

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 11TH OCTOBER, 2021

A MEETING of the COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICE on MONDAY, 11TH OCTOBER, 2021, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Daniel Barwell
Vice-Chair - Councillor Nigel Cannings

Councillors James Church, Gemma Cobby, Julie Grace, Debbie Hutchinson,
Emma Muddiman-Rawlins, Glynis Smith and Gary Stapleton

Union Representative: Jim Board (Unison)

DMBC

- Karen Shooter- Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead
- Bill Hotchkiss – Head of Service (Community Safety)
- Paul Evans – Drainage and Street Works Manager

EXTERNAL

- Mel Palin - Doncaster District Commander (South Yorkshire Police)

9 Apologies for absence.

There were no apologies received.

10 To consider the extent to which the public and press are to be excluded from the meeting.

None

11 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest made.

12 Minutes of the meeting held on the 28th July 2021

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th July 2021 be agreed as a true record.

13 Public Statements.

There were no public statements made.

The Panel received a report, which provided information about the new 2021-2024 Domestic Abuse Strategy. Members were told how the strategy sets out a coordinated community and whole family response to domestic abuse, ensuring that it was everyone's responsibility through clear objectives.

There was a discussion held and the following areas were highlighted;

Data/Victim Support - Clarification was sought on data from the report, that "during the 12 months from April 2020 to March 2021, South Yorkshire Police recorded 9,724 reported incidents of domestic abuse, 6,021 of these were recorded as a crime". It was questioned why 3,703 cases were not recorded as crime.

Members heard how early intervention and support was recognised as being very important in addressing domestic abuse. It was explained that as a country we also record non-crimes and that would mean when a domestic abuse incident occurred, if there was a recordable crime, for example, an assault, theft or harassment etc, a crime would be recorded and flagged as domestic abuse. It was continued that in the event the police attended a report of an incident, for example, reported from an argument from next door (and the relationships within that environment met that criteria), then that would be recorded a domestic abuse non-crime. It was explained that this would result in a referral being made which would then be recorded on the system and allow for further suitable actions to be undertaken accordingly. It was commented that more recently the proportion of crime to non-crime had moved more towards the crime side (partly due to legal changes that have been made to what is a crime).

Members were informed that during the pandemic there had been an increased reporting of domestic abuse, following more time being spent at home and with families, resulting in an increased requirement being placed on support services. It was commented that domestic abuse incidents were previously being prioritised through the court system, and as a result of the pandemic, there had been a delay with all cases and that balance needed to be addressed. It was recognised that the longer it takes for a case to be resolved then the harder it was for the victim.

Reference was made to front line services who might have been able to 'spot the signs' but as a result of the pandemic had not seen people (including children) as they normally would have. It was commented that following the pandemic, there may be an increase in referrals being made through the Domestic Abuse Hub through partner agencies. It was commented that most referrals to the Domestic Abuse Hub currently came from the Police or Children's Services.

Clare's Law - An explanation of Clare's Law was provided in terms of 'right to know' or 'right to ask' and what this meant in terms of the process. Members were informed that during Quarter 1, there had been 64 requests of 'right to know' and 30 requests of 'right to ask' which was a slight reduction on Quarter 4 of the previous year. It was outlined that when Clare's Law was originally launched there had been a great deal of publicity. At present, there was a domestic abuse campaign that was ran once a year, and there was always information on the main website (as well as other partner websites). It was added that there was a wider agency role where disclosures were requested through working with the family. In terms of 'right to inform', it was explained that there was a set criteria to provide sufficient information where the risk of domestic abuse may continue. It was outlined that it was about providing a picture so that the victim was able to make an informed decision and enable partner agencies to support that victim by putting protective measures in place.

Communication - In terms of advertising this information, Members were informed that steps were being taken to update the Domestic Abuse Strategy and website, (the latter contained information on such initiatives as the new perpetrator programme and SmartWater, services

and Clare's Law) which were continually being improved. Members were told about the Domestic Abuse Protocol (launched at a conference in November 2019) which was a key document for partner agencies on how to respond to incidents of domestic abuse and support both victims and offenders. Members heard that through the Domestic Abuse Act, Clare's Law would be placed on a statutory footing and at that point, there would be another campaign. It was commented that further publicity would be undertaken around Domestic Awareness month in October and the 25th November, which would be White Ribbon Day, centred around ending violence against women and girls. Members requested a copy of the communication plan.

Children and Young People – In terms of delivering Domestic Abuse/Healthy Relationships Education in schools across Doncaster's schools, it was explained that this was being undertaken as part of the curriculum. Members were informed that although this has been looked at, information was being waited on from Central Government to be reviewed and made more relevant for Doncaster. In the meantime, it was explained that a programme was in place for secondary schools, and there were peer-mentoring schemes and close working with the 'Youth Council' who were prioritising domestic abuse following the Make your Mark consultation.

It was noted that domestic abuse was not a criminal offence for children under 16. However, it was recognised that children did still enter into such relationships and therefore the Trust looked at referrals both for a growing number of children against parents in households and for children who were perpetrators against other children. Members were assured that steps would be taken to continue to carry out assessments and develop safety plans.

Family Support (Caring Dad Scheme) - Members heard how the Caring Dad Scheme was set up to assist perpetrators with changing behaviours although it was felt that there were limits on what could be achieved. It was recognised that the scheme was very effective for those who attended it voluntarily but less so for those who had been directed to attend it.

Awareness Raising - Members were told how there was a full communication plan in place that mapped out key events and campaigns throughout the year, that was in addition to communications undertaken through twitter and social media. Members were informed about the Community Engagement Worker, who engaged with communities and local businesses in order to raise awareness had received a positive response.

It was continued that both community members and business people had attended domestic abuse training. It was added that the domestic abuse website included a communities page that highlighted work being undertaken and encouraged others to come forward. It was acknowledged that it was about creating a culture where such abuse was not tolerated and that it was everyone's responsibility.

The Panel was told about Domestic Abuse champions who had undertaken Domestic Abuse training and were passionate about raising awareness, sharing information and ideas and finally by working together. Members heard about Domestic Abuse enamel badges and how at present there were 253 individuals wearing badges. It was continued how there were aspirations to increase that number before rolling out a communication campaign. It was hoped that those individuals could generate further self-referrals and early interventions for the victim as well as providing support for those concerned about their own behaviours.

The Panel was also informed about the recent employment of a Survivor Liaison worker, whose role it would be to help shape services and form an understanding from a victim's point of view, look at how to engage with services and where to go next; this was considered an excellent way forward for Doncaster.

Training - It was confirmed that not all of DMBC, St Leger and Doncaster Children's Trust staff had undertaken training around domestic abuse. It was explained that there was a full

domestic abuse programme available on the website, which was free to any organisation within Doncaster. The Panel heard how through the strategy and charter (which referenced 5 standards), contained a standard that was aimed at organisations to identify who needed training, at what level and ensure that they complete it. Reference was also made to work undertaken by the Council's Policy, Insight and Change team around referral pathways and process mapping, which had flagged up areas that needed further training and where training needed to be made mandatory. It was continued that St Leger Housing Doncaster was undertaking a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation Scheme, which incorporated the requirement to undertake domestic abuse training. Finally, a comprehensive list of training available was outlined alongside further courses to be included in the future.

It was explained that in terms of reporting domestic abuse, staff should consult the Domestic Abuse Protocol for advice about reporting on suspected domestic abuse through different referral pathways. It was noted that there was a new guidance was being developed for Doncaster Council staff to support victims who were suffering from domestic abuse and that encouragement was given to other organisations to do the same. It was clarified that the place to refer to was the Domestic Abuse Hub as the single point of contact and Members were assured that although a Council service, it worked closely with the Children's Hub, Phoenix Women's Aid and Riverside.

Phoenix WoMen's Aid - Clarification was provided that Phoenix WoMen's Aid was part of the Doncaster Domestic Abuse Hub as well as part of the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Partnership and were regularly signposted to. It was explained that the Manager attends the partnership meetings and was involved in all partnership work. It was stated that the close working relationship could be demonstrated through the successful collaborative bid that had been previously submitted.

Funding and Accommodation - It was clarified that £732k funding had been received by the Council (not St Leger Housing Doncaster) from the government for statutory requirements placed on local authorities for one year. It was noted that with uncertainty around future funding, there was a challenge to commission services beyond one year. Regarding accommodation, Members were informed that work had been undertaken to review what stock was available in Doncaster. It was continued that conversations were taking place with the Domestic Abuse commissioner, Ministry of Housing and Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) around what Doncaster would like to see going forward. Members were assured that the authority was seeking to prevent victims of abuse spending long periods of time in Bed and Breakfast or hotel accommodation.

Domestic Abuse Charter - Members were informed the charter had been made more achievable for smaller organisations and businesses with 5 standards to evidence. It was explained that a full audit would not be undertaken but that evidence would still be required. It was acknowledged that some of larger statutory organisations may expect more than 5 standards. The Head of Service, Community Safety commented that the charter presented a fantastic way of raising awareness. It was added that the Health and Adult Social Care Directorate was currently working towards this and were appointing Domestic Abuse champions.

Members were informed that work was being undertaken alongside the Commissioning Team with care contracts, ensuring that conditions included that staff of organisations (commissioned by the Council) undertake the training. It was explained that there was a Community Engagement Worker engaging with businesses to make sure they had the necessary information. It was added that in terms of adult safeguarding, information had been shared with care companies. It was acknowledged that certain organisations employed a greater ratio of female staff and they were encouraged to adopt appropriate policies.

Future Pressures - It was hoped that going forward following the pandemic, reporting would increase against a decrease in level of harm, high-risk victims, perpetrators and children. It

was recognised that prior to Covid, further work needed to be done around recognising other types of abuse such as financial and emotional abuse as well as escalating behaviours.

It was acknowledged that changes around Universal Credit could increase pressures within the family and relationships. It was noted that it was important to focus on early intervention and prevention, before it reached crisis point and hoped that the work through strategy, charter, training and communication plan would help with addressing future pressures.

Performance reports - Members were told how domestic abuse was looked at alongside mental health concerns as well as alcohol and drug use. It was noted that more people had been referred to alcohol services during the pandemic.

RESOLVED: that the Panel supports the Domestic Abuse strategy.

15 Flood Risk Briefing and Update

The Panel received a presentation, which described the Borough's overall flood risk and provided an overview of the authority's winter readiness. Members received information about the challenges faced by the authority in delivering flood alleviations' schemes and specifically around the funding of those projects.

There was a discussion held and the following areas were highlighted;

Sand Bags – Regarding the shelf-life and turnover of sandbags, Members were informed that the Council now had hydro bags in stores as they lasted longer. It was noted that the supplier provided sand bags, which were turned over on a regular basis.

It was explained that the location of companies were in Branton and Thorne, and sandbags could also be dropped off at North Bridge. It was reported how at the last near miss event, there had been a 4 day waiting time to prepare. Members heard how the sandbags could be delivered to site so there was no problem in terms of connectivity or being locked in.

Built Environment – Members heard how ensuring that new build housing was not adding pressure to or being built on existing types of flood risks, that sustainable drainage had been brought into planning provision (following the 2007 floods and the Pitt Review) and therefore as part of the consultation for the application, the Council acted as a consultee. Members were assured that further new guidance was coming under planning but had not yet been released.

Members heard that following the 2019 floods, Defra had released a substantial amount of funding, providing £500 per property (Property Flood or Level Resilience) for a survey to be carried out to find out what the best resilience solutions were for that property to be protected. It was continued that a further £4,500 was made available as a grant to provide solutions although any remaining money would have to be found by the resident. The Panel was provided with information on the numbers of households who had followed through with the process and it was acknowledged that there were challenges such as some properties not wanting to engage with the process, some properties being rentals and also due to restrictions arising from the pandemic. Reference was made to the fact that some estates were made of generic houses and it was clarified that the process and guidelines set by Defra was based on the individual property.

The Chair requested that details of the scheme be sent out to Ward Members to help publicise the scheme.

Health Assessments – Regarding whether there had been a health assessment for residents who had been living in properties impacted by the floods, Members were advised that a response would be sought from colleagues in Public Health.

Resources – Further to an enquiry around how many registered and trained volunteer Flood Wardens were operational, Members were informed that it was a function of the Local Environment Agency (LEA) who administered the scheme. The Drainage and Street Works Manager offered to provide this information to Members outside of the meeting.

In terms of employment within the Flood Risk Team, it was explained that at the point of the 2019 floods, that there were 5 members of staff. Following that event, the structure of the team and the budget were reconsidered to expand the capacity of the team to 12 members of staff. Members heard how the team was split into 2 which consisted of Drainage Maintenance Team (dealing with surface water) and the Flood Risk Team (dealing with larger schemes). It was noted that the full 12 members had never been fully recruited (currently operating at around 10/11) which was possibly due to less competitive salaries being offered compared to other authorities and organisations. It was acknowledged that there were challenges with recruiting engineers. It was estimated that there was around 10 experienced Flood Liaison Officers.

Reference was made to a Panel Members own experience of the flood events, the type of response it had been felt had been provided as a Council and what had or hadn't been learnt from the previous floods. The Drainage and Street Works Manager spoke about changes that had taken place following each flood event and the circumstances some of which were outside the authority's control. Members were reminded that the authority was not an emergency response organisation and assurances were provided that the Council's own employees would not be put at risk by entering flood waters. It was suggested that Members may benefit and develop a better understanding from observing a scenario in operation, by contacting the Emergency Planning Team. Reference was made to the preparation that had taken place in February 2021 and what could be achieved with notice.

Later in the meeting, the union representative sought information about staff members entering flood waters.

Members were informed that with the 2019 floods, the Council had been more reactive due to the late forecast. The Panel was told that all residents were able to register with the Environmental Agency (EA) warning system, which would advise of risk of flooding based on postcodes and provide updates. It was recognised that there was better information and communication in place with the Near Miss event in 2021. It was commented that it would be helpful for engineers and residents in Bentley if there were flood warnings in place.

Community Engagement for Newly Elected Ward Members – Reference was made to the planned community engagement that took place during October 2020 and it was asked whether this would be repeated for new Ward Members. The Panel was informed that the last report identified all the community areas and highlighted all the work that had been undertaken such as gully cleansing, watercourse clearing, sandbag removal and emergency work done on repairs. It was explained that the Council was now at a point where schemes were now being undertaken, and the intention was to set out a list of all the schemes in the different areas, the amount of allocated funding that has been secured and finally funding gap for each area and flood alleviation schemes. Members were told that rather than area-based consultation, there would be scheme-by-scheme consultation through meeting with representatives from localised flood groups to discuss Council plans. It was added that this would be reflective of how communication and consultation would be handled going forward. It was commented that there were no plans around doing something specific such as through the newsletters although it was felt there was potential to consolidate that.

RESOLVED that the Panel notes the information provided.

16 Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Senior Governance Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan report for the 2021/2022 municipal year.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan for 2021/2022 be approved; and
2. The Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions, be noted.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____