

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: Step Change Project (Project End Update)

Purpose and summary of the report:

This report provides Members with details of the Step Change Project that was initiated as the result of a successful bid to the MHCLG Domestic Abuse Service Fund submitted by the Council's Community Safety Unit. Funding was provided for the financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20 and the Project has been delivered at an operational by Choices (domestic abuse service provider).

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note and comment upon the content of the report.

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2018, the MHCLG announced that it was making available funding to support innovative approaches to improve services available to victims of domestic abuse. Gravesham's Community Safety Unit (CSU) worked closely with Choices (domestic abuse service provider) in submitting a bid to fund the delivery of a new project called Step Change and was successful in being awarded £137,880.00.
- 1.2 Step Change is a preventative, 'wrap around the family' support model providing a scaffold of measures and tools to directly assist victims of domestic abuse and their children. The Step Change approach places the victim at the centre of local domestic service provision, tailoring the assistance provided to meet the specific, individual and often complex needs of the victim and their children. Working with the family as a whole, the method of intensive support used reduces demands on a raft of services by:
 - minimising the risk of repeat victimisation;
 - addressing the very specific and complex needs of the victim/the family;
 - empowering victims to have more control over their future by placing them at the centre of decision-making and allowing them to be personally involved in the development of support plans;
 - breaking the cycle of violence through preventative work with children alongside the non-violent parent;
 - enabling local services to work more collaboratively and effectively to ensure the best outcome for victims/families supported and make best use of resources.
- 1.3 Choices employed and line-managed specialist workers to provide intensive support to the victims and their children. The Project also had the opportunity to be able to provide a bed space at one of Choices residential support properties should an individual and their child/children require accommodation for a short period of time.

2. How has the Project performed in meeting its objectives?

2.1 Late announcement of invitation to bid for funding and consequently, late release of funds to successful projects by Government meant that in reality the Project that was planned for delivery over a 2 year period had only just over 12 months within which to meet its targets. Evidence of the high demand for the service provided is served purely by the fact that the target numbers originally set were exceeded within the shortened timescales. The original target was to aim to work with approximately 80 adults and approximately 120 children. The Project actually worked successfully with 92 individuals and 180 children.

2.2 In terms of the specialist support and advice provided to victims, this included:

- support with housing issues as a high priority – 1:1 support in making contact with local housing providers and working with the victim to access information regarding available accommodation, checking cost details and ensuring affordability;
- providing guidance with finances and support to access welfare benefits;
- promoting good mental health and signposting to specialist services if needed;
- offering parenting advice and aids to ensure healthy relationships are maintained with children;
- direct work with children within the family (school year 7 and upwards);
- Risk assessment and safety planning.

2.3 Where appropriate, victims were referred to Choices own hostel premises (for clients aged 18-25 years and who have young children or are pregnant) where they could be supported until ready to move to independent living. The Project specifically worked with victims with complex needs e.g. mental health issues, drug/alcohol dependency problems, victims from cultural backgrounds in which reporting domestic abuse may be seen as bringing shame upon the wider family. Victims experiencing a multitude of difficulties often live with chaos and their experiences are often typified e.g. by missed appointments, inability to travel to meetings with professionals due to financial constraints. The Step Change approach aims to counter these factors in several ways. The Step Change workers accompany/support the victims directly and act as a conduit between agencies to make sure that communication is maintained. Through regular contact with the victim, they ensure that planned professional interventions take place at the most appropriate time. The approach appreciates there may be times when a victim 'takes a step back' e.g. they may fail to adhere to a treatment programme to which they have made a commitment to follow, but this is dealt with through the intensive support sessions to understand what caused the momentary lapse and the victim and the worker work together to identify what is needed to get the victim back on track. This non-judgemental process helps to build and restore the victim's confidence and significantly reduces the risk of disengagement with services that might otherwise occur.

2.4 From the point of referral, the needs of the children attached to the parent victim are assessed and children have benefited from either (or both) structured programmes of 1:1 and group work bespoke to the specific needs of the particular child/children and family.

Work with children has included:

- Sessions enabling children's expression, discussion and disclosure using a variety of tools e.g. Signs of Safety Tree Houses;
- Arts and crafts and play methods;
- Targeted activity to re-build/strengthen the child-parent relationship;
- Making appropriate referrals to other schemes such as HeadStart and to Family and Children's Centres.

2.5 The majority of case referrals to the Project have been made by Kent County Council's Early Help Teams, Education and Kent Police.

3. Outcomes of the Project and Current Position

3.1 Of the 92 referrals to the Project, 72 people (78%) went on to fully engage i.e. required more than signposting or very short-term advice and guidance. The most common age range of victims supported was 25-34 years (46%); the youngest victim was in the age range 16-17 years and the eldest in the 55-64 years range. The majority of the victims classified themselves as White UK (60 victims or 65% of the total). At the time of completing monitoring returns to the MHCLG, full assessments had been completed with 23 of the longer-term support cases that had then closed with the following results:

- Increase in emotional well-being: 18 (78%)
- Increase in general feeling of safety: 15 (65%)
- Reduction in the fear of harm: 15 (65%)
- Increase in financial stability: 16 (70%)
- Improved confidence in engaging with other services: 13 (57%)
- Improved confidence to identify and overcome abusive behaviour: 14 (61%)
- Improved confidence in decision-making for themselves and their children: 13 (57%)
- Improvement in parent-child relationship: 15 (65%)
- Improvement in children's well-being: 13 (57%)
- Improved understanding of own strengths/goals: 13 (57%).

Case studies have also been gathered to illustrate the impact of the Project (details are available on request from the Community Safety Unit).

3.2 The Project has been successfully delivered and clearly had some positive outcomes for the victims supported and their children. Careful monitoring and record keeping throughout the Project placed Choices in a good position in trying to find additional funding after March 2020 when MHCLG funding came to an end. Choices have been able to continue delivering Step Change following a successful application for Big Lottery Funding for a wider project that also includes the delivery of a further separate domestic abuse support service, the Phoenix Programme. Services are now available to victims from Medway and Maidstone as well as Dartford and Gravesham and this funding is secured until the end of March 2022.

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	The Step Change Project has been funded in its entirety from external funding through an application to the MHCLG Domestic Abuse Services Fund.
Risk assessment	Failure to take advantage of opportunities to secure funding or to work in partnership with other agencies/organisations to improve support to those experiencing domestic abuse and their children would carry the risk of a lack of confidence in the Council's commitment to protecting people from harm and improving community safety.
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	Step Change has made a direct contribution to improving public safety linked to 'People' in the Corporate Plan.
Crime and Disorder	Encouraging victims of domestic abuse to report their experience and improving support services available is a priority for the Dartford and Gravesham CSP and the local Community Safety Unit.
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; improving services for victims of domestic abuse and their children contributes directly to this agenda.