



Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 16th September 2020

Report Title: Community Safety Partnership Response to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Since Covid

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Purpose:

This report is to detail the Community Safety Partnership's response to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence since covid to Overview and Scrutiny Group. It covers partnership responses within the more acute phase of the pandemic (lockdown) and ongoing work.

Overview

The main two meetings that govern responses to DASV in Torbay are the Executive Group (DASVEG) and the Operational Group (DASVOG), which report to Torbay's Community Safety Partnership via DASVEG. Both groups continued meeting during lockdown with DASVOG increasing frequency to monthly meetings. The DASV agenda sits as one of the CSP's strategic priorities, the focus was not just maintained but enhanced since covid started and remains one of our primary areas of concern. The Council's Incident Management Team would receive weekly updates regarding trends and activity around DASV and has now been established as a theme within the recovery structure.

Collaboration with colleagues from other Local Authorities across the peninsular was maintained and developed during the pandemic with the Commissioning Lead for the OPCC taking a pro-active approach in bringing people together to share information, insights and practice. Certain government funding streams came via the OPCC also so they have helped coordinate applications for these funds.

The initial planning at the outset of covid was anticipation of increased levels of DA and SV due to the likelihood of victims and abusers to be spending more time together through lockdown and under heightened stress. This planning also included how to adapt to covid-safe service delivery, ensuring accessibility of support and information. Most services have maintained supportive offers but most have also had to use phone and online methods save for more acute situations.

Communicating with people potentially in need of a service was also a priority during lockdown, to assure that services were and are still there to support and provide emergency assistance where necessary. More details of the communications activity are detailed below.

Trends

Contrary to expectation, reporting to both the Police and to TDAS has been lower or equal to pre-covid levels. This was similar to most other areas within the peninsula. It is still anticipated to rise but has not yet been the Torbay experience. Here is a brief summary relating to relevant service areas and DASV experienced across them:

Torbay Domestic Abuse Service (TDAS) – Initial drop in referrals into the service which has risen, but with inconsistent volumes on a weekly basis and no apparent pattern.

Police – during lockdown reporting was significantly lower than equivalent periods for previous year, since lockdown ended reporting has increased for DA but no ‘surge’ experienced yet.

MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) – referrals remained relatively constant throughout covid and forum moved to virtual facilitation to ensure no break in continuity and management of high risk cases

Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) – immediate and near total cessation of referrals being received. Numbers have increased.

Devon Rape Crisis Sexual Abuse Service – initial 30% reduction in referral numbers but have seen significant rise since lockdown eased. Services were amended to virtual delivery which worked well. Referrals from IRIS have continued and proportionately more so than from other services, felt that this reflects the proactive approach this intervention takes as opposed to more reactive service delivery in the system.

Housing Options – DA has not been a notable reason for homelessness during covid and this has remained the case since lockdown ended and restrictions relaxed.

Areyouok.co.uk – this is the Safer Communities developed web resource for DASV, with content for victims, perpetrators, professionals, friends and families. Numbers of people accessing the website have increased over the last few years and the covid period saw a notable spike in utilisation. A comparison between numbers of people accessing the site during March – June in 2019 and March - June 2020 saw a near 3-fold increase in 2020.

Communications

Communications have been consistently put out during covid period and reiterated that services have been both open and accessible. A mixture of media has been used in these efforts including social, newsletters, posters, staff communications and included following messages:

- Police are continuing to respond to calls.
- The SARC had been able to make alternative arrangements if someone has COVID-19, or believes they have, which means people will still receive the time critical support they require. They are still able to see individuals face to face where safe to do so.

- Despite TDAS not providing face to face support through lockdown they have provided telephone and email support. This has been amended where safe to do so, some face to face meetings are being arranged.
- Devon Rape Crisis has amended the times of their helpline to be accessible Mon to Fri, 9.00 to 12.00 noon, in addition to offering email contact. They have also been able to adapt some of their therapy work to be delivered online.
- The Peninsular wide Victim Care Unit campaign signposted to the VCU who have been able to provide advice and signpost to appropriate local services. The VCU website also provides a link to the Victim Support webchat facility which is available 24/7.
- Information promotes the message that anyone who has to flee as a result of domestic abuse can still access the Housing Options team and will be found emergency temporary accommodation.
- Another message has been to ask residents to report if they are concerned about something they see or hear happening to someone else.

All Torbay schools and early years settings had been supportive by circulating messages, with key information being that those schools that were open could be accessed as a safe space for those with a child who would normally attend that school, whether or not they were currently at school.

Information has also been circulated via Torbay Council intranet, Torbay Together weekly newspapers, to the DASV Community Forum, Care Homes, Outreach and Supported Living newsletter, and members briefing. A mobile billboard with DA messaging was also situated in front of some of Torbay's supermarkets to ensure visibility of messages in key places still being visited during lockdown.

Funding / New roles

This financial year the CSP allocated the largest proportion of its annual grant from the OPCC towards the DASV agenda as a response to covid. This includes the funding of two new roles which are:

Behavioural Change IDVA (1FTE) and Children and Family Support Worker (0.5FTE) – currently being recruited to. Based on a pilot in Exeter this role will work with perpetrators of Domestic Abuse as identified by MARAC to challenge behaviours and beliefs. An accompanying Child / Family Support Worker enables for a whole family approach to be taken where circumstances necessitate.

DVPN / DVPO Co-ordinator (1FTE) – this role has just been recruited to and will be working alongside Police to provide immediate support to victims of DA protected in their own home by use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders / Notices (which removes perpetrator from home for limited period).

CSP funds have also provided additional resource within Devon Rape Crisis to help reduce their significant waiting list, paid for another course of CRAFT training and allocated a small budget to DASVOG.

STP monies have also funded a 2-year DASV Lead within CCG which gives some dedicated resource to developing the response to DASV within Health. This post has been successfully recruited to and person now in post.

Children's Services as part of their restructure are introducing some specialist DA resource within their workforce, which will be a significant step forward and support our strategic embedding of the CRAFT framework.

The Community Sector work-stream of the Ops Group were successful in their bid for the MOJ funds (£58k) via the OPCC. Now referred to as Standing Tall Partnership, they have already set about delivering on the various aspects of the grant which include:

- Emotional support - Listening ear service (helpline) to free up TDAS capacity
- Court support
- Counselling for perpetrators and people who harm including YP
- Emergency packs (eg nappies, food)
- One off emergency grants (travel, electric, etc)
- Training and supervision (and support) for helpline staff
- Publicity
- Small overhead contributions

TDAS were successful in securing additional short term funding for 3 more safe houses and accompanying support. These are available until October 2020.

Some further funding is being made available by the Home Office via the OPCC, we are currently working with colleagues from across the peninsular in coordinating our respective requests for the funding.

Re-Commissioning of Domestic Abuse Services

Timescales have been amended due to covid and now work towards service start date due to be December 2021. Plan remains to re-commission alongside substance misuse and homelessness (hostel) services under an alliance contract.

Training during covid

Traditional face to face delivery of training is not currently possible, which has most significantly halted the progression of CRAFT training – our second course got part-way through before being suspended due to lockdown. The developers of CRAFT are looking at how they may be able to use digital platforms to progress training and development and we await their feedback before being able to proceed in planning additional courses.

As part of the collaborative efforts across the peninsular and with the OPCC a list of available training offers nationally, regionally and locally was compiled which can be used to identify what offers may best suit staff, this list was distributed across partner agencies in Torbay.

Jason Preece and Tania Davies (Reducing Parental Conflict Coordinator) have delivered first webinar to colleagues within Children's Services that has received positive feedback and may suit as an additional means to reach staff with DASV related information going forward. The webinar is available in i-learn, the platform for which is available externally to the Council.

Conclusion

DASV has remained a priority area which has been demonstrated by the ongoing monitoring not just of the regular governance structures, but also by inclusion within the IMT and recovery agendas of Torbay Council. It will continue to be a priority.

Whereas Torbay has not seen the surge in numbers anticipated by a period of high anxiety and restricted mobility / social contact, we are not complacent about this and continue to monitor the situation with our partners.

Encouragingly we have been able to continue elements of our strategic development by bringing new roles to Torbay, maintaining key system initiatives (such as IRIS) and strengthening our links across the peninsula with other DASV professionals. We will be reviewing the lessons learned from the variety of activities that have been undertaken since covid and consider which elements we would like to maintain or develop going forward.