

Subject:

Scrutiny Report: Support Services for Victims of Sexual Violence. Response to Recommendations.

Date of Meeting: 18th October 2010.

Report of: Head of Community Safety

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 A scrutiny panel on support service for victims of sexual violence was established by the Environment and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee following a referral from full council. The report of panel's findings and recommendations is appended.
- 1.2 This report informs the Forum of progress in meeting the recommendations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 The Forum is asked to note the progress described in detail in the body of the report. As recommended, this report will in due course, be taken to Cabinet and the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 2.2 The Forum is also asked to note that a further report will be brought to its meeting next year, which brings together the work to deal with sexual and domestic violence within the wider policy framework of dealing with 'Violence Against Women and Girls'. That framework continues to be developed nationally. We have been invited to submit the outcome of our Intelligent Commissioning Pilot (on DV) as an example of good practice within that national framework.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The scrutiny panel comprised Councillor David Watkins (Chairman), Councillor Juliet McCaffery (Deputy Chairman), and Councillors Averil Older and Alex Phillips.
- 3.2 The terms of reference for the panel were agreed as:
- To gain an understanding of the nature and prevalence of sexual violence, particularly in the Brighton and Hove context
 - To identify what support services for victims of sexual violence are already available to Brighton and Hove residents
 - To identify where there are gaps in the provision of support services
 - To identify what referral routes and pathways between different statutory agencies and support services currently exist, and how these can be developed further to increase support to victims of sexual violence
 - To investigate ways to encourage a co-ordinated and holistic approach to the provision of support services for victims of sexual violence
 - To investigate ways to encourage a more strategic and integrated approach to planning and commissioning support services
 - To identify ways to ensure that support services can be sustainably resourced
 - To identify ways to consult with service users about the support services they are accessing
- 3.3 The panel report is appended to this paper.
- 3.4 The report identifies four recommendations (p 10) which are about putting in place joint strategic commissioning arrangements across the Partnership and which are integrated with those for domestic violence. Those recommendations will be in place from 1st November this year. A single lead commissioner for community safety overall, will develop further the joint commissioning processes already in place for sexual violence, informed by the outcome of the Intelligent Commissioning Pilot on domestic violence.
- 3.5 There are a number of recommendations which are directly in relation to the development and funding of support and other services. They are:
- A dedicated programme of support services for young women aged 16 -25 (R.1)
 - Group counselling services for men who have unwanted sexual experiences (R.2)
 - A Health, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor in A&E in Sussex County Hospital (R.3)
 - That funding (by all statutory agencies) for local independent support services be awarded funding for a three to five year period (R.19)

- That all statutory agencies (with health agencies particularly identified) consider how they support and provide mainstream funding for sexual violence services including local independent support services (R.20 & 21)

3.6 Joint funding and commissioning decisions for the current year have enabled the establishment of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre for Sussex and new local rape crisis, support and counselling service. Although capacity is limited by available funding, that local provision includes a dedicated support service for young women (16 – 25 age group) by a staff member with appropriate expertise. A Health, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor located in A&E is funded for the current year by the PCT. Group counselling services for men are not funded in the current year. That recommendation will be considered in the joint commissioning decisions for 2011 and beyond. While the benefit of funding decisions and allocations for a three to five year period is recognised, it is not yet possible to indicate whether or not that arrangement can be achieved within financing and new joint commissioning arrangements.

3.7 There are three recommendations (R,6, 15 and 18) which are about building the capacity of local independent support services and establishing networks and partnership support structures between statutory and third sector service providers in order to better develop strategic approaches and services which meet local need. Recommendation 7, proposes that strengthening the referral pathways to (and from) the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) is a high priority.

3.8 These recommendations are being taken forward in several ways. The SARC has now completed its first year of operation overseen by a management and commissioning Board made up of representatives from police, health and community safety services across Sussex. An Operational Group is established which brings together the third sector service providers from Brighton & Hove and Sussex, to work alongside the statutory forensic and clinical service providers. Progress in developing this complex service is very good and reports to each meeting of the management Board assist in joint problem and service development.

3.9 Regular meetings of the network of agencies in the women's services sector, facilitated and chaired by the Director of Probation Services and Head of Community Safety is one way in which support is provided and the capacity of those organisations is developed. Outside of those meetings, senior Probation officers and those within the Partnership Community Safety team provide practical assistance with the tasks associated with funding bid preparation, the development of protocols, procedures, monitoring returns and so on. A meeting on 6th October of an 'expert reference group' for Brighton & Hove, will allow a wider range of statutory and third sector organisations to consider progress on taking

forward all the outcomes that are being sought to reduce sexual violence in the City.

- 3.10 Recommendation 8 seeks the commissioning of a feasibility study for the introduction and funding of an independent 24 hour signposting and support service. That recommendation will be considered at the October meeting (above). The SARC Management Board are also to consider the potential of the service as a Sussex wide provision within its funding plans in future years.
- 3.11 Two recommendations (R.10 & 11) are to be taken forward within proposals currently being considered, to increase workforce skills of frontline staff to recognise, risk assess and respond appropriately to those who are experiencing domestic or sexual violence. The recommendations in the Scrutiny report are specific about promoting staff training to enable appropriate responses and seeking to ensure that all women who come into contact with front line staff and professionals are informed about the independent, women only specialist support services in the City. Those specific recommendations will be incorporated within future work plans for improving workforce skills.
- 3.12 Recommendations 12 and 16 seek to standardise recording and monitoring of cases of sexual offences across the city. The issue arises because although that measurement is incorporated within NI 26, the Home Office have not offered any definition which is normal practice for national indicators. In the absence of that definition, we have during the past year, monitored police recorded sexual offences as a measure of what is happening in the city. That information is included within the regular performance reports which are submitted to the Safe In The City Partnership, Community Safety Forum and elsewhere. As the SARC and local support services begin their service and client monitoring, the data set begins to build upon which we can develop important analysis which then informs interventions. Those interventions (both within the criminal justice system and of local support services) are also informed by six monthly 'strategic assessments' of rape and other sexual offences. The assessments are completed by the police and the Head of Community Safety considers the implications of that restricted information with partners at a regular Sussex wide steering group. In due course, we will seek to compose a data set that contains information that can be more widely shared.
- 3.13 Recommendation 17 proposes that support is given to independent support services and organisations who represent vulnerable adults to enable them to work together to develop appropriate services which meet their needs. Discussions with Adult Social Care will begin shortly on taking forward this recommendation.
- 3.14 Recommendations 4, 5, 9, 13 and 14 are in relation to services for children and young people. In summary they are:

- That the specialised therapeutic support service for children and young people affected by sexual violence be reviewed as a matter of high priority in order to ensure that their needs are met
- That the specialised support services for children who display sexually harmful behaviour be reviewed as a matter of high priority to ensure that their needs are met
- That Children's services reviews and considers how it responds to and supports children and women from families where domestic and sexual violence has taken place in order to ensure a holistic approach to such cases is taken
- That greater evidence is placed on positive perspectives of masculinity and promoted to young people
- That a programme of prevention and early intervention be developed to meet the needs of a range of individuals in a range of different contexts. As part of this, education and awareness raising programmes about what healthy relationships are and consist of, should also be undertaken

3.15 The Children and Young People's Trust regard these matters as a high priority and are to begin considering the approach to be taken to implement these reviews as soon as is possible.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 The Scrutiny panel invited and heard evidence from a range of third sector organisations, including those from the Women's Services sector and providers of local support services.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 The financial implications of adopting the scrutiny panel's recommendations will be considered by within the new Commissioning arrangements and by the Council's Executive alongside the relevant budgets.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Sexual offences are a serious violent crime and as such the responses to prevent and reduce their incidence, protect and support victims and bring offenders to justice is a priority for the Community Safety Partnership

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Sexual violence is mostly experienced by women and girls and can be considered one of the main causes and consequences of gender inequality. Sexual violence represents a significant violation of women's and girls' fundamental human rights. These issues have been clearly acknowledged within the review and within all the work carried out to deal with sexual violence.

8. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Sexual offences are a serious violent crime and as such the responses to prevent and reduce their incidence, protect and support victims and bring offenders to justice is a high priority for the Community Safety Partnership.

10. RISK AND OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None identified directly in relation to this report.

11. CORPORATE/CITYWIDE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The recommendations made in this report are in line with the council's priorities to reduce crime, improve safety and reduce inequality.

12. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Report of the Support Services for Victims of Sexual Violence scrutiny Panel, Volume 1.

Background Documents:

1. The Panel report Volume 2 contains the evidence presented to the scrutiny Panel.