

## **Scrutiny review scoping proposal**

### **1 What is the review?**

Domestic abuse (DA) is defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behavior, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can include, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional. Witnessing Domestic Abuse is an Adverse Childhood Experience that has the potential to negatively impact on children's mental and physical health throughout their life course.

Southwark has one of the highest volumes of DA in London, with very high levels of referrals to our specialist domestic abuse service. There has been generally rising demand over the last several years, although there was a small reduction in demand prior to lockdown. Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in demand. For the period April 20 to March 21 the service saw a 21% increase in referrals compared to the same period the previous year (2879 against 2373 previously). We are yet to see any downturn in demand, referrals remain at an extremely high level; the period January to March 2021 saw 748 referrals to the service. This represents a 25% increase on the same period in 2020 (598 referrals). The average monthly number of referrals for FY 20/21 (April 2020 to March 2021) was 240, a 31% increase on the monthly average of 198 during FY 19/20. The number of referrals received from victims aged 16 to 25 also increased significantly, by 46%.

The increase in referrals was largely driven by a dramatic increase in high-risk referrals. In line with this, there was a corresponding increase in referrals to MARAC. The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is coordinated by Southwark Council and meets fortnightly to provide a multi-agency response to high-risk cases of domestic abuse. During the period 28 April 2020 to 4 May 2021, Southwark MARAC heard 831 cases, this compares to 674 in the same period the previous year, an increase of 23%.

Children's social care recorded a 20% increase in contacts relating to domestic abuse in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 (2,350), when compared to the previous year (1,956). Whilst referrals for domestic abuse increased by 31%, from 594 to 779. This in the context of a 13% reduction in the total number of contacts received, and a 2% reduction in referral.

Nationally NSPCC reported that contacts to their helpline about the impact of domestic abuse on children increased by 32% since the start of the lockdown, to an average of one an hour. In May 2020, the helpline received its highest number of contacts about domestic abuse since 2016 when the current recording method began.

A report by Oxford and Manchester Universities suggests that child to parent violence has also significantly increased since lockdown measures were put in place. They found that the number of child to parent violent episodes increased by 70%, and that 69% of practitioners surveyed, said they had seen an increase

in referrals for child to parent violence.

The commission heard that the council recognised very quickly the need to adapt the delivery of services including domestic abuse services during lockdown, moving from face to face to delivery via online and remote means. Additional funding has been put in place for two DA workers, to increase telephone capacity and support for high-risk victims. A communications campaign was also delivered across Southwark to raise awareness of domestic abuse and how to seek help.

The new Safe Space project was launched in February 2021. The initiative provides confidential rooms in a range of settings where survivors of domestic abuse can access information and make contact with specialist services. The scheme is currently operating across the network of Children and Family Centers, at more than 15 primary and secondary schools and the Tessa Jowell Health Hub. Further rollout of the scheme will include places of worship, community centers, council buildings and other primary care services.

A new group service has also been delivered to support parents where there is child to parent abuse and extra support has been provided to children in refuges. Longer term there are calls for the government to increase the profile and funding for domestic abuse.<sup>1</sup>

**2 What outcomes could realistically be achieved? Which agency does the review seek to influence?**

The review will seek to better protect victims of domestic abuse within Southwark, and influence Councillor Leanne Werner; Deputy Cabinet Member for Domestic Abuse.

**3 When should the review be carried out/completed? i.e. does the review need to take place before/after a certain time?**

February 2022.

**4 What format would suit this review? (eg full investigation, q&a with executive member/partners, public meeting, one-off session)**

The format of the review will be carried out by investigation, inquiries and a commission report. In support of this, cabinet members and officers will be interviewed as well as information gathering sessions from external organisations will take place.

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<sup>1</sup> Information taken from the Health and Social Care ‘Mental Health Inequalities of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People’ report, August 2021.

**5 What are some of the key issues that you would like the review to look at?**

- The increases in domestic abuse in Southwark
- The impact of domestic abuse on children
- Responses from the Council and the national government to the rise in domestic abuse during Covid-19 lockdowns.

**6 Who would you like to receive evidence and advice from during the review?**

- Southwark Domestic Abuse Advocacy and Support Service, delivered by Solace
- Children's Services
- NSPCC
- Domestic Abuse officers
- Women's Aid
- Councillor Leanne Werner; Deputy Cabinet Member for Domestic Abuse and the Cabinet lead
- The police
- Southwark Safeguarding chair and executive
- Local domestic abuse charities in Southwark: SaveLives; Solace in Southwark; the Gaia Centre; Latin American Women Rights LAWRS.

**7 Any suggestions for background information? Are you aware of any best practice on this topic?**

- Report by Oxford and Manchester University; <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-08-18-launch-report-child-parent-violence-during-pandemic/>.
- NSPCC sources; <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2020/Calls-about-domestic-abuse-highest-on-record-following-lockdown-increase/>. / <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2020/domestic-abuse-calls-rise2/>.
- National Government response; <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19-a-year-into-the-pandemic/>.
- NYT article; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>.
- Impact on Children and Young People; <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/car.2649>.
- Also in regards to children and young people; <https://capmh.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13034-020-00347-1>.
- Social Care Institute; <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/safeguarding/domestic-violence-abuse>.

- BBC report; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56491643>.
- University of Essex report; <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/blog/2020/08/18/what-are-the-effects-of-lockdown-and-recession-on-domestic-violence>.
- NSPCC report; <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2246/isolated-and-struggling-social-isolation-risk-child-maltreatment-lockdown-and-beyond.pdf>.

**8 What approaches could be useful for gathering evidence? What can be done outside committee meetings?**

e.g. verbal or written submissions, site visits, mystery-shopping, service observation, meeting with stakeholders, survey, consultation event

Verbal and/or written submissions from external actors, bodies and organisations, cabinet members and officers.

A roundtable with stakeholders.