

Domestic Violence Thematic Audit

Executive Summary

The three central imperatives of any interventions for children living with domestic violence and abuse are to: protect the children, including unborn children; empower the non-abusing parent to protect the children; identify the abusing partner and hold him or her accountable for the abusive behaviour and; provide opportunities to change this behaviour.

The thematic audit was completed in March 2016 and its purpose was to focus on male perpetrators; evaluate the assessment and planning process; explore the success of subsequent interventions and the effectiveness of partnership working. It was anticipated that the information gathered would help identify potential barriers that may have been inhibiting effective partnership working.

Findings

The audit revealed that multi agency responses to domestic violence have significantly improved over recent years and the analysis evidenced our journey to improvement with compelling evidence improvements in partnership working and information sharing since early 2015.

There were also strong indications that the impact of domestic violence on children is fully recognised and responded to with several areas of strengthening practice when working with children was identified. However, there were indications that practitioners were less confident about undertaking work with the perpetrators of domestic abuse and breaking the cycle of abuse.

The initial findings and recommendations of the audit were scrutinised and verified within a multi agency focus group before the publication of the final report. The members of the focus group highlighted that whilst practitioners recognise and value the work done by specialist domestic violence services that work with survivors (such as SIDASS) and perpetrators (such as probation) there was some evidence of incompatibility across the agencies with varying priorities in respect of the needs of child, the needs of the victim and the needs of the perpetrator. This meant there was not always a holistic approach to assessing and safeguarding the family, children and victim, in its entirety. It was agreed that there was a need for specialised training and tools when working with male perpetrators. It was recognised that agencies have specialist perspectives. However, it was the auditor's opinion that working together for the benefit of children and victims would be improved through a better understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.

Good Practice

In brief the audit highlighted good practice in Salford including:

- Effective interventions and work undertaken by highly skilled practitioners.
- Indications that practitioners within Salford are confident in their dealings with perpetrators of domestic violence.

- A record of open and honest dialogue with the family and clarity about expectations.
- There was evidence of robust risk assessment and regularly updated SMART plans.
- Children were provided with support which enabled them to contribute directly to the risk assessment and child protection plan.
- Children's views, wishes and feelings were clearly recorded in assessments.
- Children's thoughts and feelings on what needed to happen/change to make them feel safe was recorded following direct work and shared with the victim and the perpetrator by the social worker.

Recommendations:

- Information sharing practice should be reviewed by all agencies to ensure that allocated case workers have access to recorded information.
- Partners to be informed of plans, including CP and PLO via a consistent information sharing protocol.
- The procedure for Lone working risk assessment should be further embedded in practice to ensure that the assessments are completed and shared with relevant professionals prior to inter-agency referrals.
- Consideration that the outcome of 'No Further Action' for cases that do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention should be abolished and changed to a pathway of signposting and/or referrals to other agencies for early help.
- All practitioners to be supported to access updated research, tools and specialist training.
- Consideration should be given to development and implementation of a holistic risk assessment tool that will address the needs and individual circumstances children, victims and perpetrators within the family.
- Services should be reminded that risk assessments should be updated on a consistent basis.
- Consideration should be given to enabling Schools, who are undertaking CAFs and GCP's to be provided with information about all domestic violence incidents.
- Co- Audit of CAF to be undertaken with the QA Team and EIP Service with a focus on quality of assessments in respect of domestic violence.
- Work should be undertaken to engage agencies in improving the understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities in response to domestic violence.

Next Steps

The implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the Childrens Domestic Abuse (CDA) Subgroup. The CDA Chair reports to the Tackling Domestic Abuse Board (TDAB) and the SSCB Co-ordination and Delivery Group.