

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	15 May 2020
<b>Title:</b>	Domestic Violence
<b>Report From:</b>	Chief Executive

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### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to brief Cabinet about specific concerns and activities related to domestic abuse and violence during the Covid 19 crisis.

### Recommendations

2. Cabinet are asked to note this report, endorse the various activities described herein and approve the current and evolving inter-departmental approach to addressing domestic abuse and violence.
3. Cabinet are further requested to receive an update report on the progress of these activities within a period of approximately six months.

### Executive Summary

4. Among the many significant challenges brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic and crisis is the anticipated increase in the incidence and impact of domestic abuse and violence. This presents a real additional risk to the organisation, its staff and especially the community at large. There is essentially a two-fold basis for this genuine concern. Firstly, the nature of the national "lockdown" is requiring all families and households to isolate within the home virtually entirely for a period now exceeding two months. This represents the potential for particular strain on any household, but especially those where there are the underlying elements for domestic abuse. Secondly, the means of referring for services and support for the victims of domestic abuse are severely challenged by the lockdown. It is much harder for the

victims or survivors of abuse to find space and time to make private contact with support services. Further, the core universal agencies, police, primary health care and schools, which act as the key sources of referral to specialist support services, are substantially restricted from their business as usual and so less likely to be acting as such a source.

5. During the progress of the County Council's necessarily radical response to the Covid crisis, Cabinet members have been raising their legitimate concerns about the potential for an increase in the incidence of domestic abuse in its various forms. This suspected increase is a matter of national and international concern.
6. In the absence of those first points of referral to some universal services, and especially given the substantial strain under which core services are now having to operate, there are limitations to the powers and capacity of core local authority services, to essentially "seek out" the unreported concerns and offer support accordingly.
7. Hampshire County Council services, working in partnership with the key statutory and voluntary sector agencies, are organised across three key domains in support of the victims and survivors of domestic abuse and violence. The Children's Services Department, through its duties to the protection of children, works with families where domestic abuse may be prevalent and the child is either the direct target of that abuse, or is placed at significant risk by the substantial trauma of witnessing abuse. This work is also coordinated through the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership. Adults' Health and Care have parallel responsibilities towards vulnerable adults living in the community. Their work is similarly coordinated in partnership with the Local Safeguarding Adults Partnership. Public Health holds a more generic role in the delivery of some domestic abuse services and the Director of Public Health chairs an inter-agency domestic abuse partnership board.
8. The following sections describe the current work and focus of those three domains of activity.

### **Children's Services**

9. We know from research in China and Italy that there was a significant rise in incidents (as there was child abuse) during prolonged periods of lockdown and isolation. Children's social care services have worked with the police to maintain daily High-Risk Domestic Abuse (HRDA) meetings at the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub). In short, the highest risk cases in Hampshire are triaged each day, information is shared rapidly and officers ensure there are safety plans in place for the victims. Cases are tracked to ensure that actions are taken to reduce risk, in so far as we can.

10. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care is having weekly phone calls with the lead Detective Superintendent, to update each other on how respective services are managing and identify any areas needing particular attention. Domestic abuse is one of those areas, hence partners are sharing information on children and families of most concern within each district, on at least a weekly basis. These include the highest risk domestic abuse cases but also a wider cohort of vulnerable children and families. The police are working with HCC to ensure these families are visited if for some reason social care cannot do so.
11. In addition, Hampshire Constabulary have reinforced the message to their frontline officers that when attending domestic abuse incidents, they must see and speak to the children. That information is shared with Children's Services to inform decisions about any necessary further action.
12. We have reminded our staff of the support that they can access for families where there are domestic abuse issues. There is a read across to services provided by Adult Services and Public Health (see below). Regrettably, senior managers have acknowledged that, given the large number of people working for the County Council, statistically some of our staff working at home might be at risk or victims and we have reminded all managers that one to one sessions must reflect on an individual's wellbeing.
13. The LSCP (Local Safeguarding Children Panel) is regularly reinforcing the message that domestic abuse is everybody's business and how professionals can refer victims.

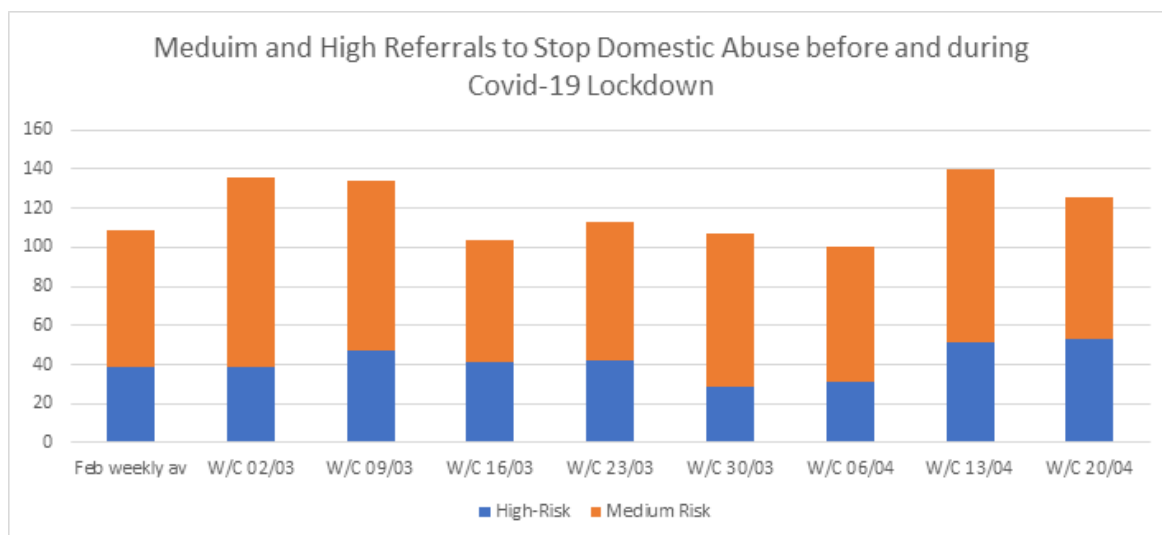
## **Adults' Health and Care**

14. The welfare response to the crisis generally in Hampshire and Isle of Wight is overseen by the HCC Director of Adults' Services (DASS) as Chair of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) COVID welfare response, which includes hard to reach groups such as rough sleepers and people with complex needs. Domestic violence is a feature in both of these areas and these forums are where co-ordination across Districts, the Voluntary and Community Sector, NHS and the SHIP footprint occur at a strategic level.
15. There are specialist adult domestic abuse call handlers situated in the Adults' Health and Care Contact and Resolution Team call centre. Children's and Adults' MASH staff continue to work closely on signposting and supporting people who experience domestic abuse. The COVID Hantshelp4vulnerable call centre staff have been trained to be aware of domestic abuse risk and triage appropriately.
16. Additionally, the Hampshire Adult Safeguarding Board and Adult Social Care assessing staff are reinforcing the continuing availability of support to those

individuals and families at risk. Through the ‘think family’ and ‘safeguarding is everyone’s business’ this approach and positive support message is being extended across all settings and with all partners.

## Public Health

17. Generic domestic abuse work is being brought together on an inter-agency basis as a key topic with all partners working together. The HCC Director of Public Health chairs the multi-agency domestic abuse partnership for Hampshire as a linked arrangement between the respective Children’s and Adults’ Safeguarding Boards.
18. Due to the complexity of the subject a senior level executive group has been formed to ensure a consistent system approach to domestic abuse included how the Police, Courts and other partners deliver their interventions consistently to tackle abuse in line with victim and perpetrator needs. A strategic partnership plan is being implemented, including input from the Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.
19. To date, there has been no identifiable increase in demand for community-based services. However, activity pre-lockdown to end of w/c 20/04/20 – shows number of high risk referrals continue on the same increased level as the previous week (which is a third higher than February baseline levels) whilst medium risk referral numbers returned to February numbers (after being a third higher than pre-lockdown numbers during w/c 13/04 and during w/c 02/03):



With the increased assumed concerns of domestic abuse partners remain concerned that people who require help can’t safely contact agencies (and for the reasons outlined generally above). Police referrals reflect the overall increases in medium and high risk cases. Referrals for children and young people have dropped by a two-thirds (which is potentially equally worrying).

Refuge referrals have increased. In February these averaged 12 referrals a week. For the last two weeks these averaged 17.5 referrals, nearly a 50% increase.

20. Refuges remain open, and where there are vacancies, they will accept new families as per normal practice. Senior managers would not recommend any steps to seek to temporarily increase refuge provision during the course of the crisis. Refuge is an important but highly specific aspect of the armoury to tackle domestic violence; it is a very sensitive service which requires extremely careful planning and, by definition, must be established with high levels of discretion as well as care. These factors are all militated against by the nature of the current crisis and professional opinion urges against any steps to seek to establish such emergency provision.
21. HCC and its partners are providing enhanced community based support by phone and video call in the main. Services have started offering support via Facebook messenger at designated times, recognising that some people may not be able to make a phone call due to being at home with their partner. From Monday 6 April 2020, victims and perpetrators (not professionals) advice line hours have been increased to accommodate victims and perpetrators needing support who may have a short window when they can safely make a call.
22. It has to be acknowledged that the lack of in person contact means that it can take longer to build rapport with new clients - staff are not able to see body language, see how children are clothed/cared for when there may be safeguarding issues etc. This can be used by victims and abusers to minimise risk. Again, this is a point of enhanced advice and guidance to all relevant staff.

## **Conclusion**

23. It should be apparent from this brief report that the nature of domestic abuse covers a range of LA services and the County Council's responses are necessarily complex and inter-dependent. That applies at the best of times let alone during this unique crisis. Members are right to be concerned about the potential increase of hidden abuse at this time. Services are also constrained about what more can be done, though the analysis above should be reassuring at least to an extent. Inevitably, there is always more that can be done, but given the inherent strengths of those respective services in Hampshire, Children's, Adults' and Public Health, and given the quality of joint working that exists within HCC and across the partnerships, Cabinet should be assured that local arrangements are as secure and responsive as possible in this most exceptional period.

It is also the strong view of officers that the balance of officer leadership and accountability across the three respective services should continue to be well served by a comparable balance across the political leadership within Cabinet. It is not recommended that these inter-dependent arrangements should be isolated to any specific role as that would have unintended and damaging consequences for the established lines of statutory accountability. It would however be appropriate for a further report to be presented to Cabinet, again covering the various domains of connected work, to review how services are managing these pressures in the context of the crisis and recovery.

## REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

### Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes/no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes/no
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes/no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes/no

### Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **1. Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **2. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

This report updates Cabinet on the current position and therefore has no equality impact implications