

Review of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Harassment



Report to: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 12 March 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Steer, Portfolio Holder for Community

Lead Officer: Christine Howard, Strategic Manager for Community Safety, Youth and Engagement (01279) 446192

Recommended that:

A The Committee notes the report.

Background

1. At its meeting on 11 July, the Scrutiny Committee held a question and answer session with Essex Police and the Safer Harlow Partnership. It then made formal recommendations on 12 September.

Issues/Proposals

2. The Committee made three recommendations and progress against these is noted below:
 - a) The Council seeks to take proactive steps to tackle the 'hot spots' the Police identified for harassment, and consideration be given to putting these locations in the public domain.
 - i) Publishing hotspot areas may increase the fear of crime in these areas therefore details have not been published. Serious violence and violence against women and girls (VAWG) are current priorities for the Safer Harlow Partnership. A dedicated multi-agency subgroup is taking forward this work with a strong focus on working with partners to create 'safe spaces' for women and girls in the community. The Council's Community Safety Team and Essex Police are leading on development of a Women's Safety Charter that will be launched in March 2024. During Domestic Abuse Awareness Week in November 2023 the council led a week of activity to raise awareness

of Domestic Abuse; ensure people know how to report it and where they can go to get help and support. Over 240 direct contacts were made with members of the public; over 110 posters were distributed to businesses and shops in the Town Centre, Staple Tye, Bush Fair, Old Harlow, The Stow and Staple Tye and two J9 training courses were delivered to elected Members and frontline practitioners.

- b) Additional 'softer' measures to chart progress in tackling domestic violence (i.e., in addition to conviction rates) be developed.
- i) Essex Police considers the following data which is currently not shared as it primarily focuses on the quality of investigations and police interaction with the victim:
 - Crime rates
 - Solved rates
 - Quality of victim engagement (through body worn video)
 - Reasons for people not supporting police action
 - ii) Changing Pathways has begun to collect and monitor soft data including anecdotal evidence of the customer journey via focus groups; individual feedback and case studies. Of particular interest is the measure of how safe the customer felt when first entering the service and how safe they feel after intervention. Anonymised case studies are of particular use at staff and partner training sessions. This information will be shared with partners via the Domestic Abuse Forum.
 - iii) The council does not collect data on Domestic Abuse.
 - iv) This matter will be referred to the next meeting of the Domestic Abuse Forum in April 2024 to seek further information on how relevant partners might be able to develop soft data measures that may help identify new trends and emerging issues.
- c) Agreements between relevant local authorities in supporting those who have escaped domestic violence to return to their home authority are formalised, where this is considered appropriate.
- i) There are currently no formal arrangements in place between Harlow Council and other Essex council's or with District or Borough council's outside Essex. It is not common for victims of domestic abuse to want to return to the area where abuse took place. However, it is sometimes possible as part of the pathway for some victims to return, depending on safety planning and the type of tenure they left. If the introduction of formal arrangements between councils is to be proposed and considered, it is suggested that this may be an item suitable for discussion at the Essex Chief Executives meeting.

3. The Committee is invited to review the progress on its recommendations and the effectiveness of the review.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

None.

Climate Change

None.

Communities and Environment

The recommendations agreed in 2023 and the actions taken subsequently contribute towards the agreed priorities set out in the Community Safety Strategy.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Finance

None directly.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Governance and Corporate Services

None specific.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Housing

As contained in the report.

Author: Wendy Makepeace, Assistant Director – Housing and Property

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

None specific.

Author: James Gardner, Assistant Director - Regeneration

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.