

**NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**DOMESTIC ABUSE**

**APRIL 2018**

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## **Chairs Foreword**

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the scrutiny review panel of the Communities Scrutiny Committee. It details findings, conclusions and recommendations from its review into Domestic Abuse.

For the purpose of the short review period the Committee made contact with a number of stakeholders including, the police, district council officers and employees as well as members of The Elm Foundation (formerly DDVSAS) and Derbyshire County Council.

The Committee were surprised at how much domestic abuse impacts on the residents of North East Derbyshire and also how our workforce come into contact with residents suffering domestic abuse more regularly than we would have imagined.

The Committee heard from a number of different sources who all identified the gap of having a dedicated officer for the Council and also having a policy around domestic abuse. It was also recognised that support should be available for our employees at the Council who can suffer domestic abuse.

I do hope that the recommendations contained in the report are considered and that the Council will agree that the review contributes to our corporate aims of making North East Derbyshire a safe place in which to grow, live and work.

I would like to extend a personal thank you to all of our stakeholders and everyone who took part in the review. Thank you to all the scrutiny panel members who made the process so enjoyable and interesting. I would also like to extend a special thanks to the Scrutiny Manager Sue Veerman for her hard work and without her input this review would not have been possible.

Kindest regards

Councillor Tracy Reader

## **Review Panel**

The review panel comprised the following members:

Councillor T Reader	-	(Labour) – Review Panel Chair
Councillor W Armitage	-	(Conservative)
Councillor B Barnes	-	(Labour)
Councillor L Blanshard	-	(Conservative)
Councillor M Foster	-	(Conservative)
Councillor C Hunt	-	(Labour)
Councillor L Robinson	-	(Labour)
Councillor C Tite	-	(Labour)

## **1. Recommendations**

That the Council:

- 1.1 Consider the appointment of a dedicated domestic abuse officer and explore opportunities to fund the post to create an effective approach to deal with domestic abuse within the District.
- 1.2 Increase awareness both for the public, managers and employees of domestic abuse and the services available to address this issue, including:
  - Effective use of the Councils website
  - Publicity through the Councils newspaper
  - Use of literature within the Councils establishments
- 1.3 Provide an effective and appropriate domestic abuse training programme for North East Derbyshire Officers and Members.
- 1.4 Consider the results of the Staff Survey on domestic abuse.
- 1.5 Prepare and publish a clear Domestic Abuse Policy.
- 1.6 Identifies how the portfolio holder can be supported in championing the issue of domestic abuse.
- 1.7 Review and strengthen the North Derbyshire Homelessness Forum.
- 1.8 Consider how the revenues team can be supported to spot flags of financial abuse.
- 1.9 Ensure that the target hardening and sanctuary scheme is adequately funded.
- 1.10 Review the provision of housing, homelessness units and refuges in its area to help support people experiencing domestic abuse.
- 1.11 Consider the requests from The Elm Foundation to reappoint a trustee to their board and write to Parish Councils regarding availability of rooms the organisation could use.
- 1.12 Explore ways to work collaboratively with other agencies and share best practice.

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2017 the Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review into Domestic Abuse. The review had been inspired by

the Chair of the Councils charity this year – Derbyshire Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service. (Now renamed The Elm Foundation).

2.2 The Committee recognised that there was a need to identify the responsibilities of the District Council and be sure it was responding appropriately in addressing issues around Domestic Violence and Abuse in North East Derbyshire.

### **3. Scope of Review**

3.1 The review aimed to:

- Identify the responsibilities and powers of the Local Authority in the area of Domestic Abuse.
- Ensure the District Council is responding appropriately to these responsibilities in addressing issues around Domestic Violence and Abuse in North East Derbyshire.
- Identify if there are any gaps in the services that are provided to North East Derbyshire residents.

### **4. Method of Review**

4.1 The review panel met on six occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and key people they wished to interview.

4.2 Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources and interviews with a range of stakeholders. At the first meeting of the panel representatives from The Elm Foundation provided an overview of Domestic Abuse.

### **5. Evidence and Research**

5.1 A number of documents and evidence were provided to the review panel for consideration. Details are provided below:

- Presentation by The Elm Foundation to set the scene and identify the prevalence of the problem locally.
- Derby and Derbyshire Domestic Violence and Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2015-2018.
- Derbyshire County Domestic Abuse Referral Guide – May 2017.
- CAADA-DASH Risk Identification Checklist for use by all agencies for MARAC.

- Domestic Abuse Assessment for Priority flowchart.
- Working to End Domestic Abuse - The Elm Foundation.
- Domestic Abuse Policy – Rykneld Homes.
- Safe at Home Scheme – Rykneld Homes.
- ABC Project – Abusive Behavioural Change for perpetrators of domestic violence.
- A selection of information posters and leaflets aimed at raising awareness of domestic abuse.
- Briefing note from the Portfolio Holder Jeff Lilley and the Director of Transformation Lee Hickin on Domestic Abuse.

## **6. Key Findings**

### **6.1 Strengths**

As part of the evidence gathering the panel heard from a mix of internal and external stakeholders regarding the work they undertake in support of Domestic Abuse. This included The Elm Foundation and Derbyshire County Council and the role it plays and how this links with the District Council. Some general findings/strengths were apparent from these discussions. However, the panel were also keen to ensure it reviewed the level of support provided by the Council and its partner Rykneld Homes specifically and these findings are detailed individually.

#### **6.1.1 Partnership Working**

The review panel heard evidence from several stakeholders about how existing partnerships were working. The Elm Foundation commented that the arrangements were working well and that they had a good relationship with the Council. To help inform the review they provided an informative presentation to the review panel setting out what domestic abuse was and the role they undertook. They also provided information on some practical help they would like from the Council if possible, which is detailed in the improvements section below.

Derbyshire County Council provided an overview of their role and advised the panel that they had been revising the contract for this service. A new model was in operation and they believed it was working well. They also stated they felt that the consortium was working with parity across the County as a whole. They specifically mentioned that they thought Rykneld Homes work in this area was very good.

From the Council teams the review panel heard that there was a good working relationship with The Elm Foundation. The Community Safety Team commented that it was fully embedded in the structure of the Partnership. This was supported by comments by the Revenues and Benefits representative and Rykneld Homes. The Revenues representative also said the service had a good relationship with the Derbyshire Safeguarding team. There was a good clear framework in place and the IDVA team had good links in place. The Council provided some finance to fund a part time worker at The Elm Foundation which was welcomed. Regular structured meetings were also held with partners. Rykneld Homes said it worked with a number of charities on mental health and drugs. The Customer Services representative stated that charities attend meetings and participate when invited. Evidence of stakeholders attending MARAC meetings was also provided. However, some stakeholders commented that some relationships worked better than others.

#### 6.1.2 Awareness/Training

The review panel heard from all stakeholders regarding their level of awareness of Domestic Abuse. Evidence provided in support of this awareness included provision of a Citizen Advice Bureau advice kiosk in reception and the display of leaflets and posters within the building to raise awareness and providing details of how to contact The Elm Foundation. The Police representative informed the panel of the ABC programme for perpetrators which sought to raise awareness and change behaviour. Rykneld Homes also display domestic abuse posters on support and advice available. Revenues felt they had good awareness as the team deal with vulnerable people so recognise the signs and report where necessary through the safeguarding procedure. An example of this was given of a financial abuse case that had been taken further.

Provision of training varied dependent on the role the stakeholder had in this area. A number of stakeholders said they attended regular Derbyshire County Council training on a rolling programme. Other frontline staff such as the housing and rents team undertake training on recognising signs and symptoms. This type of training was useful as several officers advised that when visiting properties part of their role is to look for signs of abuse, such as punch holes in doors and neglect that may suggest there is an issue. Training levels varied with some teams having specific Domestic Abuse training whilst other had more generic safeguarding training.

#### 6.1.3 Signposting

In response to a question about their roles in this area the majority of stakeholders considered signposting to be an important part even though their day to day involvement varied. Several stakeholders commented that there was an understanding they had a role in spotting an issue and where appropriate signposting the person onto to the relevant internal officer or

agency. Rykneld Homes stated that signposting was a key part of the role they undertook due to the significant contact they had with residents. Revenues and Customer Services both provided evidence that they signpost customers and understand the need to be aware of potential issues.

#### 6.1.4 Portfolio Holder

The portfolio holder for Community Safety, Equality, and Diversity & Health attended the review panel. He provided a briefing paper prepared following a meeting with the Director of Transformation on support for Domestic Abuse currently within the Council and discussed what he saw as his role. He was very supportive of the Council being proactive. He thought his role was to help co-ordinate action within groups and influence internal strategies. He also spoke of his role in child and adult safeguarding and the links with domestic abuse. He felt that the Council had strong links with Rykneld Homes and that this relationship worked really well. He also acknowledged work being undertaken with other partners. However, he said he would like to see improved attendance at meetings by all partners.

#### 6.1.5 Community Safety Partnership/Police

The panel heard from the Community Safety Manager and a police representative. The team worked closely with the police and the relationship worked well. The role involves dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour and this was often an opportunity to spot signs of domestic abuse such as holes in doors which indicate there may be an issue. The service manager co-ordinates the Partnership so she has the opportunity to pull information together from different agencies/people. Liaison with the fire service and housing all have a role to play. The Partnership puts alarms in properties and also speaks with neighbours where appropriate. They work with The Elm Foundation and have provided some funding to this organisation. They also advised that they undertake awareness raising measures to try and change some of the attitudes that are still in existence on domestic abuse. Part of this is to use the ABC programme for perpetrators. The service has a handy van scheme providing hardware, alarms for windows, burglary and drive alerts. There is also a domestic violence unit for high risk cases which involves risk of death. With regard to training the police representative said he attends a rolling course provided by Derbyshire County Council. From a Police perspective he feels the service provision has improved since the 1990's and it now at the forefront. He thinks partners co-ordinate and work well together. They hold regular structured police tasking meetings ever two weeks with all partners attending. As a result cases are dealt with promptly.

#### 6.1.6 Customer Services

The Customer Services representative made it clear that her team were not specialists in this area but advised that they do come across domestic abuse when customers ring the Council or visit the reception. Sometimes customers are visiting for a housing issue or other issue and it becomes apparent that domestic abuse may be involved. Each situation is assessed and treated

accordingly. Rykneld Homes, the Safeguarding Team and Derbyshire County Council may be involved. She advised that she had referred a case to Derbyshire County Council. There was a safeguarding aspect involved with abuse within the family. Another case was a visitor not a resident within the District and she had advised them to contact the police. She said that confidentiality has to be maintained and this was clearly understood.

People attending for the Housing list is one area where the team deal with people in this situation. They don't always have the documentation they need to apply and also don't want information sent to where they live so as to avoid alerting their abuser. Sometimes they have left the property and they need to speak with the Housing Options Team. She found that it was not always women but the majority were. Again sensitivity was required.

She considered her service had a good relationship with Rykneld Homes. People know who to contact across the partnership and understand it is important to pass information on. She thinks the co-ordination between the Citizens Advice Bureau and charities works quite well and stated they do attend meetings.

#### 6.1.7 Housing Options/Homelessness

The section has direct contact with households regularly and people affected by domestic abuse. Part of the role involves getting families into a place of safety and supporting people into refuges. The Council do have some temporary accommodation which sometimes can be used. The service also works with partners including domestic abuse support services, police and social services in order to find the best outcomes for people. This includes consideration of safety measures being put in place to keep families in their own home rather than having to move away. Additionally they make referrals to County support services. They have a prevention budget, although this is limited. The service also have a deposit scheme to help secure accommodation in the private sector. Reference was made to the current funding provided to The Elm Foundation to fund a support worker.

The Housing Options representative commented that the North East Derbyshire DC Allocations Policy had a very favourable and positive approach to victims of domestic abuse. Victims were given a high priority on the housing register. As a result many victims did not have to approach the homelessness prevention team. Also the Councils Homelessness Strategy makes reference to targeting vulnerable households in financial difficulties for housing, support and homelessness prevention. This demonstrated that the Council understood the importance of this issue. The Homelessness Team are a long standing team who have become very experienced in this area with some working in homelessness since the early 1990's. They have also received training. He commented that the support services work well together.

#### 6.1.8 Revenues and Benefits

The Revenues representative advised that the service did occasionally deal with suspected abuse, usually financial. They could provide benefit form assistance and also had an understanding attitude if documentation was not available. This approach to evidence required for benefit claims was considered important as claimants in these circumstances may not have documents available. Discretionary Housing Payments were also available from government to fund hardship. The service try to prioritise people suffering domestic abuse. However, although people do qualify it is a short term solution so other strategies need to be in place. Additionally the service provided visiting officers for vulnerable people, who would report back if further action was required from the visit

The officer felt that the team had a good working relationship with Rykneld Homes, the Housing Options Team, and with The Elm Foundation. The team would work with them to try to make the process less traumatic and as quick as possible. He advised the panel that the team had received training.

#### 6.1.9 Rykneld Homes

Representatives from Rykneld Homes attended a session of the review panel to outline the measures they undertook in this area. Their role covered dealing with people fleeing domestic abuse and also perpetrators which involved tenancies and potential tenancies. It would be classed as a breach of tenancy if it was the perpetrator. They advised the panel that they had an existing Domestic Abuse Policy that they had produced and it was being reviewed in 2018. A Sanctuary Scheme and target hardening provided facilities for making doors, windows and boundaries more secure for vulnerable people and the fitting of an alarm service if appropriate. They also attend MARAC meetings through Derbyshire County Council. They stated that people know who to contact across the partnership and staff realise the importance of passing information on. They also worked with the police and other organisations. They were confident that the Rykneld Homes workforce consisted of very good frontline staff who know how to look for and recognise signs. They can also offer support to employees if suffering domestic abuse. Domestic abuse cases would be dealt with by a specific officer. The Community Safety Partnership commented that Rykneld Homes were very good at spotting signs and provided a good link into the Community Safety Partnership.

#### 6.1.10 Support for Staff

The Human Resources representative informed the panel that their involvement was from an employee's perspective. Things that supported this area included support to managers, the Health and Wellbeing Framework, the Sickness Management Guidance, Occupational Health and access to counselling. The Council provided a 24 hour support line for staff but the support was not specific to Domestic Abuse.

## 6.2 Areas for Improvement/Observations

### 6.2.1 Dedicated Officer

One issue which was raised by a number of internal stakeholders was the lack of a dedicated domestic abuse officer. Several referred to the dedicated officer at Bolsover District Council and how well this arrangement worked. The Police representative also mentioned the benefit of having our own officer. It was recognised that many Councils had unfortunately withdrawn from this level of support but it was stated that it was considered very important by many stakeholders. Details were provided of the role the Bolsover Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator fulfils which was part strategic and part on the ground. One stakeholder informed the panel that within his service there had been seven cases in quarter three alone, all women. This was slowly rising this year. He felt a dedicated officer could provide front facing support and drive the strategy for the service. This could include support with paper work, attendance at MARAC meetings and the more strategic items. Reference was made to the domestic abuse partnership access not always being easy and that some victims did not want to use this method but would speak with a dedicated officer who knew their issues such as housing need. Additionally it was felt we also need to support people who fall under the radar, for instance people who fall under the threshold. The Portfolio holder referred to the benefits of having dedicated officer and said he would support an officer or at least sharing this resource with our strategic partner.

### 6.2.2 Support for Staff

Whilst there is some staff awareness of the issues the panel heard that officers can still feel unprepared if they actually have to deal with a member of staff suffering domestic abuse. There have not been many incidents but one stakeholder told the Committee of her experience when one of her team approached her. She had received no training in this area and she said she felt as an authority we could have done better to support her as the guidance she received was limited. Fortunately she and her colleague received a considerable amount of help from the Domestic Abuse Officer at Doe Lea. She said she had to deal with a lot of the situation outside of work but thinks this is something every manager could find themselves potentially having to deal with. Counselling sessions were provided for the employee which was helpful but they were limited. Another stakeholder also acknowledged that we could do more to raise awareness and provide some specific training.

To gain an insight from a wider staff perspective a survey on domestic abuse had been undertaken on the Councils intranet. It aimed to identify how the Council should support any member of staff who has, or is, experiencing domestic abuse. It sought to identify staff awareness and attitudes to this issue and knowledge of support available. Some key issues examined included why someone may be reluctant to inform their manager they were suffering domestic abuse, what they thought was the employers role in supporting staff and managers and what that support might include. The panel

concluded that it would be very helpful for the Council to consider the survey results and review how we support our own staff.

### 6.2.3 Raising Awareness - Website

Both internal and external stakeholders commented that the Authority could enhance the information on the Councils website. There was a need to be more proactive in highlighting the issue of domestic abuse and create a culture where discussion on the topic can take place and officers feel able to ask questions. Both internal and external websites and the Councils newspaper could have this as a topic to raise awareness of support and encourage more debate. One stakeholder commented we need to make information very easy to access and when we publish information ensure it is refreshed and kept up to date. The Elm Foundation said one very practical measure that would help them would be for their publicity to be displayed at all Council venues and for their contact details and information to be included on relevant Council publications. This would include ensuring Council staff are aware of domestic abuse and how to refer people from your area into The Elm Foundation services. They invited anyone who was interested to attend a domestic abuse awareness raising session that they provide.

### 6.2.4 Raising Awareness – Training

As part of awareness raising and also supporting staff and managers it was considered that the Council could provide some specific training. Some key frontline staff had received specific training which was considered very good. Many officers had only received general safeguarding/ mental health training which whilst it had links to domestic abuse did not include issues about what to look out for. It was understood that not all officers need detailed training in this area. However, for most there was a need to raise awareness and also to provide more specific training for managers. Wider recognition of signs, what to do and what action to take would be beneficial. Derbyshire County Council would be happy to provide an awareness course at North East Derbyshire's offices. The Police representative commented that he believed within his service they needed to concentrate on perpetrators and changing attitudes.

### 6.2.5 Domestic Abuse Policy

The review panel felt that the Council should have a separate domestic abuse policy rather than it being included in a wider safeguarding policy. They believed this would be a clear visible Statement of Intent of the Councils commitment to addressing domestic abuse. This was supported by the portfolio holder.

### 6.2.6 Portfolio Involvement

The portfolio holder spoke of his desire to do what he could to promote work to address domestic abuse. The Council need to support and facilitate the

involvement of the portfolio holder more in this area. This should include him being invited to attend appropriate meetings and be involved in policy developments that discuss domestic abuse.

#### 6.2.7 Homelessness Forum

The panel were advised that the Council had developed a North Derbyshire Homelessness Forum between NEDDC, Bolsover DC and Chesterfield BC which was a very positive step. It brings together all partners in the field. The forum had been developing a new referral/housing pathway with partners within the group and conducting training sessions for partners in relation to homelessness. However, it was suggested that further work was needed to place the forum higher on the agenda and develop a clear direction

#### 6.2.8 Financial Abuse

Evidence was heard from the Revenues representative that financial abuse appeared to be on the increase. He advised the panel that staff do look out for signs of unusual activity in people's accounts and in the past he has needed to pursue a case. This does have an impact on resources within his team but the panel stated that this was important that his team had the capacity to look for flags in financial reduction that may indicate abuse. Additionally the panel supported the approach being taken in the team with regard to the procedures around claimants' paperwork and people not having all the required documentation and not wishing documentation sent to their house.

#### 6.2.9 Sanctuary Scheme/Target Hardening

Various stakeholders raised the sanctuary scheme and target hardening measures that could be taken to make properties more secure for people experiencing domestic abuse. However, some officers said there was no designated budget for target hardening and whilst some stated it was still happening others said it had been reduced. Additionally the comment was made that if the Council had a dedicated officer their role could help with securing funds for this scheme and provide support and help to access legal remedies such as injunctions. The panel were of the view that this was important in helping people to feel secure in their homes and in some cases help them to stay in their homes. They therefore would like to ensure that funds are available for this work.

#### 6.2.10 Housing, Homelessness and Refuges

The Housing Options representative advised the panel that there was a shortage of provision of housing, homelessness units and refuges. Another issue was that refuges were closing and the referral process is not always successful for people with additional social issues like mental health, drugs and alcohol. Some refuges did not seem keen to take large families. Consequently it could be very tough getting people into a refuge and can take

days sometimes and be extremely difficult. One problem with referrals to the County was they only placed people in refuges within the county. This was often not suitable as victims needed to be further afield to prevent their abuser finding them. The officer often had to use the national helpline to go out of area for a refuge. This was also often very time consuming for officers and not always ideal for people having to move quickly.

#### 6.2.11 The Elm Foundation

A couple of practical issues were raised by The Elm Foundation. Since the departure of the previous housing options post holder no representative was currently sitting on the board of their trustees. Secondly they asked whether the Council could contact Parish clerks regarding available room facilities that they could use for their meetings with clients.

#### 6.2.12 Sharing Best Practice

It had become very clear during the review that supporting people experiencing domestic abuse could be a complex and difficult task. Multiple agencies could come in to contact with this issue and the level of involvement was varied. It was also apparent that stakeholders were all dealing with issues of resourcing and funding. Consequently the panel wished to acknowledge this and emphasise the need for all the agencies, including Councils, to share best practice and help each other make the best use of resources. The panel had heard from Rykneld Homes on their domestic abuse policy and procedures for dealing with domestic abuse. This insight from the inclusion team was informative and something the Council may find of use.

### **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 The review panel heard views from a wide range of stakeholders both internal and external during this review. It identified a number of measures various sections of the Council were using to support people suffering from domestic abuse. The commitment that staff and external agencies had to address domestic abuse was also made very clear during the stakeholder interviews.
- 7.2 However, some areas for improvement which would enhance the current provision were identified around raising awareness, support for staff, producing a domestic abuse policy and dedicated officer support.

# Appendix 1

## Stakeholders Engaged During the Review

Allison Boyce	-	Derbyshire County Council
Jennifer Calverley	-	The Elm Foundation
Andrew Gascoigne	-	Senior Revenues Officer
Sara Gordon	-	Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager
Faye Green	-	Community Safety Manager
Jeff Lilley	-	Portfolio Holder – Community Safety, Equality & Diversity and Health
Helen Mitchell	-	The Elm Foundation
Lee Pepper	-	Housing Options Team Leader
Rachel Pope	-	Customer Services Operation Manager
Jamie Shirley	-	Police Representative
Heather Summers	-	Head of Neighbourhoods - Rykneld Homes
Jayne Walker	-	Community Sustainment Manager -Rykneld Homes

Staff Questionnaires