

Public

Summary of the Findings of the of the Consultation into Domestic Abuse Services in Derbyshire 2015

Providing support to people who have experienced domestic abuse is very important to Derbyshire County Council (DCC) and our other partner agencies. For many years we have provided funding to local specialist services so that they can support victims of domestic abuse and their families.

Approximately every three years we review and re-commission the services that the Council funds to make sure that it continues to provide the best support available to people that need it.

Before re-commissioning the domestic abuse services this time the Council wanted to know what people thought of existing services, if they felt there were any gaps and how they could be improved.

Assisted by staff from Public Health, who carried out a health impact assessment (HIA) at the same time to determine how domestic abuse and the services affects people's health and wellbeing, we undertook comprehensive consultation. Public Health staff were able to produce a very detailed report with findings and recommendations.

The Council also wanted to check that the service we designed for the future would serve all the people in Derbyshire more equally by carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

Consultation included members of the public (who may or may not have used the services), partner organisations who need the services to be in place so they can do their jobs (e.g. Police, Fire Service, Social Services) and the provider organisations who currently run the services on behalf of the Council.

To do this a variety of methods were used including on-line and paper questionnaires (including an easy read version) and different questionnaires for the public, partner agencies and domestic abuse service providers. Focus groups with service users were also held, (both people in refuge and those using outreach services) and with domestic abuse service providers and partner organisations who are involved in domestic abuse. Specialist groups including North Derbyshire Deaf Forum, Derbyshire Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Forum were also consulted.

The on-line questionnaire was promoted positively through Derbyshire Friend, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) organisation and DCC Employee Networks for LGBT, Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME), Disabled and Women employees. Presentations were delivered to meetings involving homelessness officers, people with learning disabilities and their carers and older people.

The Council was very pleased with the level of response and grateful for the generous way in which people shared their views on a sensitive subject and often their own very personal experiences.

What The Consultation Told Us

Although a lot of the feedback was anticipated several additional points were also noted.

The findings told us that:

- People were satisfied with many areas of the service. Service users identified the Freedom Programme, the support of staff members, and being able to stay in a refuge as very beneficial.
- Locally based services were felt to be important, to build relationships and understand the local issues.
- The quality of any police intervention in a domestic abuse situation is crucial, for the satisfaction of service users.
- There was however, a real lack of knowledge about the support available to people experiencing domestic abuse both in the general public and even amongst service users.
- Sometimes people didn't know what domestic abuse was and therefore didn't know that they could access support services.
- It was felt that there were some gaps in services. Although domestic abuse services are available to anyone; women and men irrespective of sexuality, race, religion, disability, gender identity etc, not everybody knows this and people from many of these groups don't know that they can go to the services for support.
- Domestic abuse can have a negative effect on diet and nutrition, on levels of smoking and substance misuse, sexual behaviour and personal hygiene.
- Domestic abuse affects finance and employment very negatively.
- Services need to be able to support people with complex needs effectively, including physical and sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health issues and substance misuse issues whilst minimising impact on other service users.
- It was felt that the domestic abuse services and partner agencies delivering other related services, for example health, housing, substance misuse services and police, could work better together to make sure people are supported at a time of great vulnerability.

- The rural nature of Derbyshire was identified as an issue, in some areas it is more difficult for people to use services because of distance and transport problems. The organisations delivering services have to work hard to make sure everybody can access the services equally.
- Childcare to enable service users to attend appointments etc. was identified as a gap in services.
- Services to support children affected by domestic abuse were identified as very important.
- There was a real need identified to raise awareness of domestic abuse in young people and promote healthy relationships, to try and prevent the next generation of people becoming involved in abusive relationships.
- In some cases the service is not accessible, for example the helpline which is often the first point of contact for somebody seeking support, cannot currently be used by Deaf or hard of hearing people.
- The lack of 24 hour support was identified as a problem particularly in refuge accommodation.
- It was felt that as different organisations deliver medium risk outreach and housing related support, sometimes there is duplication of services. Also because different organisations deliver services for different levels of risk there is confusion about who is delivering what.
- The current length of support offered to service users was felt to be too short sometimes
- The perpetrator programme (currently lottery funded) was less well known than other services. Currently this programme is restricted to male perpetrator and female victim model, the need to extend this to cover female perpetrators, and people in same sex relationships was identified.
- There was significant concern about changes in legal aid and service users needing support when involved with legal and court systems. The existence of the Domestic Abuse Court Independent Domestic Violence Advisor was identified as very beneficial to those attending court, and staff from domestic abuse services acting as a 'MacKenzie Friend' to support people in court was appreciated.
- The impact of fleeing a domestic abuse situation for refuge accommodation cannot be underestimated. Problems were identified with too much form filling and information when entering services. It is necessary to have a balance between risk reduction/safety and asking someone to fill in too many forms or giving them too much information at a very vulnerable time, when it is difficult to take things in.
- So that people can move towards independence, there needs to be additional support, including help to stay in employment, find employment, financial planning and information and support to access accommodation.

The New Service

Responding to the consultation findings, some of the things in the proposal for the new re-commissioned service from April 2016 included:

- The overall service will be very similar to the existing service in that it will still include refuge accommodation, support for adults and support for children.
- The contract for the High Risk Service, which provides the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), is being extended and not being re-commissioned on the basis that this service was felt to be working well and there was an appetite to keep the service as a countywide service to ensure that everybody has the same level of service. There will be one change to the current contract which is that IDVAs will be based at least two days a week in the area of the county that they work in rather than at the base of the organisation they work for. This is in order to see clients in person rather than contact them by phone.
- There will no longer any distinction between medium risk and standard risk in service provision. In future one organisation will deal with those people felt to be at high risk of serious harm or homicide as described above and another organisation will provide the service locally for all other people suffering domestic abuse. Consequently the Council has entered into a co-commissioning arrangement with the Police and Crime Commissioner who has provided some additional funding to the service recognising the PCCs obligations to provide support for 'standard risk' victims of domestic abuse.
- There will be a new Countywide Advice Line. A single number to ring throughout Derbyshire. It will be staffed by an organisation experienced in domestic abuse which can give advice to people affected by domestic abuse, including victims and friends and family and professionals who want guidance. They will assess the level of risk from that first phone call and make sure that people are put in contact with the correct service for their situation. This line will operate 8.00am - 6.00pm on week days and calls will be picked up by Call Derbyshire overnight, at weekends and bank holidays. Call Derbyshire will pass the call onto the Advice Line first thing on the next working day. This Advice Line number is the one we will be promoting widely to raise awareness of the services available in Derbyshire.
- There will be four locally based services around the county, each will deliver all aspects of the service to anyone who has not been identified as High Risk, including, accommodation, outreach support, counselling, support for children, training, etc. All service providers will work closely together so that services around the county are the same. The areas they will cover are:
 - High Peak and North Derbyshire Dales
 - Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire and Bolsover
 - Amber Valley and Erewash

- South Derbyshire and South Derbyshire Dales
- When allocating the funding, the Council recognised that the service providers in some areas of the County will have to work hard to make sure that services are available to people in remote areas.
- The contracts will be managed to ensure that gaps or problems identified in the course of the consultation will be improved in future, for example:
 - Service providers are trying to engage with the sections of the community who currently don't use the services, so that they feel able to get the help they need. This should be reflected in comments from the people from these groups using the services over time.
 - People requiring emergency access to refuge accommodation are supported.
 - Services work together and communicate so that people throughout the county can expect the same level of service.
- The Council will also make sure that the service providers are working together with the other agencies that can provide help to their service users, for example health, drug and alcohol services, mental health services, etc. so that people with additional issues are supported as much as possible.
- Service providers are also being asked to train the people who work for them in a range of issues so that, for example, they can provide support for people with legal issues, that they have an understanding of equalities and safeguarding, etc.

The consultation was a very useful exercise and a lot was learned from it. The Council would like to consult with service users regularly in the future to check that the services are providing the support people need. If you would like to be involved in any future reviews that we do please can you send your contact details to Alison Boyce Alison.boyce@derbyshire.gov.uk 01629 538272