

MULTI-AGENCY RISK ASSESSMENT CONFERENCING IN RELATION TO VERY HIGH RISK VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

28. There was submitted a report (docketed) dated 8 August 2005 by the Director of Community Services (1) advising that the Domestic Abuse Action Plan for North Lanarkshire, which was a multi-agency plan, identified the need to protect victims of domestic abuse and their children from such abuse and to develop strategies which addressed violent and abusive behaviour; (2) proposing that Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC), which had been developed in South Wales, be introduced in North Lanarkshire to provide a forum for sharing information and taking action to reduce future harm to very high risk victims of domestic abuse and their children; (3) outlining the benefits of the system; (4) seeking approval for the permanent establishment of the post of Service Co-ordinator (Domestic Abuse) on salary grade PO1 to assist in meeting national and local objectives, and (5) detailing the financial implications of the proposals, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

Decided:

- (1) that the implementation of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing be approved;
- (2) that the post of Service Co-ordinator (Domestic Abuse) on salary grade PO1 be permanently established;
- (3) that the report be remitted to the Education, Housing and Technical Services and Social Work Committees for consideration, and
- (4) that the report be otherwise noted.

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL
REPORT

To: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE		Subject: MULTI-AGENCY RISK ASSESSMENT CONFERENCING IN RELATION TO VERY HIGH RISK VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE
From: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES		
Date: 8 AUGUST 2005	Ref: PJ/LMcM	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise committee of the proposal to develop Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC) in North Lanarkshire. The Domestic Abuse Action Plan for North Lanarkshire a multi-agency plan, identifies the need to protect victims of domestic abuse and their children from such abuse and at the same time develop strategies which address violent and abusive behaviour.
- 1.2 MARAC provides a forum for sharing information and taking actions that will reduce future harm to very high-risk victims of domestic abuse and their children. This report provides details of the benefits derived from this way of working, in particular the promotion of the safety of women and children.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 North Lanarkshire Community Safety Partnership identified domestic abuse as one of its key themes in 1998. North Lanarkshire like other areas in Scotland has a significant level of domestic abuse. From the 1st April 2004 until 31st December 2004, Strathclyde Police in North Lanarkshire attended 2279 reported incidents of domestic abuse. This has resulted in 1222 reports being submitted to the Procurators Fiscal and 928 persons being arrested.
- 2.2 This equates on a daily basis to:
- 8 reported incidents of Domestic Abuse;
 - 3 people arrested for abusing their partner; and
 - 5 reports submitted to the Procurators Fiscal.
- 2.3 At present there is no formal method of sharing information on domestic abuse cases across agencies in North Lanarkshire. The proposal to establish the use of MARACs in North Lanarkshire would put in place a much needed formal framework for sharing information on families experiencing domestic abuse.
- 2.4 The MARAC model was developed in South Wales by South Wales Police and the Womens Safety Project located in Cardiff. It was developed in response to a

review of 47 domestic homicides. These homicides included the murders of 11 children under the age of 16 months. In these cases domestic abuse was highlighted as a common theme.

2.5 Central to the MARAC process is the risk assessment, which is carried out by Police Officers when attending incidents of domestic abuse. The risk assessment process in cases of domestic abuse victims seeks to identify those victims who are most at risk of experiencing violence in the future. Accurate risk assessment serves several important objectives:-

- It can provide a structured way for responding officers to gather detailed and relevant information from victims. This information, particularly when shared with other agencies, can help provide better service to victims because their specific needs are identified.
- Risk assessment can help save scarce resources, through helping identify those victims in particularly dire situations that will require more intensive assistance from police or other agencies.
- When embedded within multi-agency frameworks risk assessment helps more agencies become aware of the most dangerous offenders.

2.6 Evaluation of the MARAC in South Wales has demonstrated that this method of working is an effective way of promoting the safety of families who are experiencing domestic abuse. Police data has shown that the vast majority of MARAC victims did not experience any further incidents of violence that were reported to the police. Figures showed that 79% did not have any additional complaints on file and 70% did not have any police call-outs for domestic abuse, indicating that most victims are experiencing less violence after the MARAC. It is for this reason that it is requested that consideration be given to adopting this method of working in North Lanarkshire.

3. **CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 **Police**

Strathclyde Police will play the key role in the implementation of MARAC. Officers attending incidents will be responsible for completing the risk assessment, which will then be passed to the Domestic Abuse Unit to identify very high-risk victims.

3.2 **North Lanarkshire Council Departments**

The departments identified as being most involved in the MARAC process are Social Work, Housing and Property Services, Education and Community Services. It is proposed that these departments identify a representative who will attend MARACs to provide information on families known to them and who will then assume responsibility for ensuring subsequently agreed actions for their agency are fulfilled within the specified timeframes.

3.3 NHS Lanarkshire

Several departments of the NHS will be required to be represented at MARACs. These include Health Visiting, Midwifery, Mental Health Services and the EVA Project. As with the local authority these departments will require a representative who will attend MARACs to provide information and ensure the agreed actions are carried out.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.5 Over the last six years the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator, graded PO1, has made a significant contribution to achieving the national and local objectives in relation to domestic abuse and if the council is to deliver on the ambitious and progressive MARAC agenda it is essential that adequately specialised and experienced resources are committed. Evidence suggests that nationally Councils are recognising the need to address domestic abuse and reflecting this in their staffing establishments. On the last occasion the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator post was vacant it remained unfilled for a number of months despite several recruitment campaigns before the current post holder was appointed. Given the long term commitment from all agencies involved in this field to more effectively tackle domestic abuse the funding although not formally confirmed as permanent is unlikely to cease or diminish. Accordingly, it is proposed to permanently incorporate the post of Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator into the Council's staffing establishment.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Funding required to support the implementation of MARAC has already been secured from the Scottish Executive. As part of the Community Safety Award Programme 2005-2008, resources to provide administrative support to Strathclyde Police and new technology support across the partnership have been approved. In approving this project, the Scottish Executive has indicated a keen interest in the development of MARAC and has subsequently requested involvement in reviewing progress and developing the monitoring and evaluation framework.
- 5.2 A breakdown of the finances secured through the Community Safety Award Programme is detailed in Appendix 1.
- 5.3 The development and implementation of MARAC in North Lanarkshire is being undertaken by the Domestic Abuse Working Group. Committee is reminded that this group brings together representatives from North Lanarkshire Council (Department of Community Services, Social Work Department, Education Department and Housing & Property Services), Strathclyde Police, NHS Lanarkshire, Procurator Fiscal, Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre, Motherwell Women's Aid, North Lanarkshire Women's Aid, Monklands Women's Aid, and Jobcentre Plus.
- 5.4 Community Services is the lead department which represents part of its contribution to the corporate priority of promoting community safety. On a day to day basis the work associated with MARAC will be incorporated into the remit of the Service Co-ordinator for Domestic Abuse, based within Community Services.
- 5.5 Funding for North Lanarkshire's Domestic Abuse project including the post of Service co-ordinator Domestic Abuse is currently provided from a number of sources; this funding is separate and additional to the funding now available to support the

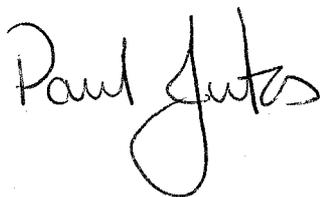
implementation of MARAC. Reflecting the Scottish Executive's sustained high priority on tackling domestic abuse significant funding, currently exceeding £31,000, has been awarded to the council for the last six years. This funding is matched by the partner organisations of NHS Lanarkshire with the Council's share being provided by Social Work, Housing and Community Services Departments. Approximately half the current funding is committed to the salary costs of the post of Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator.

- 5.6 It is proposed that there will be a phased implementation of MARAC across North Lanarkshire. Details of the implementation process are contained in Appendix 2.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that Committee;

- (i) approve the implementation of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing;
- (ii) permanently establish the post of Service Co-ordinator (Domestic Abuse), graded PO1; and
- (iii) remit the matter to Social Work, Housing and Education Committees
- (iv) otherwise note the details of the report



APPENDIX 1

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP AWARD

ACTIVITY	YEAR 1 (2005/6)	YEAR 2 (2006/7)	YEAR 3 (2007/8)
Information Sharing (Software, hardware, training and protocol)	£48,000	£15,000	£12,000
Administrator (To be placed within Strathclyde Police)	£20,000	£28,000	£30,000
Advocacy worker (seconded officer from Strathclyde Police to be placed within the EVA Project)	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000
Accessing legal services	£30,000	£60,000	£60,000
Evaluation		£5,000	
Total	£128,000	£138,000	£132,000

IMPLEMENTATION

It is planned that the implementation takes place in a systematic approach using the geographic locations of Strathclyde Police sub-divisions. The timescales for police training and MARAC to be up and running are highlighted below.

TIMESCALE	POLICE TRAINING TO TAKE PLACE	MARAC IMPLEMENTATION
September 2005	Bellshill/ Newarthill/ Viewpark	
October 2005	Bellshill/ Newarthill/ Viewpark	
November 2005		Bellshill/ Newarthill/ Viewpark
December 2005	Wishaw/ Harthill/ Shotts/ Motherwell	
January 2006	Wishaw/ Harthill/ Shotts/ Motherwell	
February 2006		Wishaw/ Harthill/ Shotts/ Motherwell
March 2006	Airdrie/ Coatbridge	
April 2006	Airdrie/ Coatbridge	
May 2006		Airdrie/ Coatbridge
June 2006	Cumbernauld/ Kilsyth/ Muirhead	
July 2006	Cumbernauld/ Kilsyth/ Muirhead	
August 2006		Cumbernauld/ Kilsyth/ Muirhead
September 2006		
October 2006		