



AGENDA ITEM: 12

SUMMARY

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| Report for: | Cabinet |
| Date of meeting: | 22nd October 2013 |
| PART: | 1 |
| If Part II, reason: | |

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| Title of report: | SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY |
| Contact: | Neil Harden, Portfolio Holder for Regulatory and Resident Services Author/Responsible Officer – Julie Still |
| Purpose of report: | To seek approval of a corporate policy to deliver early intervention, support and protection to victims of domestic abuse who approach our services or who are employed by DBC. |
| Recommendations | That the proposed Policy is approved |
| Corporate objectives: | Safe Clean and Green Environment Building Community Capacity Dacorum Delivers |
| Implications: | <u>Financial</u> None. |
| 'Value For Money Implications' | <u>Value for Money</u> |
| Risk Implications | Failure to deal corporately and consistently with domestic abuse is a risk to the reputation of the Council and increases the risk of significant harm to victims. |
| Equalities Implications | An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in September 2013 and is appended to this report. |
| Health And Safety Implications | Considered as part of general risk assessments – none specific to this policy. |
| Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer Comments | Monitoring Officer: I have considered the proposed policy and have no comments to add other than to endorse the report and the policy. |

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| | <p>Deputy S.151 Officer</p> <p>There are no budgetary implications arising from the recommendations in this report.</p> |
| Consultees: | <p>Strategic Housing</p> <p>Tenant and Leasehold Management</p> <p>Anti Social Behaviour Team</p> <p>Community Safety Partnership</p> |
| Background papers: | <p>Hertfordshire County Council Domestic Abuse Policy</p> <p>Living Without Abuse 2013</p> <p>Hertfordshire Constabulary Data</p> |
| Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report: | <p><i>ACPO – Association of Chief Police Officers</i></p> <p><i>MARAC – multi agency risk assessment conference</i></p> <p><i>RAOG – responsible agencies officers group</i></p> <p><i>CAADA – Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse</i></p> |

BACKGROUND

1. Definition

1.1 Domestic abuse has a wide definition which includes: -

- Physical Violence
- Psychological, sexual, financial and emotional abuse involving partners, ex-partners, other relatives or household members

1.2 The Council is proposing to adopt the following definition of domestic abuse: -

“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse, (psychological, physical, sexual financial or emotional) between any persons who have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

1.2 This definition incorporates Government and ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) guidance and recognises that domestic abuse and occur between family members and is not just restricted to current or former partners. It also takes into account elder abuse, forced marriages, male victims and same-sex relationships.

1.3 It is recognised that domestic abuse is not restricted to a specific age group, race religion or socio-economic standing, but cuts across all sections of society and it effects can be debilitating on the individual concerned and society as a whole.

2 Facts

- 2.1 In Dacorum between 1st April 2012 and 31st March 2013 there were 421 reports to the police of domestic violence related crimes.
- 2.2 This is an increase of 19.3% on the previous year and is a figure that would be expected to continue to rise with increased awareness and improved support for victims of domestic abuse. On average there will have been 35 assaults before a victim calls the police (Source: Living Without Abuse, 2013) so there is considerable under reporting.
- 2.3 The local MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) estimates that they receive 25% of the referrals that they should for serious and repeat victims of domestic abuse due to the significant under reporting.
- 2.4 Domestic abuse is the most quoted reason for becoming homeless (Shelter 2002).

3 Dacorum Borough Council Services

- 3.1 There are a number of front line services within the Council that will deal with the victims of domestic abuse on a regular basis as an obvious part of their role. In addition to this, there are other services within the Council that also deal with victims but which are not so obvious and officers, given the appropriate awareness training, can and do offer support and help with the prevention of, or identification of abuse at an early stage.
- 3.2 The proposed policy for Supporting Victims of Domestic Abuse (appendix A) aims to coordinate the Councils response to: -
 - Intervene early in cases of domestic abuse;
 - Protect those affected by domestic abuse; and
 - Support victims of domestic abuse.
- 3.3 Staff can also be victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse and the draft policy recognises this and gives guidance on how Dacorum Borough Council propose to deal with domestic abuse within its workplace.
- 3.4 The Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004 requires a review to take place after any domestic homicide.
- 3.5 The Chair of the RAOG (Responsible Authorities Officers Group) of the Community Safety Partnership is responsible for conducting a review and the document must be sent to the Home Office. The Chief Executive of Dacorum Borough Council is the Chair of the Dacorum RAOG.
- 3.6 There was a domestic homicide in Dacorum in 2012 which is currently subject to a review. The review will result in an action plan to address any areas that could be improved. The review will be sent to the Home Office for approval.

4 Actions supporting the policy

- 4.1 A lead officer for Domestic Abuse sits within the Resident Services Anti Social Behaviour Team. This officer is highly trained and had been recognised by CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) as a champion in this field.
- 4.2 Designated Officers will be appointed in each service area. This approach is already in place for Safeguarding and officers will now be trained to include the support of victims of domestic abuse. These officers will provide a point of contact for their services for information, services related issues and any concerns. They will also act as a support network for each other.
- 4.3 This information will be publicised as with first aiders so that all staff will know, not only a point of contact for support with reports of domestic abuse, but also for Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.
- 4.4 A regular meeting is organised for the designated officers to discuss any barriers they may encounter when dealing with related matters and to take forward any improvements or actions that may be identified following on from reviews or as service improvements.
- 4.5 Over 80 front line staff have now been trained in domestic abuse awareness and 2 further courses for up to 40 more have been scheduled.
- 4.6 Selected Officers are also undertaking specialist DASH (domestic abuse, stalking and honour based violence) risk assessment training.

5 Review

- 5.1 This policy will be reviewed regularly in line with national and local changes in legislation and practice following domestic homicide reviews and good practice and a full review will be carried out in Autumn 2016.