

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee
Date: 15 September 2020
Reporting officer: Strategic Manager (Community Safety Unit)
Subject: Altogether Safer – Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) - Project End Update

Purpose and summary of the report:

Following the conclusion of the Home Office funded project, Altogether Safer – Reducing VAWG in North Kent) in March 2020, this report provides Members with a brief overview of the impact of the different strands of the project during its lifetime. It should be noted that this report provides only key highlights but a full Independent Evaluation Report of the Project can be shared with Members on request to the Community Safety Unit.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note and offer any comments on the content of the report.

1. Background

1.1 In 2016, Gravesham's Community Safety Unit (CSU) submitted a successful consortium bid to the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Transformation Fund. A total of £248,464.00 was awarded over 3 years to the Altogether Safer Project led by Gravesham Council's Community Safety Unit (CSU) and delivered in collaboration with North Kent Police; Choices (specialist domestic abuse service provider); Kent Equality Cohesion Council (KECC); Rethink Mental Illness (Rethink Sahayak); and Dartford Council.

1.2 Specifically the project aimed to:

- Improve the availability and quality of services for victims of domestic abuse so that they are more accessible and meet victims' needs;
- Change attitudes/break the cycle of violence through preventative work;
- Increase awareness amongst under-represented women/girls, encouraging them to report their experiences and access services available to support them;
- Work with local communities to help break down cultural barriers that could be influencing victims to remain silent;
- Bring more offenders to justice.

1.3 Three distinct strands of the project were developed to address these aims:

Police Station Based Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Service

The provision of an IDVA service based at North Kent Police Station at weekends/outside office hours was set up to provide expert advice for victims and front line officers. Availability of advice and support at the right time was crucial; without it victims could have

to wait days to access appropriate support and this was impacting the number of victims willing to support a prosecution.

Engagement with domestic abuse support services across BAME communities

Collaborative work between KECC and Rethink sought to encourage engagement with services by victims from BAME communities who were under-represented. This included awareness raising, service promotion, peer-led support and initiatives to remove the stigma associated with domestic abuse. Some activities were exclusively for women and girls to generate confidence and encourage victims to discuss their experiences and seek help.

Choices Respect Programme

This part of the project worked with targeted boys and young men displaying challenging, aggressive, controlling or anxious behaviours. It addressed factors influencing their behaviour through small group work and 1-2-1 sessions proven to reduce violence and aggression. The programme also addressed the use of social media as a tool for exploitation/abuse and was delivered in partnership with schools and education providers.

2. The Police Station Based IDVA Service

2.1 IDVAs were provided by Choices on commencement of the Project who underwent police vetting processes and trained to use police databases. They were accommodated at North Kent Police Station, working alongside the Police Vulnerability Investigation Team (VIT). Briefing sessions were given by an IDVA trainer to police colleagues to increase the understanding of the role of the IDVAs and the support they provide. This was an innovative and creative partnership intervention that was a new approach and that successfully dealt with the challenges of different working practices, procedures and systems.

2.2 Over the three years of the Project, the IDVAs supported 269 adults who between them had 349 children. Numerous case studies have been collected that clearly demonstrate the value of having an IDVA available to work alongside police officers when cases come to attention outside of standard office hours. In some of the case examples, it meant that the victim was able to be accurately assessed by the IDVA without delay. Appropriate engagement and sufficient support helped them to be confident enough to disclose a number of offences resulting in the suspect being arrested. Feedback received from both victims assisted and Kent Police colleagues confirm the positive impact of the service. This is impressive given that the service was only operating for 12 hours per week (with the exception of the second six months of 2018-19 when it was able to extend hours to 18 per week on receipt of some additional funding from the Home Office in that year).

3. Engagement with domestic abuse support services across BAME communities

3.2 This element of the Project was led by KECC and Rethink Mental Illness as very well-established local agencies with extensive community links/strong credibility and likely to be effective in approaching women and girls who might otherwise be harder to reach, to engage in the project's activities. The focus was on targeting women and girls from BAME communities to raise awareness of VAWG and available services and remove the stigma of reporting domestic abuse using a range of methods including:

- Holding an annual conference and social event (Sadi Awaaz Suno – Listen to our Voices) to explore different topics and issues to encourage open discussion;
- Engagement with community and faith groups/venues;
- Work with the Gurdwara to engage with men and boys from the Sikh community;
- The use of social media (Facebook, Twitter) and YouTube to highlight particular forms of violence and services available;
- Developing peer support networks for victims.

- 3.3 Local events were used as opportunities to disseminate information and advice particularly as some of the high profile local events are especially well-attended by women and children from BAME communities. These included:
- The UK India Year of Culture Celebrations (organised by KECC, in partnership with Gravesham BC and the Sharodia Druga) hosted by the UK Hindu Cultural Association);
 - Diwali celebrations at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Gravesend) and during the Festival of Light (Dartford);
 - Interfaith events taking place across both Dartford and Gravesham;
 - Gravesham Festival of Christmas Lights;
 - Community outreach in support of International Women's Day activities at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara;
 - Open discussions with the Indian community in collaboration with the Gurdwara, with a number of events being hosted by the temple itself;
 - Fusion Festival (Gravesend).
- 3.4 The annual Sadi Awaaz Suno Conference has been incredibly successful. The Project originally set a target of 150 women and girls to attend each conference. This was greatly exceeded with 880 attendees over three years. The conferences have covered a wide range of issues relevant to domestic abuse including: modern slavery and human trafficking; mental illness; female genital mutilation (FGM), alcohol abuse, forced marriage and honour-based violence. Interpreters and translators have been present at each event to assist with audience participation and feedback forms from attendees have clearly demonstrated the value of this event.
- 3.5 KECC and Rethink have also produced several short film clips that have been available on YouTube and used to raise awareness and encourage reporting. One of these, the Ladies Sangeet, examines a domestic abuse victim's silence. It was shot within an Indian Sub-Continent cross-generational context with the cast made up of local BAME women. It has been used as a tool to begin conversations on the issue of domestic abuse more broadly.
- 3.6 In assessing the impact of work carried out with BAME women and girls, it is important to remember that 'word of mouth' plays a significant role in sharing information and raising awareness. The conference and other local settings/events provided an opportunity for discussions to begin that will continue in the community and between families and friends. 98.0% of 215 survey responses following the holding of the conference in Year 3 recorded that the event had increased their awareness and understanding of support services and how to access them and the same percentage asked that a similar event continue to be organised each year. Rethink Mental Illness have repeatedly seen an increase in women accessing their services in the period directly following the conference. It also seems that this work specifically with the BAME community may have resulted in an increase in BAME victims accessing the Police Station Based IDVA service: in Year 1 of the Project, 19.1% of victims supported were from the BAME community; in Year 3, this had risen to over 30.0%, indicating that barriers to seeking help are being broken down.

4. Choose Respect Programme

- 4.1 This strand of the Project was a preventative, targeted programme for boys and young men aged 11-16 displaying challenging, aggressive, controlling or anxious behaviours. Delivered in partnership with schools and education providers, the programme provided 1-2-1 and small group sessions proven to reduce and prevent violent and aggressive behaviour. The programme also addressed the use of social media as a tool for abuse and exploitation.
- 4.2 During the lifetime of the Project, a total of 204 boys and young men have been supported through either 1:1 or small group work. Data collated as part of post-programme

assessments suggest that the intervention and support provided had some very positive results. In each of the years 1-3 of the Project, the outcomes were extremely similar with:

100.0% of participants stating that:

- Their ability to be assertive (in the face of peer pressure) had increased;
- Their aggression had decreased;
- They were able to identify respect, honesty and empathy as important for healthy relationships and communication; and,
- 98% were able to identify relationship skills including self-esteem, assertiveness and healthy boundaries as important in a healthy relationship.
- 96.5% felt that their understanding of their feelings had increased.
- 87% were able to identify that abuse occurs in relationships because of power and control.

4.3 Case studies were collated throughout the three years have served to illustrate the value of the Programme and also highlighted some of the issues, experiences and behaviours which the young people taking part brought to the Project, including: difficulty in controlling anger; inability to express emotions; aggressive and threatening behaviour; ADHD, ODD and ASD diagnoses; verbal and physical attacks; witnessing domestic abuse in their family; risk-taking behaviour; bereavement; struggling in the classroom.

4.4 Feedback not just from the individuals themselves that took part but also from teachers of schools that participated and parents was extremely positive. The following comments from one teacher were included within the Project's Independent Evaluation Report:

'We have been fortunate enough to have accessed the Choose Respect Programme for a number of our students. The impact of this has been invaluable. The students are referred for a number of reasons and often have a complex background and negative relationships. The opportunity is there for their individual needs to be met through group work or in a 1:1 setting. The high majority of students referred have fully engaged. From these we have seen an improvement in attendance, attitude to learning and a decrease in risk taking behaviour and poor choices. Our young men have felt understood, listened to and expressed gratitude for the intervention.'

5. Overall Assessment, Value for Money and Future Work

5.1 An Independent Evaluation Report was completed as required by the terms of our Grant Agreement and was provided to the Home Office. The Project was delivered in full, to agreed deadlines and within budget. Gravesham Council had forward-funded the initiatives and all expenditure was successfully claimed at the end of each year.

5.2 Details provided above demonstrate the impact of the work carried out on those individuals and families supported. However, on a pragmatic level it is also important to consider the value for money aspects of what has been delivered. The Home Office Report 'Economic and Social Costs of Domestic Abuse' published in January 2019, estimated the cost of domestic abuse in England and Wales for the financial year ending March 2017 was over £66 billion. The estimated number of domestic abuse victims in that year was 1,946,00, giving an average cost of £34,015 per victim. The costs of the interventions delivered through Altogether Safer should be considered alongside these:

Weekend/Out of Hours IDVA Service – in supporting a total of 269 adult clients, the unit cost per client was £187.31. It should be noted that a number of the cases supported by the IDVAs were complex, high risk and therefore, time consuming. Children are often the hidden victims of domestic abuse and if the clients' 349 children between them are also

included, the unit cost comes down to approximately £80.00.

Improving access to services (BAME communities) – this work was successful in reaching a large number of women and girls through its annual conference/other events. It is impossible to calculate an accurate figure of the number of beneficiaries. However, there were 880 attendees at the conferences alone and so it is still likely that at least 1000 would have benefited in some way across all the events.

This part of the project cost £36,000, an estimated unit cost of £36 per participant. However, the impact of the project can be seen on a sliding scale in terms of intervention and support. From the lower end – perhaps a woman picking up and keeping a leaflet about domestic abuse and help available, to a woman being actively supported by one of the Rethink workers, or being referred to other services to enable her to leave an abusive relationship. Awareness-raising in this context is invaluable and together with the opportunity for women to meet together at the conferences and discuss a number of difficult issues, the project demonstrated excellent value for money.

Choose Respect Programme - worked with 204 boys and young men during the three years. Details provided in case studies and the young men's own assessment of how the project affected their behaviour indicate that the project had a positive impact on them with the potential to change their future lives and also the lives of those around them. The unit cost for this part of the project is just under £640 for each boy/young man who took part in the 12 week Programme. Some of the participants were displaying significant anger and aggression to other members of their families and without the intervention of the Programme this might have resulted in them being placed in the care of the local authority. That course of action would have been far more expensive (£640 would barely pay for a week's foster care) and potentially would have had a long-term impact on their future in terms of education, training and the ability to develop healthy relationships. It is also worth noting that the Programme was labour intensive, especially when providing 1:1 sessions.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 As a result of funding coming to an end, the Weekend/Out of Hours IDVA Service has had to be discontinued but it is hoped that given the relatively small cost in providing the service, and as a result of similar work being carried out by Kent County Council in providing a Hospital based IDVA service, that this provision may be considered for incorporation into the wider commissioned domestic abuse services provided county-wide. Choices have been considering broadening the Choose Respect Programme in order that further external funding can be sought. The Sadi Awaaz Suno annual conference will continue as funding from the Community Safety Unit's own budget will be able to sustain this. A conference had been planned for 12 November 2020 but this has now been deferred until 2021 as due to Coronavirus restrictions the event is not viable.
- 6.2 Kent Police, KECC, Rethink Mental Illness and Gravesham's CSU will continue to work together and a new project, due to commence in the autumn, will focus on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (many of the issues overlap with work carried out as part of the Altogether Safer Project). This new initiative will also bring colleagues from Porchlight (homelessness charity) and Kent Police Serious Crime Directorate into our Working Group and we hope to be able to establish best practice locally in our approach to raising awareness of modern slavery and supporting victims of this other crime type that experiences considerable underreporting nationwide.

IMPLICATIONS	
Legal	The Council has a statutory obligation to work with partner agencies to address crime and ASB and SOC (Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Serious Organised Crime Act 2015).
Finance and Value for Money	Other than nominal costs, the Altogether Safer Project was funded in its entirety through a successful bid to the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls Transformation Fund.
Risk assessment	The Council has a duty of care and responsibility to work with our partners to support victims of violent crime and protect vulnerable people from harm. As a key local public agency, failure to take opportunities to develop this work would threaten the reputation of the Council in fulfilling its legal obligations.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (OPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <u>personal data</u> or <u>special category data</u> or <u>criminal offence data</u> ? No
	b. If yes to question a., have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/a
	c. If no to question b., please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk
Equality Impact Assessment	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? No.
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? No
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Corporate Business Plan	The Altogether Safer Project made a direct contribution to improving public safety as a key priority within the Corporate Plan.
Crime and Disorder	The work of the Altogether Safer Project made a significant contribution the Dartford and Gravesham CSP's strategic objectives of addressing violence and domestic abuse.
Climate Change	None.
Digital/website website implications	None.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	The safeguarding of vulnerable young people and adults is a high priority for the Council and partner agencies; much of the work carried out through the Altogether Safer Project has potentially helped to prevent vulnerable individuals coming to harm and to protect victims from re-victimisation.