

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Education and Families Committee

approval noting

Ref AG/MF

Date 22/02/22

Tackling Domestic Abuse – Update on Improvement Activity and Partnership Delivery Arrangements

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Executive Summary

This report provides an update on a range of improvement activity targeted at addressing Domestic Abuse and the sustaining structural inequalities which remain a key challenge within North Lanarkshire with significant adverse impacts on the lives of women, girls and our wider communities. Further to the approval by Committee of a contract award for specialist Domestic Abuse Services to SACRO (Aura Service) in February 2021 further information was provided to Committee in September 2021 on the implementation of the new service, as well as on the ongoing involvement of local Women Aid Services in partnership planning and delivery, Committee having sought assurance on the continued involvement of Women's Aid and other key partners in the new approach to service provision. This report provides a further update on partnership delivery arrangements and the current work through the Violence Against Women Partnership to develop a comprehensive strategy and workplan and to ensure a coherence of approach to improvement which addresses not only effective services for safety, support and recovery but prevention, early intervention and tertiary intervention as a critical step towards addressing the underlying causes of domestic abuse and achieving the ambitions of *Equally Safe* and the *Plan for North Lanarkshire*.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Education and Families Committee:

- (1) Endorse the improvement activity and approach to developing a strategy and revised work plan outlined in this report and the next steps detailed in section 2.14
- (2) Agree that the new Violence Against Women Strategy and Action Plan is presented to a future CMT for approval

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities

Ambition statement (14) Ensure the highest standards of public protection

1. Background

1.1 As reported previously national policy in this area is driven through *Equally Safe* –

Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women and girls which recognises the deep rooted structural gender inequalities which underpin domestic abuse and other forms of gender based violence and recognising also the wider harms created by domestic abuse in families and communities and that whilst anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse that women and girls are significantly disproportionately affected.

- 1.2 Equally the response to domestic abuse in North Lanarkshire continues to be framed within this context and gendered based analysis as well as the recognition that, as reported in previous committee reports, the prevalence of domestic abuse in our area remains stubbornly high despite strong partnership working in this area over many years. Tackling Domestic Abuse is therefore a key programme of work within the *Plan for North Lanarkshire* and integral to delivering for our communities through our aims of improving the health and wellbeing of communities, supporting all children to realise their full potential and achieving inclusive growth and prosperity for all.
- 1.3 The September 2021 report to Committee highlighted the focus on improvement activity framed by a whole system approach which recognises the criticality of improving the safeguarding and support to those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse but importantly also the need to attend to prevention and tertiary prevention to support longer-term change. To achieve this and in line with the previous review of domestic abuse provision within North Lanarkshire we need to focus on the effectiveness of existing services and pathways but also build the capacity for early help and intervention and improve our reach to those currently underrepresented in services.
- 1.4 Whilst data in relation to incident of Domestic Abuse in North Lanarkshire recorded on the iPVD database suggests a stability in the number of incidents over the past year this is only part of the story with feedback from partner agencies which suggests a more significant increase in the prevalence of domestic abuse. This pattern is also reflected nationally suggesting an increase in hidden harm over this period. This is reflected also in accounts of those with lived experience who report more challenges accessing support over the pandemic period, due to changing service models during lockdown and the impact of restrictions on community services. At the same time the significant backlog in the justice system has created a range of additional pressures and vulnerabilities for victims of abuse,

2. Report

Improvement Activity Update

- 2.1 The **Violence Against Women Strategic Partnership** following previous self-evaluation and development sessions supported by the Improvement Service brought forward proposals for revision of partnership arrangements to a two-tier structure to both to enhance change capacity and to increase visibility and ownership of this key agenda at Senior Management level across the partnership. Whilst implementation was paused due to the pandemic this has now been progressed and both the Operation and Strategic Groups have met and identified key initial priorities as detailed:
 - Development of a new and comprehensive Violence Against Women Strategy and Action Plan
 - Review the multi-agency performance management template and to consider how to reflect better the impact and outcomes for those affected by domestic abuse.
 - Progress a system for domestic homicide reviews

An updated multi-agency Practice Development Plan was additionally agreed by the partnership at its meeting in January 2022.

- 2.2 To support the development of the strategy, the partnership invited stakeholders from across key organisations and services responding to women and children in the local area affected by VAW to a series of workshops held from November 24th-26th 2021. Stakeholders were grouped across Health, Justice, and Communities and were invited to share learning and views on key priorities for the upcoming refresh of the Strategy refresh and supporting action plan. These workshops were facilitated by the Improvement Service with real value added by the inclusion of a wide range of universal and specialist services ranging from financial inclusion staff to those from the Eating Disorder Service. Key challenges were identified, particularly around areas such as access to the justice system, ensuring support which is person centred and trauma informed and addressing intersectionality and the additional barriers faced by some victims. In common with issues highlighted in the previous analysis by Arrivo, priorities identified included strengthening interventions and pathways to support, awareness raising and education, and workforce development, as well as broadening stakeholder involvement. Clearly it is critical that the new strategy is driven by the views of those with lived experience and the VAW Strategic Group agreed at its meeting in January 2022 to scope work already undertaken in this area in order that any further consultation activity adds value and addresses gaps rather than placing an additional burden on victims.
- 2.3 **Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC)** is the process for managing the highest risk cases of domestic abuse. High risk is defined as risk of homicide or serious injury to the victim/ survivor. Due to this MARAC is the domestic homicide prevention model used across Scotland and is part of public protection arrangements in North and South Lanarkshire. To ensure that this critical area of activity continues to be delivered effectively an improvement plan is being progressed, informed by engagement with *SafeLives* and an updated pathway for access to Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy (IDAA) is under consideration recognising the expertise available through ASSIST, Women's Aid and Aura. As in other areas of public protection referrals to MARAC dropped to 70 in the first quarter of 2020/2021 but quickly recovered to 137 in Quarter 2. Engagement with *SafeLives* and local analysis has highlighted the need to build additional capacity into the pan-Lanarkshire MARAC arrangements and Chief Officer Public Protection Groups in both North and South Lanarkshire have since agreed in principle to identify increased funding to support additional Co-ordinator capacity as well as a sessional independent chair to ensure consistency and quality of meeting arrangements. This is currently being progressed through local budget processes.
- 2.4 Justice Services and Children and Family Services are continuing to progress work to implement the **UP2U Family Practice Intervention Programme**. This is a behavioural change programme which aims to educate and support individuals to break the cycle of abusive behaviour. A 12-month training programme has been agreed and a cohort of staff has already been trained to implement this approach to family support where domestic abuse has been identified as a factor. Importantly this is compatible with the *Safe and Together* approach referenced in previous reports and section 2.7 below. These combined developments provide a huge opportunity to address what has been a significant gap in our response to domestic abuse by providing a vehicle to address the behaviour of the significant number of perpetrators who are not charged/referred into the court system or who do not have supervision or programmed work as part of a sentence. Evaluation will be built into this programme which will be rolled out over 2022
- 2.5 As previously reported to Committee **Mentors in Violence Prevention** is a peer education programme which gives young people the opportunity to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms which underpin domestic abuse, bullying and other forms of violence and seek to create a culture within which abuse and violence are unacceptable, through a bystander approach which challenges negative behaviours and supports victims. A key strand of activity to support primary prevention is the expansion of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme (MVP). A Steering Group has been established to oversee the development plan and

consideration is now being given to how to include partners, for example, CL&D Workers, Campus Police Officers and the voluntary sector. The aspiration to reach all secondary schools in North Lanarkshire has progressed well and the training programme has already substantially increased the number of schools actively participating in the programme with training in all secondary schools due to be taken place by February 2022. Work is also now being undertaken in partnership with the Psychological Services team to develop and implement an adapted programme for primary schools.

- 2.6 A further opportunity to add value by linking MVP implementation with the complementary **Equally Safe at School** programme is currently in the early stages of exploration. Equally Safe at School is a whole school approach to preventing gender - based violence supported by a free suite of online tools and resources. Rape Crisis have been allocated additional resource to support this programme nationally and locally.
- 2.7 In early 2021 the Scottish Government launched the revised **Delivering Equally Safe Fund** to support *Equally Safe* and work to tackle violence against women and girls across Scotland. As previously intimated the Council supported by the Violence Against Women Strategic Group applied to the fund for resourcing to progress the implementation of the **Safe and Together** model across North Lanarkshire. Safe and Together is an internationally recognised model of working with domestic abuse cases where there are children. The National Guidance for the Child Protection in Scotland 2021 highlights the Safe and Together model as the systemic approach to domestic abuse built around principles of keeping children with the survivor parent and partnering with them as a default position and intervening with the perpetrator to reduce risk and harm. Although Safe and Together has been championed in North Lanarkshire for a number of years, capacity issues have been a barrier to whole system implementation.
- 2.8 The application was successful with £220,041.80 being secured over two years, (£110,020.90 per year). These resources will ensure there is a robust programme of training to key groups of staff and will create the post of Safe and Together Co-ordinator who will schedule training and ensure learning is embedded in practice. Recruitment process for the Safe and Together Co-ordinator are progressing with a successful applicant being identified and expected to take up post shortly.
- 2.9 Wider allocations from the DES fund to partners operating in North Lanarkshire including local Women's Aid and Rape Crisis organisations and to a small number of specialist organisations including ASSIST and Say Women, who operate across a number of council areas, are a welcome support to the aims of the partnership and the wider programme of work. Following a recent presentation to the VAWG, it has been agreed that Say Women will meet with local housing leads to explore potential partnership opportunities to address the needs of young women impacted by homelessness who have been victims of sexual abuse/violence,

Commissioned Service

- 2.10 In line with the contract award the Aura Service, run by SACRO commenced on the 1st June 2021. A permanent manager for Aura has been appointed and will now oversee the ongoing development and implementation of the service in collaboration with North Lanarkshire Council as the commissioning authority and SACRO's Gender Based Violence Manager.
- 2.11 As agreed, monthly monitoring meetings and quarterly performance meetings have taken place, involving North Lanarkshire Council Education and Families managers and senior officers, a senior officer from North Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership Quality Assurance and managers with the responsibility for the Aura Domestic Abuse Service. KPIs are in place to evaluate measures of success of the new service which were discussed at the last performance meeting (October 2021).

The following shows work undertaken by Aura

Period covered	New referrals (NLC only)	How many people in total are currently using the service (NLC only)
July 2021	31	37
July - September 2021-22	61	72
October – December 2021-22	68	91

Given the figures represent the first seven months of service delivery it is not unexpected that most referrals come from NLC as the commissioning service however referrals sources have also included MARAC, Police Scotland, Simon Community, and Self-referrals.

Aura also continue to develop their online chat services.

Service Development

- 2.12 With respect to operational arrangements Aura have developed a duty rota to cope with the volume of calls the service receives. The duty worker manages calls with requests for advice and support. This is in addition to the online chat and is available to all residents of North Lanarkshire. Aura are continuing to develop their communication strategy including developing further publicity materials.
- 2.13 Since the Aura service commenced the service has continued to build partnerships to supporting the wider needs of service users including a successful relationship with Lanarkshire Association Mental Health to support women to attend a range of mental health and wellbeing classes for example yoga, managing stress and better sleep. Aura have also linked with Citizens Advice in Motherwell with a view to offering a drop-in service for advice and support to anyone who requires it
- 2.14 Two Aura workers will be joining the UP2U (Family Practice) training programme to co-facilitate with CJS and CFSW colleagues.

Women's Aid Services

- 2.15 The three local Women's Aid organisations have recently received confirmation of additional funding from the Delivering Equally Safe Fund. This has a wider focus than previous DES funding to two of these organisations which was targeted specifically at children's and for one also advocacy service and will enabled them to continue to provide front line services to support women including IDAA services, reducing to some extent also immediate concerns regarding sustainability associated with the ending of the previous local authority contracts. In addition, they continue to receive funding for refuge provision from North Lanarkshire Council via housing benefit.
- 2.16 Following the previous committee, an offer was made to facilitate a meeting between Women's Aid and Aura, given particularly the direct and indirect feedback received from Women's Aid suggesting a lack of knowledge about the Aura Service and to provide a vehicle outside of wider partnership meetings to discuss their interface however, Women's Aid continue to indicate they do not think that this is required at this time. Representatives from the three local Women's Aid organisations did however meet in November 2021 with lead council officers with agreement in principle to regular meetings in 2022 providing a forum for further discussion around joint-working and future partnership opportunities.

Next Steps

- 2.17 A multi-agency writing group will be established to support the development of the refreshed VAWG Strategy and Action Plan with a view to completion by June 2022
- Implementation of the MARAC improvement plan
 - Implementation plan to be established to support the roll out of UP2U Family Practice Intervention Programme aligned with the Safe and Together Plan
 - Exploration of the potential to add improve impact through closer integration of MVP and Equally Safe at School implementation alongside development of a programme for primary schools
 - Exploration of partnership opportunities with Say Women

3. Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

The activity outlined in this report will support the Council in this duty and particularly address the well-established wider inequalities arising from domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

Completed with respect to procurement of commissioned services as previously reported. Not required with respect to further activity outlined at this point.

4. Impact

4.1 Financial impact

New grant funding for Safe and Together is detailed in Section 2.8 above. There is no other specific financial impact associated with this report, the details of the contract award to SACRO having been presented in the previous report to committee. As noted above and previously discussions continue with local Women's Aid organisations with

respect to future partnership activity which may require further consideration of resourcing. Proposed change to MARAC resourcing is currently subject to consideration by partners through relevant financial planning channels.

4.2 HR policy / Legislative impact

None

4.3 Technology / Digital impact

None

4.4 Environmental impact

None

4.5 Communications impact

A communication plan is in place with respect to the new Aura service.

4.6 Risk impact

In the longer term the whole system approach to tackling domestic abuse reflected within this report will support a reduction of harm to individuals and communities however there are a number of risks in the shorter term.

There remains a possibility that negative publicity associated with the change in commissioned provider will impact on the confidence of women and community with respect to the new service or that pathways between services may be disrupted or confusing to service users. This continues to be addressed through the communication and engagement plan and through existing partnership structures.

5. Measures of success

5.1 Increase in the numbers of domestic abuse survivors being supported.

5.2 Increase in the numbers of non-mandated perpetrators being worked with as part of an ongoing range of interventions.

5.3 Evidence of community benefits.

5.4 Implementation of Safe and Together Approach

6. Supporting documents

6.1 None



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