

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)

1. Attached to this report is a letter dated 12 March to Geoff Lee from Melanie Laws, the Chief Executive of the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) (Appendix A), together with a report (marked '12') to the Corporate Management Team of Durham County Council (DCC) (Appendix B).
2. The letter seeks views from Community Safety Partnerships on two options for collaborative working on DHRs, as outlined at paragraph 8 of the Durham report.
3. The Safe Durham Partnership is currently carrying out a DHR into a case in Bishop Auckland, chaired by Hazel Willoughby from DTV Probation Trust, and will need to carry out a further review shortly into the Horden 'family annihilation' case, which involved the use of firearms.
4. Members of the Partnership are reminded that over the last six years there has been one domestic homicide in Stockton-on-Tees. This was an 'out of the blue' case, involving a couple whose adult children had left the household and who had no history of contact with any agency in relation to domestic violence and, as such, would have been a relatively straightforward case in review terms. However, in 2011 there was also a 'near miss' involving a young woman who spent some time in intensive care with severe brain swelling but eventually pulled through. Had this case resulted in a fatality it would have been a more challenging review, in relation both to the question of 'homicide or accident?' and to the history of the male partner.
5. The first of the two options is based on a principle of regional pooling of costs and risks. The report suggests a system of population-based contributions, with a maximum of £5,000. If Durham, as the largest authority in the region, were to pay £5,000 then the Stockton share would be approximately £1,800. However, the total yield, if all twelve localities contributed on this basis, would be only about £20,000. This sum could easily be spent on one complex review.
6. The second option is a pairing arrangement, proposed to operate between similar sized areas. The locations closest in size to Stockton are North Tyneside and Gateshead. Discussions have been taking place with Hartlepool for some time about a pairing arrangement, but have not yet come to fruition.
7. In relation to the first option, it is not sufficiently clear how the proposal would work – the suggestion appears to be that the 12 localities would take turns, on an annual cycle (i.e. 12 years in total?) to organise any DHRs in the region, drawing on the regional funding pool to do so. However, there is no detail about what would happen if multiple DHRs were needed in one year, and what would happen if costs exceed the available funding (would there be a supplementary levy?). Clearly this system, whatever the details, would only succeed if supported by all 12 authorities. In other contexts some authorities have objected to the principle of population based funding and argued for equal shares, or declined to contribute at all.

8. In order to evaluate the proposition properly it would also be very helpful to see the data on historic distribution of domestic homicides across the region. It is often stated that two women die every week in the UK at the hands of current or former partners. Ignoring other forms of domestic homicide (e.g. male victims), that would suggest a North East average of about 4 domestic homicides per year, assuming an equal distribution across the UK population of 60 million people.
9. Taking all these considerations into account, it is RECOMMENDED that the Partnership discuss the options, with a view to a response based on the following key points:
 - (a) that we have no strong views for or against the regional pooling option but would welcome further details;
 - (b) that the pairing option has definite merits, and that we would be happy in principle to pair with Hartlepool if they were willing to reciprocate;
 - (c) that data on historic distribution of domestic homicides in the region should be circulated; and
 - (d) that we would welcome an event, possibly hosted by ANEC, to share learning from the first few DHRs, including those in County Durham and any others taking place in the region.

Mike Batty
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