

By: Mr Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities
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To: County Council – 13 December 2012

Subject: Select Committee: Preventing and Responding to Domestic Violence and Abuse in Kent

Summary: To receive and comment on the report of the Select Committee on Preventing and Responding to Domestic Violence and Abuse in Kent

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Domestic violence and abuse strikes at the heart of society by disrupting families and causing lasting, often intergenerational, damage. It is a topic which is surrounded by myths and misconceptions and, far from being confined to particular groups; it affects people of different ages, social classes, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity. It affects the development of children exposed to it while growing up and is becoming increasingly common in young peoples' relationships with one another and with their parents. The costs in terms of the wellbeing of individuals affected by it are incalculable. The total costs to the Kent economy (including for example health, criminal justice, social care, housing costs and lost economic output) have been calculated by the Trust for London and Henry Smith Charity at over £382.3 million per annum.
- 1.2 The Select Committee was established in late 2011 and began its work in Spring 2012 to investigate the topic of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in Kent. It focused on services for adults experiencing DVA and those available for perpetrators as well as services being developed for children and young people who are impacted by exposure to DVA while growing up. It looked in particular at prevention and early intervention and the ways in which the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse could be reduced in the future.
- 1.3 The Select Committee report was considered at a meeting of the Cabinet on 3 December 2012 and the recommendations welcomed. On consideration of the report it was agreed by Cabinet that the meeting of the County Council be asked to consider the same resolutions but that they also go further and consider some of the practical ways in which the recommendations might be achieved. In order to facilitate this discussion an annex to this report has been produced which details current and planned activities.

2. Select Committee

2.1 Membership

The Select Committee was chaired by Mr John Kirby. Other committee members were Mrs Ann Allen, Mr Harold Craske, Mrs Trudy Dean, Mr Steve Manion, Mrs Elizabeth Tweed, Mrs Carole Waters and Mr Alan Willicombe.

2.2 Terms of Reference

The agreed Terms of Reference were:

- To investigate breaking the vicious cycle and impact of domestic abuse in Kent, focusing on equitable access to support for victims and the efficacy of perpetrator programmes in reducing repeat victimisation and repeat offending.
- To examine co-ordination and collaboration within and between statutory and voluntary agencies, with a particular focus on delivering efficient services and maximising safety while reducing negative impacts of organisational change in key organisations.
- To make recommendations for Kent County Council and partner organisations (having explored funding options and feasibility) in order to improve outcomes for, and reduce long term damage to, individuals and families affected by domestic abuse.

2.3 Evidence

The Domestic Violence and Abuse Select Committee held eight hearings to gather oral evidence from a range of experts from the statutory and voluntary sectors. In addition written evidence was gathered from a wide range of contributors from all sectors and desk-based research informed the review.

Eight visits took place during the review and these primarily provided the opportunity for Members to speak to people with direct experience of domestic violence and abuse, in supportive surroundings.

Appendix 1 comprises a list of witnesses who contributed oral and written evidence to the review and details of the visits undertaken. The names of some witnesses have been kept private.

2.4 Timescale

The Select Committee conducted its official programme of visits in April and May 2012. Training sessions to increase Members' knowledge and understanding of the topic were undertaken in April and June and the programme of hearings took place during June and July 2012. It is planned that the committee's report be considered by a meeting of Cabinet on 3 December, and by a meeting of Full Council on 13 December 2012.

3. The Report

3.1 The key themes of the report's 14 recommendations include:

- Strengthening the multi-agency response to DVA by:
 - Developing a clinical care pathway to assist GPs and other medical professionals in responding to domestic violence and abuse
 - Improving information-sharing by health professionals

- Retaining front-line specialist health visitor roles
 - Strengthening Police contact, referral and information exchange processes
 - Developing the Central Referral Unit
 - Improving the 'safety net' for cases not meeting social care thresholds
 - Strengthening the co-ordinated community response in terms of contacts and access to specialist support
- Improving the sustainability and equity of services through joint commissioning
- Ensuring that domestic violence and abuse (DVA) is given a high priority
- Raising public awareness of DVA and ensuring that Members as well as officers (multi-agency) receive appropriate training
- Ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions including the damage done to children
- Seeking to break the vicious cycle of domestic violence and abuse by:
 - Improving services for children affected by DVA as well as seeking to raise awareness of DVA among young people universally
 - Improving awareness of the impact of DVA on children and young people among those involved in educating and working with young people
 - Maintaining and improving links between education and specialist social care and other support
 - Ensuring children and young people have access to information and resources on domestic violence and abuse.

3.2 An executive summary of the report is attached as Appendix 2. To obtain a copy of the full report please contact the report author (details below).

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 We welcome the report and would like to congratulate the Select Committee on completing this piece of work.
- 4.2 We would also like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee, and the officers who supported it.
- 4.3 Mr John Kirby, Chairman of the Select Committee, will present the report to Council and the Committee asks that Council approves the recommendations made.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Select Committee be thanked for its work and for producing a relevant and balanced document.
- 5.2 The witnesses and others who provided evidence and made valuable contributions to the Select Committee be thanked.
- 5.3 The County Council approves the recommendations of the Select Committee.

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