

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

COORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1000 hours on Friday 17th February 2023, Committee Rooms 3 and 4,

Council House, Victoria Square, B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Albert Bore (Chair)

Councillors: Jack Deakin, Mick Brown, Mohammed Idrees, Chaman Lal, Ewan Mackey, Kerry Jenkins, Saima Suleman, Alex Yip, Roger Harmer, Deirdre Alden.

Also Present:

Cllr. John Cotton, Cabinet Member Social Justice, Community Safety & Equalities

Cllr. Morriam Jan, Visiting Member

Maureen Connolly, CEO of BSWA

Revinder Johal, Commissioning Manager for Adult Social Care

Kalvinder Kohli, Assistant Director Early Intervention (online)

Shirin Marashi, Senior Commissioning Officer

Emily Owen, Student Wellbeing and Partnership Officers, University of Birmingham

James Mason, Student Wellbeing and Partnership Officers, University of Birmingham

Nicky Brennan, Victims Commissioner, OPCC

William Noble, Research Officer, OPCC

Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Ed Brown, Committee Officer

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised the meeting to note that this meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's meeting You Tube site (www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES - 27 JANUARY 2023

The Action Notes of the meeting on the 27 January were agreed.

RESOLVED:

- That the action notes of the formal meeting held on 27 January 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

RESOLVED:

- That the Action Tracker be noted

6. DOMESTIC ABUSE PREVENTION STRATEGY REVIEW

The Chair introduced the report and thanked the officers who had brought us to this point.

(See Document No 1)

A report was submitted providing an overview of the approach to reviewing and developing the new Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2024+ and an update on cross-party scrutiny engagement to date and ongoing opportunities to engage in the consultation of the strategy.

Kalvinder Kohli, Assistant Director Early Intervention and Prevention and Revinder Johal, Commissioning Manager for Adult Social Care presented the section on the Strategy review and the approach to review and engagement with the use of slides.

Key points included:

- This was a sensitive area of work and colleagues were reminded that support was available.
- In 2022 domestic abuse was the third highest reason for homelessness.
- The existing strategy had been widely consulted upon and involved a wide range of partner organisations across the city.
- There had been a shift in strategy moving upstream away from crisis intervention, and focussing on early intervention and prevention.
- The partnership approach required a wholesale system change and a change in culture. There had been unanimous support from the partner agencies.
- Women and Children were at the centre of the strategy as domestic abuse is a gendered crime. However, the strategy recognised that anybody could experience

domestic abuse, and equality was embedded in the strategy, with particular consideration to those with protected characteristics.

- Key achievements included:
 - A commissioned prevention pathway providing support to victims
 - Retained refuge provision which had continued to be built on.
 - A cross-directorate domestic abuse group.
 - A developed Human Resources offer for staff.
 - Specialist officers for housing where domestic abuse was a factor.
 - The implementation of Part 4 Domestic Abuse Act 2021 new statutory duty (*provision of support to victims who reside in safe accommodation*). This included:
 - A shadow board set up a year in advance of the new duty.
 - A full needs assessment had been completed.
 - A refreshed strategy had been produced.
 - Commissioned support in safe accommodation which included children's workers, therapeutic and counselling sessions, family support workers etc.
 - A community grants prospectus was developed to enable smaller grass roots organisations to bid for pots of monies to support victims who often had protected characteristics. These included Domestic Abuse Learning Disability Coordinator, Domestic Abuse school link workers, The Leaving to Healing programme etc
- Regarding next steps the approach would:
 - Review and reflect on the current strategy, considering what has been achieved, what challenges were encountered and what may need to continue in the new strategy.
 - Ensure, strong partnership involvement, in continued recognition that no one single agency can deliver on the significant whole system approach required to tackle and prevent domestic abuse across Birmingham.
 - Ensure the Council's corporate priority of prevention and early intervention is central to the new strategy.
 - Align with the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Violence Against Women and girls (VAWG) strategy.
- The issues of early intervention and prevention were addressed, and the Domestic Abuse Strategy Timeline was outlined.
- The approach had been approved by DALSP Board and presented at Cabinet member briefings. There had been cross-party scrutiny involvement and a strategy working group had been established.

Emily Owen and James Mason, Student Wellbeing and Partnership Officers, University of Birmingham, gave a presentation using slides on Enhancing Support for Student Vulnerability on Campus. Issues covered included:

- The Wellbeing Network.

- Student Wellbeing and Partnership, which comprised of Vulnerable Student Support, training and development, Partnerships and Non-traditional Student Vulnerabilities.
- Changing attitudes and behaviours.
- Early identification and help.
- Safety and support.
- Next steps and developments including:
 - Identifying best practice within the sector.
 - The use of data to understand prevalence, identify trends and inform proactive prevention work.
 - Developing new partnerships within the community both voluntary and statutory.
 - Coproduction with students.

Maureen Connolly, CEO of Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA), presented the section on Partner feedback on current strategy: successes and achievements using slides.

Key points included:

- Key Obstacles for Women including:
 - A low rate of arrests and prosecutions (less than 4% of crimed cases).
 - A shortage of refuge accommodation and family housing and suitable and affordable housing.
- Data was presented showing a significant rise in cases particularly during the Covid-19 lockdown which had a big impact on services. Data also showed that high risk cases (victims at the highest risk of the most significant harm) were rising quickly and it was noted that the thresholds for what was considered a high risk case were very high in Birmingham.
- Further data from the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was presented showing that of victims, 6% were male compared to 94 % female with 3% in the LGBT community and of perpetrators 94.5% were male and 5.5% were female (the data for perpetrators in the LGBT community was not known).
- The Birmingham City Council Commissioned Domestic Abuse Pathway was showing the services available to women such as Home Options, Advice and Wellbeing and the helpline and Webchat which could then in turn refer on to specialist teams, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA) and other services.
- Trans issues were identified and referred on to the LGBT centre.
- Women and Children were prioritised as that was where the risks were.
- Services were in one place in order to prevent escalation and there had been significant success stories.
- There was no gatekeeping and the organisation had worked with women to consider what could be done differently

- New interventions recognised children as victims and took account of families with complex needs where issues had the potential to escalate. Age-related services were also available.
- In terms of cultural change, the organisation was working to support women and also share practice and the understanding of challenges.
- There had been an issue that large properties were often purchased quickly, which reduced the chance for them to be bought as refuges.
- The organisation was looking to find ways to find a new model and to help vulnerable women.

During the discussion the following issues were raised:

In response to a query from Councillor Mackey on the rise of domestic abuse in lockdown, the CEO of BSWA noted the rapid rise and informed those present that a regional campaign had been set up so that women knew where they could go. She further reported that practice had adapted quickly, and the police had help protect victims of domestic abuse. She further noted that the scenarios had been very alarming with an increase of women murdered during the lockdown and as such the organisation and partners had needed to act quickly.

In response to a query from Councillor Deirdre Alden concerning housing issues surrounding domestic abuse, the CEO of BSWA noted that there was very little choice about where to house victims due to a lack of space. She further noted issues surrounding the safest place to house victims which included areas other than Birmingham.

The Commissioning Manager, Adult Social Care, agreed to further investigate the success rate of injunctions carried out by Birmingham City Council.

In response to further questions from Councillor Deirdre Alden on how the statistics were compiled, the CEO of BSWA explained that the majority of cases were not crimed and statistics were affected by the fact that if cases were not dealt with by the police when reported, victims would be reluctant to report cases in future.

It was clarified that a crimed case was a case in which a significant assault had been determined. The determination depended on evidence of harm and as such whilst coercive control was a crime, cases were rarely crimed.

The Victims Commissioner, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) further clarified that there were often different elements in a case and where this was the case the different elements were crimed as separate entities. She further noted that for many victims there could be a back catalogue of incidents not reported.

The Chair suggested that the data could be presented differently to aid clarity.

In response to questions from Councillor Suleman concerning the sharing of information about services and the role of intersectionality, the CEO of BSWA informed those present that there were agencies to contact and that information was available. However, she acknowledged that there was a finite number of staff operating the helpline and as such

it could sometimes be difficult to get through meaning that some people did not get support. She further acknowledged that intersectionality was important but also acknowledged that there was a lot of pressure across the sector. She suggested that there was more to learn for the statutory sector and that it was important to understand situations.

In response to an issue raised by Councillor Brown regarding domestic abuse and particularly coercive control involving older children and young adults within a family, the CEO of BSWA acknowledged that this was a challenge that was not easy to resolve and that this was something that needed to be looked at further.

In response to issues raised by Councillor Lal regarding the causes of domestic abuse, statistics showing different levels of domestic abuse in different communities and people at risk of modern slavery, the CEO of BSWA explained that domestic abuse took place as a result of women's place in society. She added that if no action was taken against perpetrators the situation could escalate, and drew attention to the low arrest and prosecution rate and the prevalence of victim-blaming. Councillor Cotton, Cabinet member for Social Justice, Community, Safety, and Equalities, added that work was being done in conjunction with Birmingham University on modern slavery and the Commissioning Manager for Adult Social Care further mentioned wider work done with universities on domestic abuse.

In response to a question from Councillor Idrees on statistics surrounding female Genital Mutilation (FGM) the CEO of BSWA indicated that she did not think that figures were reducing based on the information available to her. She further clarified that FGM was treated as family abuse and it was necessary to look at the whole picture.

Responding to a query from Councillor Deakin regarding trans victims of domestic abuse, it was explained that trans victims were referred to the LGBT centre who could take a more nuanced approach. She added that whilst there were services for male victims, thousands of women were being turned away due to capacity issues.

During consideration of lessons learned from current strategy: main challenges and what could be done differently, the following issues were raised:

- The importance of working in strategic partnerships and a collaborative approach.
- The need to change how things were heard and the need to end victim-blaming.
- The need to assess risk properly.
- The need for a place for victims to go.
- The importance of the early intervention model.
- The need to act to protect.

Nicky Brennan, Victims Commissioner of OPCC presented the section on Emerging Issues, including, Successes challenges and emerging issues, children as victims, training, housing,

MARAC, criminal justice responses, cost of living crisis and key issues to take forward into new strategy using slides.

Points highlighted included:

- The role of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) to amplify the voice of victims and to help them recover.
- The increase in support across the region and the funding of services.
- 'By and For' services to support victims of Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse, FGM, Forced Marriage, Honour Based Abuse and specialist support services that support LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse and hate crime and increase trust in the criminal justice system.
- The Specialist Domestic Violence Courts – in particular issues surrounding the backlogs faced by courts and the discussions at regional level surrounding specialist domestic abuse courts.
- The importance of the accessibility of victim support, particularly for minorities.
- The Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Fund.
- Changing behaviours such as the No Excuse for Abuse Campaign and the Time to talk initiative which challenged surrounding social media personalities who promote misogynistic perspectives focussing on boys in a school setting, calling out misogynist behaviour and educating boys on how to be allies.
- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on domestic abuse particularly with regard to victims being financially dependent on their abusers.
- Further challenges included:
 - Housing for domestic abuse victims.
 - Court backlogs and the lack of investment in the criminal justice system.
 - The impact of the cost of living on providers.
 - The prevalence of misogynistic figures online.
 - The NHS/Public Health response to victims and survivors through treatment such as sexual health, dental etc.
 - The lack of recourse to public funds.

Councillor Yip noted that this was an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to feed into the strategy and be heard and stressed the need for each scrutiny chair to take back to their own committees on what was relevant and feed into the new refreshed strategy. He further stressed that this was an opportunity to look both back and forward on the issue.

He provided feedback from the December roundtable of 30+ groups and noted that a number of points raised at the present meeting reflected those raised at the roundtable. Observations, recommendations and issues raised included:

- With regard to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS):
 - Non-molestation orders
 - Family court

- Low levels of prosecutions
- Number of instances where no further action was taken.
- Modern slavery
- The increasing number of and increasing complexity of cases around domestic abuse (male and female victims).

This was a key element for prevention of future offences.

Further observations, recommendations and issues raised included:

- Education and the impact to the child as a victim in their own right, the voice of the child and getting better more timely education as a priority for children. Mental health and counselling. Whether children fleeing domestic abuse could be placed as a priority for schools when considering places. Moving and porting the housing waiting position from other Councils into Council.
- The issue of housing that was temporary but not temporary enough, causing bed-blocking and an inability for families to move on. Also, poor quality housing that was not joined up.
- The cost-of-living crisis as a new emerging challenge since the strategy was created. In particular its influence on coercion and control, finance and pressure upon commissioned services as well as legal aid and no resource to public funds.
- The need for longer term funding- not short-term funding for organisations.
- The need for earlier prevention to reverse the trend which had been moving in the wrong direction for several years. Offences were arising at an ever-younger age and there was a need to get prevention right.
- The need to place the voice of the victims at the heart of the process.
- The suggestion for a direct line for commissioned services and councillors to cut through red tape for discretionary payments, advice or housing in emergency cases not just the email that is used.
- The need for short term and medium-term changes, as part of a long-term strategy.
- The complexity of this issue which crosses multiple portfolios and the desire to see Cabinet Members (multiple) reporting back to ensure joined-up action on this.
- Changing behaviours and attitudes earlier.

He further suggested that training for Councillors on how to address issues of domestic abuse would be welcomed.

During further discussion the following issues were raised:

Councillor Kerry Jenkins commented that the roundtable had been informative and useful and added that discussion was ongoing. She further commented that whilst changing attitudes were the most important feature, they were also the hardest as domestic abuse was an ongoing issue and it had been difficult to see how attitudes had changed in recent history. Issues surrounding victim-blaming, particularly in the mainstream media were further highlighted and the need to call-out victim-blaming was raised. She further suggested that more could be done by Councillors to work with their own communities to

educate and change attitudes, and whilst this may exist in some communities already, it needed to be taken onboard as a whole and that she would like to see this in the strategy.

She further stressed the need for early intervention and prevention and the need to think about how to get other partners onboard to deliver.

She suggested that training on domestic abuse issues should be mandatory for Councillors.

Councillor Jan added that the CEO of BSWA had offered training. She also raised the suggestion that every victim should approach the CPS as Women's Aid had funding for legal aid which could help those who could not afford solicitors. She raised the question of whether legal aid would still be in place if cases took a long time to get to court.

In response to a query from Councillor Lal about the correct use of funds by organisations, the Victims Commissioner, OPCC, assured that there was a robust monitoring process to ensure that money funded to partner organisations was spent properly.

The CEO of BSWA added that she had not heard of any agency that had not used the money funded to them properly and the Commissioning manager, Adult Social Care, further assured that there was a robust procurement process in place and ongoing contract management to ensure that bids were delivered on.

Councillor Suleman supported her ideas of training for Councillors and a single point of contact for Councillors on the issue. She further raised the issue of victims of abuse becoming perpetrators and the need to get the message across that these people had the choice not to become abusers.

Councillor Mackey drew attention to training materials available through the Local Government Association.

Councillor Jenkins stipulated that whilst having a single point of contact was good for signposting for the right support, it was important to ensure that certain cases were not prioritised over others.

Councillor John Cotton, Cabinet member for Social Justice, Community, Safety, and Equalities thanked the members of the Committee for an important session and made the following summarising comments:

- When scrutiny was involved at any early stage it helped to shape policy rather than being reactive.
- There had been a strong message, and everyone appeared to be on the same page regarding understanding the challenge and what action was needed. He made reference to the 'Everyone's Battle, Everyone's Business' approach.
- Given the cross-cutting nature of the issues each Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a role to play.

- There was a need for the strategy to be owned across all cabinet portfolios and directorates.
- There was a responsibility to build an environment that tackled the root causes of domestic abuse.
- There was a demand for crisis support and it was important to meet that whilst also working on prevention work. A balance was needed as some issues needed to be dealt with immediately.
- A great deal of funding was short-term which needed to be spent at the crisis end rather than the prevention end. As such representations needed to be made to the government or long-term sustainable funding to aid the delivery of prevention.
- An offer had been made regarding the training of Councillors.
- Regarding the single point of contact and the 'no wrong door' approach, it was necessary to look at systems. There was a need to meet need as it came and there was a need to know referral routes.
- A timeline had been set out for the next steps. Many other stakeholders needed to take part. The strategy should not just be for the Council but for the whole city.

Councillor Yip, as Chair of the Cross-party Scrutiny Working Group, concluded by highlighting the positive work that had taken place to date and asked officers to consider the following suggestions ahead of refreshing the strategy:

- To implement a direct point of contact for signposting Councillors.
- To consider prioritising children fleeing domestic abuse for education places.
- To consider housing priorities with regard to people escaping domestic abuse
- To look into longer-term funding.

The Chair made the suggestion that the Committee look at the refreshed strategy before it came to Cabinet in December. This would mean that a meeting would likely need to be scheduled for either October or early November to allow comments ahead of the Cabinet report being finalised. As such it would be necessary to firm up the timetable to take forward and build into the future scrutiny work programme.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the observations and issues raised by the Committee (summarised via the minutes above) be reviewed by officers.
- (ii) That the Committee consider the refreshed Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy prior to it going to Cabinet.
- (iii) That, following adoption of the new strategy by Cabinet, the committee be updated on an annual basis on its implementation.

7. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Chair raised the need to firm up the March and April work programme so as to accommodate Homes for Ukraine.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That, subject to items for March and April being confirmed by the Chair in consultation with officers outside of the meeting, the work programmes for Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee was noted.
- (ii) That the work programmes for the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.

8. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

There were no requests for Call In for Co-ordinating OSC.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that next meeting of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be 17 March 2023 at 10.30am

The meeting ended at 12:02pm