

Classification:

Public

Key Decision:

No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Date: 20 March 2018

Reporting Officer: Strategic Manager, Community Safety Unit

Subject: Altogether Safer – Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls in North Kent

Purpose and summary of report:**Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- a) Note and comment on the content of the Altogether Safer Annual Report 2017-18.

1. Background

- 1.1 In December 2016, the Home Office announced that it had created a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Transformation Fund and was inviting bids from Local Authorities and Health Authorities to support projects to address this issue. Gravesham's Community Safety Unit (CSU) saw this as an opportunity to work with some of our partner agencies to put together a programme of work to help reduce VAWG and submitted a bid in late February 2017.
- 1.2 The announcement on the outcome of applications was delayed due to the General Election but in July 2017 we received notification that our bid was one of 61 projects nationwide that had been successful. Funding was agreed in full for our project (Altogether Safer – Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls in North Kent) and we have been awarded a total grant of £229,000 over three financial years from 2017-18 to 2019-20 (c. £76,300 p.a.).

2. Our partner organisations

- 2.1 Whilst Gravesham CSU prepared and submitted the funding bid, the delivery of the project is a collaborative effort between:

Gravesham Borough Council (CSU)

Dartford Borough Council (CSU)

Kent Police

Choices (formerly North Kent Women's Aid and specialist domestic abuse service provider)

Kent Equality Cohesion Council (KECC)

Rethink Mental Illness (locally Rethink Sahayak)

3. Project Outline

- 3.1 The ultimate aim of Altogether Safer is to fill serious gaps in service provision by:
- directly improving the availability of services and the speed with which they are accessible to victims;
 - bringing more offenders to justice;
 - changing attitudes and breaking the cycle of VAWG through preventative work with boys and young men;
 - drawing under-represented women/girls into services and raising awareness within communities and particularly in respect of Hard to reach groups.
- 3.2 A Police Station-based Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service at weekend nights/Out of Hours provides readily accessible, expert advice for victims and front-line officers – crucial engagement at the right time. Victims do not have to wait until the following week for this support which can otherwise be too little, too late and result in a disproportionately high ratio of victims declining to support a prosecution in Dartford and Gravesham.
- 3.3 Choose Respect is a targeted programme for boys and young men aged 11-18 years displaying challenging, aggressive, controlling or anxious behaviours. The programme addresses factors influencing their behaviour through small group work and 1:1 sessions proven to reduce and prevent violent and aggressive behaviour. The use of social media as a tool for abuse and exploitation is also addressed through the programme delivered in conjunction with schools and a wide range of services coming into contact with young people.
- 3.4 Collaborative work between North Kent Equality Cohesion Council (KECC) and Rethink Sahayak is focusing on encouraging engagement with services by victims across BME communities (currently unrepresented). Awareness-raising, service promotion, peer-led support and initiatives to remove the stigma associated with seeking help within certain cultures, will continue to break down existing barriers. Activities (including some for women and girl-only audiences) are used to generate confidence and provide environments in which victims can be empowered to discuss their experiences and get the help they need.
- 3.5 Altogether Safer supports the objectives of our joint Dartford and Gravesham Community Safety Partnership Strategy and our own corporate community safety business plan as well as contributing towards the Council's Safeguarding Agenda.

4. Our first year

- 4.1 Despite the late announcement of successful bids which resulted in a significant period of time being 'lost' in this first year of the project, considerable efforts have been made by all those involved and by using additional staff/covering additional hours, we have managed to still effect a full spend and meet the original targets set in Year 1.

- 4.2 It is also very encouraging indeed that in February 2018, we were approached by the Home Office seeking our approval for our project to be featured in a newsletter that the Department's Safeguarding Team produce and issue to a number of stakeholders ranging from police, local authorities, social, health care, academia and charity sectors. The next edition is due to be issued in the Spring and this will help to raise the profile of the work that is being carried out locally.

Full details of the work carried out in each of the project's key strands and its impact are contained in the project's Annual Report attached as Appendix 1.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1: Altogether Safer Annual Report 2017-18.