

Committee:	Date:
Safer City Partnership	25/02/2021
Subject: Domestic Abuse Vulnerability and Risk Policy Update	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter – Director of Communities and Children Services	For Information
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Summary This report updates Members on the City of London Corporation’s domestic abuse COVID-19 response plan for the third national lockdown. The Community Safety team has been working with partners across the City of London throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to promote available services for domestic abuse/Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The COVID-19 response plan has continued to be delivered throughout the pandemic and the current national lockdown, including promoting the government campaign, ‘Ask for ANI’ (Action Needed Immediately). The report also provides an update on the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) funding for the specialist VAWG Bangladeshi post, the review of domestic abuse services and the Vulnerable Victims Advocate (VVA) post. Finally, the report provides a brief update on the Domestic Abuse Bill.	
Recommendation Members are asked to note the report.	

Main Report

Domestic Abuse COVID-19 Response Plan

1. The City Corporation's webpage on domestic abuse is regularly updated to ensure that the page includes current and up-to-date information on local support services and initiatives available to victims.
2. An article on domestic abuse has been included in both the Barbican and City of London estates' newsletters. Articles have been written for these newsletters throughout the pandemic and have provided a variety of information for victims of abuse. The most recent article included information about the Government's Ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) campaign. The Community Safety team contacted all the pharmacies located within the City to make sure they had relevant materials and training on the campaign. The pharmacies taking part were then promoted through online channels.
3. An article has been included in the *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 information about the Ask for ANI campaign.
4. A domestic abuse campaign has been updated to include information about Ask for ANI on the City Corporation intranet page. This is important to ensure that employees are aware of support services available to them, even when working from home.
5. Posters have been distributed across the Barbican and City of London estates, signposting victims of domestic abuse to relevant support services.
6. Domestic abuse refresher training will continue to be delivered as and when partner agencies request them. These sessions are promoted through the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Forum.
7. 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 delivering a virtual conference covering a range of vulnerability issues, such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, child sexual exploitation, modern-day slavery and human trafficking. The conference has been postponed from March to May to ensure that hotels are open and representatives are able to attend. The conference is being delivered alongside an electronic newsletter distributed to hotels.
8. The City Police and Community Safety team have created videos around awareness of sexual abuse, domestic abuse, mental health and Prevent to promote support and services that are available to victims. The videos will be promoted through online channels such as social media and YouTube, as well as newsletters via the City Police and the City Corporation. The videos will also

be available on the City Corporation website. The sexual abuse awareness videos have been promoted during Sexual Abuse & Sexual Violence Awareness Week 2021 in support of the #ItsNotOK campaign.

9. The City Corporation and City Police are working in partnership with CrimeStoppers to deliver a campaign funded by the City Bridge Trust. Part of the campaign will be aimed at the Bangladeshi community, encouraging the community to report domestic abuse. The campaign will also include information on hate crime and modern-day slavery.
10. The City Police have been conducting welfare checks, when safe, on City residents previously known to them as victims of domestic abuse.
11. An article will be published in February's edition of the DCCS newsletter, *The Buzz*, stating that domestic abuse is a reason people can leave their homes and employees can work from the office if they need to. If they would like to report the abuse while they are at work, the article includes a direct number for the City Police so they can speak to an officer face-to-face.

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 and June 2020 there were nine reports of domestic abuse, which is a significant decrease compared to April to June 2019, when there were 27 reports of domestic abuse. The number of reports started to increase again post the first national lockdown, with 21 reports from July to September 2020. This data aligns with the anticipated surge in reports as the lockdown restrictions eased. City Police data for October 2020 indicated that domestic abuse continued to increase, with 16 reports recorded. The reports decreased again during the second national lockdown, with six reports recorded during November. This figure stayed the same during December, with six reports recorded. This data indicates a general decreasing trend over the last year, with a significant decrease in reporting of 14% from October to December 2020 in comparison to October to December 2019. This decrease in reports could be due to the small residential population in the City, or due to victims feeling unable to access help while in lockdown. The increase in reports in October 2020 was mainly related to crimes occurring in hotels and some repeat incidents with residents.
13. The decrease in reports during the COVID-19 pandemic is also reflected within the VVA domestic abuse referrals. Between April and 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 to September 2019 when the VVA received 32 domestic abuse referrals. This figure decreased again during October to December 2020, when the VVA received 11 domestic abuse referrals, in comparison to 19 domestic abuse referrals from October to December 2019.

14. Solace Women's Aid provide advice and advocacy support to City residents and workers. From April 2019 to March 2020 they received 16 referrals to the service. The service received nine referrals from April to September 2020 and six referrals from October to December 2020, indicating that Solace are starting to see an increase in referrals.
15. 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, and therefore it was expected that the levels of crime would decrease during COVID-19. However, it should be noted that the number of domestic abuse reports do 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.

POCA Funding Update

Specialist Bangladeshi Domestic Abuse/VAWG Post: Extension Request

16. The specialist Bangladeshi post is currently going through the procurement process, with the contract being awarded to the chosen organisation by 23 February. An estimated start date of 1 April 2021 has been set for the post, allowing adequate time for the recruitment process and for the post holder to start the role. An extension of the POCA funding is needed to allow time for this process and to ensure that the service is delivered for the full two years.

Review of Domestic Abuse Services

17. Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (STADV) have provided a consultancy proposal to conduct the review of domestic abuse services. The consultancy proposal will be approved by members of the City's VAWG Forum before being agreed with STADV.

Vulnerable Victims Advocate (VVA): Extension Request

18. The three-days-a-week post for the VVA has been advertised by Victim Support and the closing date for applications was 10 February. Assuming that one of the applicants is suitable for the post, the successful applicant will be in post as soon as possible. An extension of the start date of the POCA funding is required to ensure that the service is delivered for the full year.

Domestic Abuse (DA) Bill

19. The Domestic Abuse (DA) Bill is currently at the Committee stage in the House of Lords. The DA Bill will include a statutory duty on local authorities to provide safe accommodation provision for victims fleeing domestic abuse. The City Corporation does not currently fund any refuge provision and the Sanctuary

Scheme is the only form of funded safe accommodation provision. The new statutory duty should give City residents better access to refuge across London.

20. There are eight key issues with the DA Bill that the DA Commissioner has raised. These are:

- No recourse to public funds and immigration status is currently a barrier for some victims/survivors accessing support.
- There is currently no statutory duty on local authorities to provide community-based services. There are concerns that local authorities will redistribute their current provision to meet the new statutory duty to provide safe accommodation.
- There is currently no legal distinction between non-fatal strangulation, (which is used to exert power and control over the victim), and strangulation, which is the second most common method of killing in female homicides. A distinction between the two is needed.
- The DA Bill gives the opportunity for a new statutory defence to be created for those whose offending is driven by their experience of DA.
- The DA Bill should include guidance for employers to support employees affected by DA, in addition to Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Notices to cover the workplace.
- The coercive control legislation does not currently protect victims/survivors post-separation, yet coercive control is often used by the perpetrator post-separation.
- It is currently illegal to share intimate images without the person's consent; however, it is not illegal to threaten to share intimate images. This gap in the law allows perpetrators to threaten the use of these images to further control and abuse.
- Statutory change is needed within the family courts to stop the perpetrator from being able to use the court system to further abuse the victim.

Conclusion

21. The Community Safety team and partners have adapted to continue to protect people from domestic abuse/VAWG while 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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