

CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES - 22 AUGUST 2011

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 22 AUGUST 2011 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage, Deputy Leader - Chairperson

Councillors

H J David
A E Davies
L C Morgan

Invitees:-

Councillor N Clarke	Councillor P A Hacking
Councillor P A Evans	Councillor R M James
Councillor C A Green	Councillor M C Wilkins

Officers:

D MacGregor	- Assistant Chief Executive - Performance
H Hammond	- Policy and Performance Management Officer
A Bowen	- Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration
J Davies	- Community Safety Team Leader
C Porter	- Community Safety Partnership Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator
A Lee	- Legal Officer
A Rees	- Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

116 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:-

Councillor M Gregory	- Holiday
Councillor R Jenkins	- Unwell
Councillor M E J Nott	- Holiday
Councillor M Thomas	- Holiday
Councillor P J White	- Unwell

117 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

118 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities held on 23 May 2011 were approved as a true and accurate record.

119 NOTES OF CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

RESOLVED: That the notes of the Corporate Equalities Management Group held on 11 May and 3 August be noted.

120 SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR TACKLING DOMESTIC ABUSE AND IDENTIFIED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration reported that nationally, domestic abuse affected one in four women and one in six men. Domestic abuse can be physical, psychological or sexual abuse and stalking. Some definitions also contain financial abuse. In Bridgend, domestic abuse is addressed in unison with violent crime and it is this aspect which is a strategic priority for the Community Safety Partnership Crime and Disorder Plan. The interconnectedness of domestic violence issues with other aspects of community wellbeing is reflected by domestic abuse being included in many of the Council's plans and strategies.

The number of domestic violence referrals received by the Police had remained broadly consistent for several years, with a higher prevalence in Bridgend's valley areas. This type of crime is under reported and social, cultural and economic factors can affect the levels of reporting in different geographical areas. Substance misuse, particularly alcohol is a prevalent factor in many incidents of domestic abuse and other types of violent crime. There had been 884 incidents reported in the County Borough's area with 154 repeat incidents. The repeat levels were broadly similar to other areas of similar size to Bridgend, however RCT Council has a larger percentage of repeat incidents.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration highlighted the support services available to those affected by domestic violence, where the third sector plays an important role in service delivery. Bridgend Womens Aid offers free, confidential and non-judgmental services to women and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse. The services offered were highlighted.

She also reported that the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) provides support to male or female high risk victims whilst they are going through the criminal or civil justice systems. The IDVA post is funded through a combination of Home Office funding and Community Safety Grant via the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The IDVA had dealt with 237 referrals.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration explained that Hafan Cymru provides temporary accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse and is funded through the Supporting People Revenue Grant Programme contracted directly by the Welsh Government. A remodelling of the service is currently being explored. The Wallich provides 14 Units of temporary accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse with complex needs and this is a cross boundary project that supports Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Local Authorities. These services are also funded through the Welsh Government's Supporting People Revenue Grant.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee of the establishment of a Specialist Domestic Violence Court in Bridgend which had led to various agencies working together to identify, track and risk assess domestic violence cases, support victims of domestic violence and share information so that

more offenders are brought to justice. High risk referrals are reviewed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The Community Safety Partnership is making available eight hours per week of advocacy, advice and support to assist those families with complex needs, where domestic violence is a risk factor.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration highlighted the priorities in the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women Strategic Delivery Plan currently under development by the Community Safety Partnership. The key challenge for the plan will be addressing areas of emerging concern such as stalking and male victims of domestic abuse as well as sustaining existing services during a period of funding reduction from central government. She explained that, the services currently provided in Bridgend are predominantly reactive and initial thinking suggests a need to reprioritise in favour of early intervention and prevention. A key priority for the Community Safety is the effective recording and monitoring so that both levels of abuse and the relative effectiveness of interventions can be measured. The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that research revealed that on average an individual would suffer 36 instances of violence before the matter was reported by the victim to the Police.

The Group Manager Housing and Community Regeneration reported on a collaborative working initiative to build a more integrated approach. Safer Bridgend and Safer Vale Community Safety Partnerships had formally agreed to fund a single Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator's post using the Welsh Government ring fenced grant. Feedback from partners to this approach had been very positive. Charlotte Porter the Bridgend/Vale Community Safety Partnership Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator was introduced to the Committee.

The Committee questioned the way in which the data is collected and whether work was done in collaboration with the NHS in respect of domestic abuse cases dealt with by them. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that cross referencing of data does need to be made with the NHS. The Committee was informed that the 884 cases recorded were for domestic abuse and if reported arguments were added it would amount to 2,912 cases.

The Committee questioned the support services available to men fleeing domestic violence. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that there were not a great deal of cases reported for men and they did not tend to access the same services as women. It was also felt that there was a stigma attached to men reporting instances of domestic violence. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator explained that she was undertaking some work with Cardiff Council regarding the lack of support to men suffering domestic abuse.

The Committee questioned whether the Crown Prosecution Service would prosecute perpetrators if the victims were reluctant to appear in Court. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that the CPS could continue with their prosecution but the case may be dropped due to the witnesses being hostile. She explained that the IDVA service will have assessed all cases referred to them, however there were insufficient IDVAs to meet demand. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that in order to support victims there was also a need to have in place support mechanisms for their children. There was a need to look at the reasons behind perpetrators of domestic violence committing those crimes and to look at the root cause which could have been embedded at an early age in their lives.

The Committee commented that the data collected related only to physical violence, however many instances would be embedded in arguments. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that the Police collect data on arguments, however it was harder to collect data on stalkers. She informed the Committee that it was important to have early support mechanisms for victims.

The Committee commented on the unfairness of women having to flee the home instead of the perpetrators being forced from the home. It was also difficult for women fleeing to change bank account and mortgage details without having the partners consent and thereby having contact with them. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator concurred with the view of the Committee that women should not have to leave the home. The IDVA was able to offer support through the Court system, together with constructing a safety plan, completing an index assessment and signposting to relevant partners and agencies to support victims. The Committee commented on the need to pressure government agencies to strengthen support services and that information should be made widely known by the Council of the services available to support victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator stated that the information about support services had not been made as widely available as it should have, however all surgeries and clinics had access to these services and she had ordered merchandise to be made available highlighting the range of support services that were in place.

The Committee expressed concern that Bridgend did not receive any funding previously and asked whether an application could be made to the Minister for Local Government in the next tranche of funding. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that the Council was not successful in the last round of applications as there was a lack of sustainability in the bid. There were concerns regarding the sustainability for agencies to second staff to a one stop shop and she commented on the need to undertake a feasibility study on the sustainability issue.

The Committee expressed its concerns regarding the way in which data was collected to record instances of domestic abuse. The Assistant Chief Executive Performance stated that there was a need for the Community Safety Partnership to undertake a piece of work to improve data capture and take the issue forward to inform the Local Service Board.

The Assistant Chief Executive Performance commented that as the IDVA deal with the most serious cases, he was concerned that less than half of the referrals receive a service and he questioned whether any contact was maintained for those who do not access the IDVA service. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that the high risk cases will be picked up by the Local Authority whilst other agencies would pick up the remainder of the referrals.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Community Safety Partnership Co-ordinator stated that domestic abuse is an important topic in the Partnership and is dealt with as a stand alone subject. He highlighted good practice in the appointment of the appointment of a Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator with Bridgend and the Vale. The Local Service Board Neighbourhood Network had met to consider domestic abuse and health issues and he was confident that the Partnership had the right people in place to tackle domestic abuse.

The Committee questioned whether measures could be put in place to support victims who had not sought the support of the IDVA. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator commented that support would be available through the multi-agency risk assessment conference and that there was a need to ensure that victims who choose not to engage with the IDVA seek the assistance of the MARAC.

The Committee requested that consideration be given to an alternative name for the Strategic Delivery Plan and asked whether there would be consultation on the plan. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that the Strategic Delivery Plan was so named due to the need to fit into the plans of the Government and the Welsh Government, however a new name would be considered. Consultation on the Strategic Delivery Plan would be undertaken.

The Committee asked whether there was involvement of the registered social landlords in supporting victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator informed the Committee that there was regular communication with two registered social landlords to discuss the provision of facilities such as panic rooms.

The Committee considered that a letter from the Chair should be sent to the Home Office concerning the cut in grant for the Advocacy Service.

The Committee considered that it wished to see within the Strategic Delivery Plan measures being taken to tackle issues of domestic violence in areas of highest instances.

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (1) The services currently available to tackle domestic abuse and the emerging priorities for the next three years be noted.
- (2) The Community Safety Partnership be requested to undertake a piece of work to improve data collection in order to inform the Local Service Board.
- (3) A letter be sent to the Home Office objecting to the cut in grant available for the Advocacy Service.

121 DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance reported that the Equality Act 2010 introduced a new general duty for public bodies to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations with individuals within the equality groups with protected characteristics. In addition the Welsh Government had introduced specific duties for public authorities in meeting the general duties under the Act. One of these is a duty to publish equality objectives and a strategic equality plan by 2 April 2012. The equality objectives must set out how the Council will address the most pressing issues for each of the equality groups.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance outlined to the Committee the eight parts of the guidance published by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission which provided an overview of all the specific duties that apply to listed public

authorities in Wales. In addition, the WLGA had published had published a revised equality improvement framework which when taken together with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission guidance would provide a considerable amount of guidance and material that will inform the development of the Council's first Strategic Equality Plan.

He reported that the Corporate Equality Management Group held a workshop which was facilitated by the individual that was engaged by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to draft the guidance. This enabled the group to develop a better understanding of the duties and identify the actions that needed to be taken to develop the initial strategic equality plan for the Council and ensure that the Council complied with requirements.

He stated that information had been gathered from Directorates to help understand service use and identify known issues for all groups with protected characteristics and from this work, it was already apparent that there was a need to develop arrangements and improve the way in which local data was captured to form part of the evidence base. In areas where direct work is regularly undertaken with service users such as in Social Care and Education, more data in relation to the protected characteristics was collected than in services such as Arts and Culture, where very little such data was collected. Information gathering is therefore somewhat of a problem area, although neighbouring local authorities had also identified this as a problem area.

He reported that a key consultation mechanism supporting the development of the equality objectives is the Valley Voices project, which was being run by VALREC. He summarised the initial contribution to the engagement process.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance reported that work on collating information and views of a cross section of individuals was being progressed and the result of this would support the development of the draft equality objectives for consideration by the Committee in November.

RESOLVED: That:-

- (1) The progress made be noted.
- (2) A further report be presented to the next meeting on the draft equality objectives.

122 WLGA EQUALITY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance provided an update on the revised WLGA Equality Improvement Framework for Wales (EIF) which was developed to promote, manage and improve the quality within local government in Wales and sat within the Wales Programme for Improvement. Implementation of the framework is voluntary.

He reported that the framework comprised four equality improvement areas:-

- Community Engagement
- Leadership and Organisational Commitment

- Generating Outcomes
- Equipped Workforce.

He stated that within each of the improvement areas are a number of 'building blocks' which help clarify what is required to achieve progress. Beneath these are a number of suggested actions or goals that will enable the building blocks to be achieved. The guidance recommends a project management approach to take forward work in implementing the framework and it also suggests some basic practical steps to assist implementation. There is significant overlap between the revised framework, the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the specific duties in Wales. He stated that many of the suggested actions within the framework are already being undertaken or planned to be undertaken as part of the work on the development of the Strategic Equality Plan. Some of the actions go beyond what the Authority needs to achieve before next April, for example, mechanisms for internal staff feedback on equality impact assessments and workplace issues.

He stated that it was proposed that the framework be used to help development of the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) and it would also seem appropriate that the framework be used as an evaluation tool to assist in the requirement to review the SEP following its publication.

RESOLVED: That:-

- (1) The publication of the WLGA Equality Improvement Framework be noted.
- (2) The proposal that the Authority uses the Equality Improvement Framework to inform the development of its Strategic Equality Plan, and uses the Equality Improvement Framework as an evaluation tool be agreed.

123 UPDATED ACTION PLAN FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2011-12

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance reported on an updated action plan for the Council's Welsh Language Scheme for 2011/12. For the period between the end of the current plan and the setting of the new standards, it was proposed that the current scheme be retained and an updated action plan prepared which will ensure progress on meeting the Council's duties under the Welsh Language Act and the promotion of the use of the Welsh Language continues. The action plan includes actions to further deliver on the objectives of the current Welsh Language Scheme in areas of

- Advice and guidance
- Website development
- Recruitment advertising
- Staffing and training
- Customer service
- Performance measurement
- Commissioning and procurement

RESOLVED: That the draft action plan be approved.

124 EQUALITIES TRAINING

The Chairperson informed the Committee that equalities training would be held for all Members during October and the Democratic Services Manager would notify Members of the date of the training.

125 LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE AT COMMITTEE

The Chairperson advised the Committee that this would be the last meeting in which a representative of Legal Services would be present and he thanked the Legal Officer for the support given to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 11.34am