

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 26 March 2013.

PRESENT: Mr R F Manning (Chairman), Mr D A Hirst (Vice-Chairman), Mr B R Cope, Mr G Cowan, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr P J Homewood, Mr R J Lees, Mr J E Scholes and Mr D Brunning (Substitute for Dr A Bamford)

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE: Mr D Brunning (Substitute for Dr A Bamford)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Beaumont (County Manager, Community Safety), Ms A Gilmour (Kent & Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator), Mr S Skilton (Area Manager - CS.) and Mrs A Taylor (Research Officer to Scrutiny Committee)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

18. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2012

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that with the replacement of Ms for Mrs in paragraph (4) the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 12 December 2012 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

19. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2013

(Item A5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 21 January 2013 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

20. Follow-up Items from Scrutiny Committee

(Item A6)

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee noted the responses to the issues raised previously.

21. Domestic Abuse Select Committee 3 Month Review

(Item B1)

- (1) The Chairman welcomed Mr Stuart Beaumont, Head of Community Safety and Emergency Planning, Mrs Alison Gilmour, Kent and Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator and Mr Stuart Skilton, Area Manager Community Safety (Kent Fire and Rescue) to the meeting.
- (2) Mr Beaumont explained the complexity behind Domestic Abuse; there was an average of 65 incidents reported to Kent Police every day but only 5000 prosecutions a year. In addition the Council had carried out 12 domestic homicide reviews in the past 18 months.

- (3) The focus was on prevention, education, supporting victims, enforcement and judicial system and there were a large number of organisations involved.
- (4) In Kent there had been a gaining awareness of issues surrounding Domestic Abuse, a Select Committee had been established as a result of concerns that victims of domestic abuse often fell through the 'safety net' or discontinued pursuing their cases in Court due in part to a lack of clarity on referral points.
- (5) The Select Committee had made 14 recommendations which were contained within the Action Plan and Members were being asked to agree that the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group should be the accountable body to oversee the implementation of recommendations within the Domestic Abuse Select Committee report. In addition to this Members were also asked to agree that a small multi-agency Task and Finish Group should be established to put into place appropriate management and service delivery action in order to work towards achieving the Select Committee recommendations.
- (6) Mr Skilton explained that he was the Chairman of the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group, the group had links with all relevant agencies and worked towards behavioural and lifestyle changes to allow a reduction in domestic abuse.
- (7) In response to a question about a link between domestic abuse and socioeconomic groups Mrs Gilmour reported that incidents of domestic abuse had risen slightly, however there was awareness that these were reported incidents and that it often took a long time for someone to report domestic abuse but the associated services were getting busier. It was believed that in times of additional stress there were more opportunities for abuse to take place and that alcohol and drugs also affected the levels of domestic abuse reported. Domestic Abuse affected the whole of society but there tended to be higher reporting rates in highly populated areas.
- (8) One Member raised the work that was being done within schools; domestic abuse had a hugely detrimental effect on children even when they were not the direct victim of the abuse.
- (9) The Alcohol Select Committee found that 90% of domestic abuse incidents that were attended by the police related to substance abuse. It was also vitally important to maintain links with young carers in difficult family circumstances. The officers confirmed that there were alcohol specialists such as KDAT (Kent Drug and Alcohol Team) and alcohol drug misuse services involved in the work of the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group.
- (10) In relation to the increase in reported incidents of domestic abuse Mr Beaumont explained that it may be because people were feeling more confident to come forward or that there had been a raised awareness of domestic abuse through one stop shops etc. Domestic abuse crossed all boundaries and sadly there were spikes around the world cup, for example, and there was undoubtedly a link with alcohol. There were concerns around the impact upon young people's education and attainment particularly for children in care.
- (11) The Chairman asked what the definition of domestic abuse was, in response Mrs Gilmour explained that it was psychological, emotional, physical or sexual

abuse when the victim had concerns about the intention. Domestic abuse centered around patterns of controlling behaviour, intentions and putting someone else in fear. Alcohol caused a loss of control however domestic abuse continued without alcohol.

- (12) The Committee congratulated the Select Committee on the report, members were aware that reported incidents of domestic abuse were only the tip of the iceberg and that early intervention was key. It was expected that the statuses of the action plan would be amber as the issues were ongoing.
- (13) In response to a question about the Connexions service Mrs Gilmour confirmed that they were part of the strategy group and delivered domestic abuse training and advice. The wider partnership co-ordinated through the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group aimed to reach out to every statutory group and as many voluntary groups as possible.
- (14) Mr Skilton explained that the fire service carried out preventative work and had a specialist team dealing with vulnerable people. Fire could be used as a threat and as the Fire and Rescue service dealt with the consequences it was beneficial for them to be involved in the preventative aspect as well. The key points were early intervention, education, behaviour and lifestyle changes.
- (15) A member asked when the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group heard of domestic abuse incidents, the police attended around 23,000 incidents of domestic abuse per year, they risk assess on site and if there is a high risk the police deal with the incident and involve partner agencies, if the case is a medium risk it is referred to a local agency. There had been an improvement in the service provided, the Independent Domestic Violence Advocates provided a service across the whole of Kent and Medway and equitable services made monitoring easier and services more accessible.
- (16) The Committee heard that one stop shops were for advice and guidance, 4-5 years ago there wouldn't have been such a multi-agency approach. There was a network of domestic abuse refugees across Kent and Medway and people were not necessarily directed to their most local provision as they may need to move area to be safe. One stop shops offered immediate access.
- (17) In response to a question about whether there were any risks to the success of the action plan Mr Beaumont explained that domestic abuse was embedded in plans and statutory documents and there had been a great improvement in the past 5 years. The partnerships were very robust and they had been very successful in establishing pooled budgets for commissioning services such as the independent domestic violence advocates. Threats would come in the form of financial pressures, as money got tight contributions might lessen. The threat could be reduced by keeping up the dialogue and investing to save. The support from members was encouraging and it was part of the strategy to maintain awareness and involve members. The group was accountable for trying to achieve the recommendations of the Select Committee and was responsible for overseeing the work of the small group undertaking actions.
- (18) The Task and Finish Group which the Scrutiny Committee was asked to approve would be a multi-agency group including the police, probation, health,

KCC and as it progressed any groups would be filled. It would meet every two months as a multiagency group.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee:

- (19) Agree that the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group should be the accountable body to oversee the implementation of recommendations within the Domestic Abuse Select Committee Report
- (20) Agree that a small multi-agency Task and Finish Group should be established to put into place appropriate management and service delivery action in order to work towards achieving the Select Committee recommendations.

22. Exempt Minute - 12 December 2012

(Item C1)

RESOLVED that the exempt minute of the meeting held on Wednesday, 12 December 2012 be approved as a correct record and that it be signed by the Chairman