

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Safer City Partnership	4 December 2020
Subject: Domestic Abuse Vulnerability and Risk Policy Update	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter – Chief Officer Department of Community and Children’s Services Author: Ayesha Fordham	For information
Summary	
<p>This report updates Members on the City of London Corporation’s (City Corporation) domestic abuse COVID-19 response plan for the second national lockdown and how this aligns with the City Corporation’s actions around the 16 Days of Action Against Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The report also provides an evaluation of the Domestic Abuse Refresher Training that was delivered as part of the COVID-19 recovery plan.</p> <p>The Community Safety Team has been working with partners across the City of London throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to promote domestic abuse/Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services. The COVID-19 response plan was updated in preparation for the second national lockdown. The City Corporation’s planned actions around the 16 Days of Action Against VAWG, due to start on the 25th November, were brought forward to promote services that are available to people affected by domestic abuse.</p> <p>This report includes data from the City of London Police (City Police) and Victim Support’s Vulnerable Victims Advocate (VVA) indicating the impact COVID-19 has had on domestic abuse reports and victims/survivors accessing support services. This has also highlighted an ongoing issue with the Bangladeshi residents within the City of London and the lack of specialist support services available to them.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
Members are asked to note the report.	

Key Points:

- **Domestic Abuse COVID-19 Response Plan: Second National Lockdown**
- **City of London Police: Domestic Abuse Data**
- **Bangladeshi Domestic Abuse/VAWG Service**
- **16 Days of Action Against VAWG**
- **Evaluation of Domestic Abuse Refresher Training**
- **Conclusion**

Domestic Abuse COVID-19 Response Plan

1. The City Corporation's webpage on domestic abuse was updated to ensure the page includes current and up to date information on local support services and initiatives available to victims. This includes updated safety planning information from Women's Aid and clearer guidance on the Rail to Refuge scheme.
2. An article on domestic abuse has been included within both the Barbican and City of London estates newsletters. Articles have been written within these newsletters throughout the pandemic and have provided different information for victims of abuse. The most recent article included information for victims about what happens after they have accessed support, such as being referred to partnership services through the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).
3. An article will be included within the next Business Healthy newsletter to promote support services available to people who work within the City of London. City workers who are currently working from home are still able to access services within the City of London, even if they are not currently based within the City. The article also includes an offer for free domestic abuse training to businesses, for example to HR and line managers.
4. The Domestic Abuse, Vulnerability and Risk Policy Officer has provided information and guidance at a conference to HR staff across City of London businesses, to ensure employers are able to support employees affected by domestic abuse, especially at the present time when most staff are working from home. The businesses were offered free domestic abuse training for HR and managers delivered by the Community Safety team.
5. A domestic abuse campaign has been updated and re-published on the City Corporation intranet page. This is important to ensure employees are aware of support services available to them, even when working from home.
6. Information has been updated on the City Police intranet page for officers and staff members to be able to access support. Similarly, to City Corporation employees, it is important to raise awareness of the support available to officers and staff even when working from home.
7. Surviving Economic Abuse will provide a Level 3 training on Economic Abuse to City Corporation employees and partner agencies. This is part of City and Hackney's safeguarding week training programme.
8. Posters have been distributed across the Barbican and City of London estates signposting victims of domestic abuse to relevant support services.
9. The London Fire Brigade have distributed posters to shops and pharmacies within the City of London to reach victims of abuse who do not have internet access or are not able to access the internet.

10. Domestic abuse refresher training will continue to be delivered as and when partner agencies request them. These sessions are promoted through the VAWG Forum.
11. The City Police, Community Safety team and external partners are working together to develop ongoing work with hotels around vulnerability. The Hotel Engagement Group are planning to run a virtual conference covering a range of vulnerability issues, such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, child sexual exploitation, modern-day slavery and human trafficking. This has been progressed following on from the engagement event with hotels in February, and the increase in reports from hotels post the first national lockdown.

City of London Police: Domestic Abuse Data

12. The City Police data on domestic abuse indicates a decrease in reports of domestic abuse during the first national lockdown period. Between April- June 2020 there were 9 reports of domestic abuse, which is a significant decrease to April- June 2019 when there were 27 reports of domestic abuse. The number of reports started to increase again post lockdown, with 21 reports from July-September 2020. This data aligns with the anticipated surge in reports as the lockdown restrictions eased. City Police data for October 2020 indicate domestic abuse is still increasing, with 16 reports recorded.
13. The decrease in reports during the COVID-19 pandemic is also reflected within the VVA domestic abuse referrals. Between April- September 2020 the VVA received 19 domestic abuse referrals, from a range of sources such as the City Police, partner agencies and self-referrals. This is a significant decrease to April- September 2019 when the VVA received 32 domestic abuse referrals.
14. The City of London has not seen the same levels of increase in domestic abuse as other London Boroughs and national services, with a 49% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline during the first national lockdown, and a 22% increase in referrals to domestic abuse services across London. This is due to a significant decrease in the number of people working within and visiting the City of London, therefore it was expected that the levels of crime would decrease during COVID-19. However, it should be noted the number of domestic abuse reports does not reflect the level of abuse taking place, due to victims not being able to leave their homes to access support. The domestic abuse COVID-19 response plan highlights ways the City Corporation have tried to promote support services.

Bangladeshi Domestic Abuse/VAWG Service

15. The COVID-19 restrictions have reinforced a need for a specialist VAWG service to support the City's Bangladeshi community. There is a lack of engagement by the Bangladeshi community in VAWG services offered within the City of London, which could be due to language barriers and fear for a lack of understanding of cultural differences. This has proven even more challenging throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as all support has been provided over the phone. For the Bangladeshi community facing barriers such as language barriers, the only support available to them is through a telephone translator service, which is not an effective way of supporting a

victim of domestic abuse/VAWG. In turn this has resulted in low engagement levels and the community not getting the support they need.

16. This gap in service provision within the City of London has been highlighted during this period, however there has been a need for support for this hard to reach community pre-COVID-19. Due to living within the City of London, Bangladeshi residents are unable to access the specialist Bangladeshi services within Tower Hamlets. This specialist VAWG service aligns with the wider national conversation around what local authorities are doing to support Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities (BAME).
17. A bid has been submitted to POCA, requesting funding for a specialist VAWG post to engage with the Bangladeshi community through community engagement, partnership working, training/education and offering frontline support to the Bangladeshi residents within the City of London.

Sixteen Days of Action Against VAWG

18. The actions planned by the City Corporation in anticipation of the 16 Days of Action Against VAWG starting on the 25 November 2020 have been brought forward following the second national lockdown announcement. The planned actions were aiming to promote domestic abuse services across the City of London. These actions have been included within the Domestic Abuse COVID-19 Response Plan above. Throughout the 16 Days of Action Against VAWG there will be messages promoted through City Corporation social media platforms.
19. The City of London Police had planned to run joint surgeries with partners, promoting support services for victims. However, these have been postponed due to current lockdown restrictions and will be delivered when safe following Government guidance. Services will be promoted via posters, fliers and social media campaigns.

Evaluation of Domestic Abuse Refresher Training

20. In anticipation of the increase in reports and disclosures of domestic abuse post the first national lockdown, domestic abuse refresher training was offered virtually to City Corporation colleagues within DCCS and external partners. The purpose of the training was to prepare professionals to deal with disclosures or concerns they have for service users. This may have been the first time the individual had had an opportunity to disclose the abuse and seek help.
21. The training was delivered to 60 participants in total, including 31 participants from across the City Corporation. This included attendees from housing, No First Night Out, Children's Social Care, Early Help, Adult's Social Care, Education, including participants from Sir John Cass Primary School. 29 of these participants were from external partners, including 4 participants from Age UK and 25 participants from PohWer, including Community Managers, NHS Complaints Advocate, Independent Mental Health Advocates, Independent Advocates and Community Advocates.
22. The training received positive feedback from participants, stating that "all sections were informative and it provided a good update/refresher for current knowledge". Following the training delivered to DCCS, a City Corporation staff

member contacted the Domestic Abuse, Vulnerability and Risk Policy Officer to discuss concerns for emotional abuse and coercive controlling behaviour within a case they were managing. As a result, following this conversation the service user was offered specialist domestic abuse support.

23. This free training offer is still available for both City Corporation staff and external partnership organisations. It is being promoted through the VAWG Forum and the Advice, Information and Advocacy (AIA) Forum.

Conclusion

24. The Community Safety Team and partners have adapted to continue to protect people from domestic abuse/VAWG whilst working remotely. The domestic abuse COVID-19 response plan is constantly being updated and reviewed to ensure it is meeting the needs of the City of London's community and aligns with current Government guidance.

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