public surveys consider that a response of this size – for this type of subject area – is a good return. The number of employees who have or are experiencing domestic violence/abuse is likely to be considerably higher than the number of replies initially implies.

(NB. Although quantifying statistics for domestic abuse and violence is difficult due to low reporting rates, national research suggests that 10% of people are – or have been - victims of domestic violence. This would indicate that around 3000 DCC employees could be in this situation at some point during their employment with the Authority).

As well as the moral obligation of pastoral care towards its employees, the Council, as an employer, benefits through supporting its workforce and enabling them to remain at work in a safe and comfortable environment during times when they might otherwise take sick leave.

A copy of the survey is attached to this report at **Appendix 1**.

It asks 19 questions which give suggested options for answers and also space for added comments. The final question (Q19) invited respondents to make further, general, comments about domestic violence/abuse.

The replies to this section (completed by 9 of the participants) are set out in **Appendix 2** to this report.

In the main body of the survey, participants were invited to make specific comments also, about particular questions. These additional comments, where they raise concerns or suggestions, are given in **Appendix 3** to this report.

2.3 Outcomes

Given the information gathered from participants in the staff survey, the following points are highlighted for further work or action to implement improvements to assist employees;

- There needs to be more consistency in the way Managers are able to help employees who are suffering domestic abuse/violence. There is evidence of good practice and this should be shared across the Authority.

- A formal training structure for Managers to help them provide the necessary support to staff should be considered. *Almost 70% of respondents stated that they did not feel comfortable or able to inform their managers or colleagues of the real reason for being absent from work.*
- Practical support - such as a quiet place, to make phone calls or have private conversations in the workplace – should be developed.
- Many employees regard the workplace as a “safe haven” from the trauma of their abuse. Measures should be in place to encourage them to remain at work wherever this is the case.
- The possibility of having a pool of trained, supportive colleagues on whom people suffering from domestic violence/abuse, could call upon for assistance should be considered. Volunteers for this role could be recruited from people who have experienced domestic violence/abuse themselves.
- Only 25% of respondents were aware of the 24hr a day telephone help line for reporting domestic abuse/violence. This evidently needs further promotion.
- Most respondents accessed support from sources external to the County Council (85.7%) with 14.2% stating that they had sourced information from the Safer Derbyshire website but **none** used Dnet as a source of support. However, over half of the respondents had seen publicity material about domestic violence campaigns and initiatives across Derbyshire County Council premises.
- It should be noted that 2 of the respondents were male (representing 12.5%)
- The age range of respondents – 47% aged between 25-44 years old and 53% aged between 45 and 64 years old – fits in with the current age profile of the Council’s employees.
- Over a third of respondents lived in the Derbyshire Dales area (as anticipated given the location of the Council’s HQ) with the others mostly living in the Chesterfield and Amber Valley Boroughs.

The support of employees of the County Council who have, or are, suffering domestic violence/abuse, is currently provided by the Community Safety Team, Adult Care, CAYA and the Human Resources Division.

The Community Safety Team, Adult Care and CAYA departments have, for some time, been developing initiatives to curb domestic violence/abuse and support victims and their families. The team works with the Council's partners (other agencies such as the Police and voluntary organisations) as well as engaging the Council's in-house services where appropriate.

The results of the survey, commissioned by this Committee and undertaken by the Scrutiny Team, will inform and help develop the work of the Community Safety Team, Adult Care and CAYA in providing support for the Council's own employees and their families. The Director of Human Resources will also be invited to use the survey results to assist his Division in providing suitable care and support to employees who are subject to domestic violence/abuse.

3. Considerations (to be specified individually where appropriate)

The issues of human relations, health and prevention of crime and disorder are highlighted within this report and, in addressing the outcomes of this survey, this Committee will be contributing to the draft Council Plan, promoting a healthier and safer Derbyshire.

The relevance of the following factors has also been considered: financial, legal and human rights, equality and diversity, environmental, property and transport considerations.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That the Committee note the results and outcomes of the staff survey on domestic violence/abuse.
- 4.2 That the information gathered by the survey be used to inform

and help develop services by the Council's Community Safety Team, Adult Care, CAYA and the Human Resources Division, specifically aimed at supporting the Council's own employees.

4.3

The Head of Community Safety, the Acting Strategic Director of Adult Care and the Director of Human Resources be requested to report back to this Committee at its meeting in July 2014 on any initiatives they develop to support the Council's employees who suffer domestic violence/abuse.

4.4

That Cabinet be informed of the outcomes of the staff survey and be asked to endorse the recommendations of this report.

Councillor Kath Lauro
CHAIR, IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY – PLACES
COMMITTEE

Appendix 2.

Comments taken from DCC Staff Domestic Violence Survey February 2014

These comments were made by anonymous respondents to the survey undertaken on behalf of the Improvement and Scrutiny - Places Committee during the winter of 2013 – 2014. They are in addition to answers to specific questions in the survey questionnaire.

Respondent	Comments
1	Escalating aggression displayed by my teenage son has made me realise that I do not know where to go for support. Apart from a Radio 4 item about teen-on-parent violence (4 November 2013) I haven't heard or read anything about this category of domestic abuse. I am aware that DCC runs parenting courses but beyond this what other support is available for parents (and siblings) experiencing teen-on-parent/sibling abuse?
2	My abuse started from a very young age by my parents but I did not realise at the time. It was only when speaking to Women's Aid that I realised what I had been going through and it was not my fault. I cut off all ties from my parents 4 years ago for the sake of my own children who are teenagers and they and my husband supported me for their own safety and peace of mind.
3	Thank you for taking the time and trouble to investigate this issue which no doubt affects many employees. In the leaflet that came with the payslips this month, the way the topic is framed seems to imply that DV/A is almost exclusively a male-on-female issue. For example there is a reference, in bold type, to Derbyshire Women's Aid. This could lead men who experience DV/A to be less willing to complete the survey or seek help. In this way, the hidden issue of female-on-male DV/A could remain hidden and unaddressed.
4	For years I thought that domestic violence only referred to being physically hit as a lot of posters years ago showed a picture of a woman being hit. I would like the issue of emotional abuse to be highlighted more so that people can be more aware of it. I had not realised that emotional abuse was just as bad if not worse because it does not show marks on the body but in the mind and on your nerves. I believe that some women "put up with" emotional or physical abuse and are either not ready to do anything about it or lack the confidence or support to do so. The thought of leaving a home in a "good" area with access to a "good" school for your children is daunting when you think you may have to move into a Women's Refuge in a town centre. When your son is 13 years or over he cannot move into a refuge with you. Having survived abuse and moved on with my life I give thanks every day for my life rather than the "existence" that I once had.
5	The incident I have referred to was a few years ago and I believe/hope the support would be better now. I live with the possibility of this happening again but would deal with it differently at

	work. I would welcome a greater awareness of domestic violence by managers. There also needs to be a greater awareness that violence can come from anyone, not just a spouse but also from other relatives etc.
6	Rightly or wrongly, at the time I felt ashamed of what was happening to me. I also didn't understand the different types of abuse I had experienced until I had counselling (counselling was a positive experience for me). This mind-set and lack of knowledge prevented me from seeking support from services and therefore I tried to get out and go through it almost alone, only with some support from family and friends. However it would have been much better if I'd had professional support. I don't think, even now, that my family really understand the level of abuse that I experienced, as it never happened to them and it was well hidden for a long time. Removing the stigma and trying to get the message out that it can happen to anyone, it is not the victim's fault and the grass is most certainly greener on the other side (and achievable!) should be crucial to your work however I understand the enormity of this task! Thank you for this opportunity to contribute.
7	I felt safe doing this as no one know who I am and I don't feel silly about telling you that my wife will at time hit me. Most of the time she just shouts and swears and makes me feel stupid. What can I do ? I have tried to tell her how it makes me feel but she stops for a while and then it starts all over again. Work is a safe place to be and being a male it is harder to speak up as being seen by everyone as weak and stupid. I feel trapped nowhere to go and no one to talk too about what I can do to stop her from verbally abusing me.
8	There needs to be greater realisation of patterns of abuse and the hidden feature of emotional and financial abuse for professional women - it is hard for a professional woman to seek refuge as it is perceived that we are in employment and could stay in a hotel for example - in my own case, I sought refuge in a mainstream women's hostel as I wanted other people on hand including staff to offer emotional support. Abusers isolate women from their families and social contacts. Misconceptions still exists that women have family support My own abuser systematically isolated me from my family by his lies and manipulation..... ..The needs of the child should remain central to any support for victim of abuse. Agencies need to recognise that some abusers are very skilful and manipulative. Workers should joint work and to review at key points whether they are being sucked in and/or manipulated. Workers need managers who are trained and competent in assessing risk and in professional families. Agencies should not be frightened to use powers to protect a child caught up in on-going dynamics of emotional abuse and control. The emphasis in any intervention should be restorative and not destructive and giving individuals the opportunity to change and reflect on choices. A child's relationship with safe extended family members should be safeguarded and preserved wherever possible in cases of domestic abuse.
9	Coming into work and being in a "normal" environment, amongst work

	friends was a relief for me when I was a victim. It is better to be at work if possible and it would help if DCC did what it could to help its staff keep coming to work - even if they have to have a bit of time out during the day.
10	Domestic abuse is illegal and wrong. It deeply affects families in a detrimental way. More, lots more, should be done to tackle this "behind closed doors" abuse. When I suffered domestic violence it was horrible and the more help, information and support is available the better. Thank you!

Appendix 3

A	Responses to questions on support from Managers/Colleagues
1	...my manager only knew I had suffered a physical assault because this was stated on my sick note from my GP. I returned to work quite quickly and still had stitches in my eye. My manager asked me if I was Ok but she asked me in front of the team and as a consequence I simply said "yes". I did not feel able to discuss this with my manager as I had reason to believe it would not be confidential.
2	I did not want to tell my manager as I felt silly about such a thing
3	I just touched the surface initially to see whether I could share information about my situation. I was in a new post and the issue was very sensitive. My manager was sympathetic but she was in a temporary interim role and moved on. I then had a male manager who again terminated his employment before I felt able to share my problem. I also found out that some personal information about my domestic abuse had been disclosed elsewhere by my employers without my permission.
4	At all times my manager was supportive whilst I was off sick and on my return to work when I had left my family home and my husband. I felt valued at work (but not at home by my husband). If I had not had a job and team to come to work with, I might have crumbled
5	My manger allowed me to have time out and use their office to have confidential conversations. This was really useful as I work in an open plan area and needed a quiet private area just for a few minutes without having to leave work.
6	I did not feel that I could trust my manager to retain confidentiality on my behalf.
7	My work colleagues were very supportive and like a second family to me. If I had not had a full time job I would not have had the confidence and finance to leave my abusive husband and start again. Through this, I was considered a success story by my Women's Aid support worker as it helped me survive this part of my life.
8	I needed somewhere to plan leaving my situation with my children and get away from my abusive husband. I couldn't make these plans at home so had to resort to making phone calls in my car during windows of opportunity which was very difficult.
9	I had to take annual leave to attend Court and I would have like support for doing this. I was able to work from home when I was physically drained
B	Responses to questions on giving reasons for absence from work – or feeling able to take time off work
1	I felt uncomfortable as there is a stigma around "mental health" issues
2	I did not report the reason as I felt ashamed and believed my manager would not understand. However, my GP stated the reason for my

	absence on my sick-note
3I particularly didn't take time off as I have to fund my legal case. My abuse has been, in part, financial control and I had to keep working for my income.
4	I did not take time off but found it difficult to work to my normal high standard during difficult periods. I spoke to my line manager who was sympathetic but offered no advice or support or changes to my work but told me I had to improve my work standard. I was told to attend counselling sessions in my own time, which I did.
C	Responses to questions on access to Council Services for support
1	At the time of my problems I was not living in Derbyshire and I had to ask a friend to drive me to a meeting with my Manager and Attendance Manager as I was too ill and exhausted to drive myself. I had support from my GP, RELATE, and Women's Aid and the DCC Counselling Service on my return to work. I was declared homeless and provided with a flat through Amber Valley's Housing Association. I was grateful for the support I received and by having peace of mind my recovery continued
2	I used the Police Domestic Violence Unit
3	I had no access to support for my children – one of whom is an adult child with mental health problems which were exacerbated by the situation. I did not ask for support through work for fear of breach of confidentiality.
4	I was able to access services from DCC because I knew they existed. I'm not sure if other people would know about these services if they didn't work near, or know of, these services
5	I accessed the Freedom Programme via a poster in the ladies toilets at work and self-referred.
D	Sources of information on Domestic Violence support
1	General internet search
2	Leaflet on the Freedom Programme from my counsellor. Posters in ladies toilets at work.
3	Posters at GP surgeries