

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting10th June 2010

1. Title of Item/Report

Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Review of Domestic Violence

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that presented the findings of the EIT Review of Domestic Violence, which was a 'reporting in' review to Executive Scrutiny Committee.

It was explained that the majority of Domestic Violence Services were provided by Harbour, a registered charity that, in addition to Stockton, ran refuges in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Peterlee. Services were also provided by a Domestic Violence Coordinator (jointly funded by this Council and Hartlepool Borough Council) and specialist team in the Council's Children and Social Care Service. A copy of baseline/challenge information considered as part of the review was provided.

Cabinet was reminded that the Audit Commission had noted a rise in caseload of approximately 20% from 2007 to 2009 and had stated that it would examine the issues as part of year 2 of the Comprehensive Area Assessment. Figures from Harbour indicated even larger increases. Audit Commission research predicted further increases as the recession developed.

Members noted that the Government had launched its new National Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The Strategy encapsulates 75 'key actions' and would lead to a significant increase in expectations of requirements from local authorities and some of their key partners

It was explained that a review of the Council's specialist Domestic Violence Team within CESC had identified issues that suggested that the current service model should be changed. The preferred service model was that the Domestic Violence Team be disbanded and a specialist Domestic Violence function be provided within an enhanced Duty Team.

Cabinet was provided with an analysis of expenditure on Domestic Violence covering the four Teesside authorities together with benchmarking across the Tees Valley in respect of the costs to the Supporting People budget of both Refuge and Floating Support Services.

In relation to the increase in caseload, which has given rise to a waiting list for some services, Harbour had been asked to analyse how much additional funding would be required to operate without a significant waiting list, based on current (2009/10) levels of demand, and had provided the following figures:-

adults - £77,000

children - £50,000

One of the significant problems identified through the review process, and reported to the Domestic Violence Strategy Group, had been the insufficiency of Refuge capacity. The Stockton Refuge was owned by Endeavour Housing Association, which retained responsibility for maintaining the shell of the building, and was operated by Harbour, who paid a fee to Endeavour for the use of the building, and was available for use by women and children only. In 2008/09 132 of 209 referrals i.e. 63%, were declined due to no places being available at the time of referral. Women accepted as priority homeless on the grounds of domestic violence, who could not be accommodated in the refuge due to capacity, and all men in similar circumstances were placed in the St. James' Street hostel or satellite accommodation, all managed by Three Rivers Housing Association. This issue had been discussed by a task group for the purpose, and the possibility of establishing a cluster of intermediate accommodation, within close proximity of the existing refuge (so as to minimise disruption of schooling for children, and to facilitate efficient staffing arrangements, i.e. 'satellite' provision from the existing staff team at the refuge) was now being explored in further detail, with colleagues at Tristar Homes and Harbour. The Supporting People team had given a preliminary indication that a further £40–50,000 per year of Supporting People funding may be available for a strong proposal which would reduce 'bed blocking' at the refuge itself and assist service users to return to independent living more quickly (reducing the average stay in the refuge itself from about six months to about three months, thereby effectively doubling refuge capacity). An ancillary option being investigated was moving the Harbour Outreach Service from its current base in rented office accommodation in Stockton Town Centre to a property in any such cluster, so as to save on costs of rent and maximise staffing efficiencies.

Following discussions with Cabinet Members concerned some years ago, it was agreed that the Cabinet Members for Housing & Community Safety

and for Adult Services and Health would participate in the multi-agency Domestic Violence Strategy Group. Following more recent discussions it was also recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People become a member of the group.

Cabinet was provided with the comments of Executive Scrutiny Committee relating to the review.

RESOLVED that :-

1. in the current climate it would be inadvisable to look for net reductions in the Council's expenditure on domestic violence services, but that efforts should continue to maximise the impact of investment
2. the position in respect of the Domestic Violence Team within CESC be noted.
3. all Council services ensure that they are represented at an appropriate level at the multi-agency Domestic Violence Strategy Group, and that their activities and performance are reported to the Group in a timely manner
4. the Strategy Group should review its links with other multi-agency partnership bodies including the Safer Stockton Partnership, the Children's Trust Board, the Health & Wellbeing Partnership, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Adult Safeguarding Board, and the links between the Domestic Violence Strategy for the Borough and other key strategies developed by these partnerships.
5. the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People be added to the Council representatives on the Domestic Violence Strategy Group alongside the Cabinet Members for Housing & Community Safety and for Adult Services & Health, as Member Champions for domestic violence services.

3. Reasons for the Decision

In order to balance the need to respond to the rise in Domestic Violence caseload against the need to achieve greater efficiency, and to improve strategic decision-making on Domestic Violence issues.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable.

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 18th June 2010

Proper Officer
14 June 2010