

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 30 January 2012 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Gavin Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Michael Bukola
Councillor Rowenna Davis
Councillor Tim McNally
Councillor Wilma Nelson
Councillor Michael Situ
Councillor Martin Seaton
Miriam Facey
John Nosworthy

**OTHER MEMBERS
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Jonathon Toy, Head of Community Safety
Angela d'Urso, Commissioning Service Manager
Sam Davidson, Divisional Accountant
Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Sally Masson, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Jane Salmon, Homeowners Council and Lesley Wertheimer, Tenants Council.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 With regard to items 5&6: Councillor Wilma Nelson disclosed that she was a leaseholder.

4. REPORT BACK ON REVIEW OF RECHARGING ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN GENERAL FUND AND HRA

- 4.1 David Longbottom from Grant Thornton, updated the sub-committee on the Audit Review.
- 4.2 Members commented that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) should be split with the general fund.
- 4.3 Members also mentioned that the rents from commercial properties went into the HRA and that funds should be considered on a case by case basis because of the loss of income if funds were moved about. Members also said that taking rents from properties out of the HRA might give leaseholders the perception that there were injustices in the system. Members commented that the recharging arrangements between the general fund and the HRA were difficult to understand and that any effort to make this work clearer would be welcome.
- 4.4 A member wanted to know why leaseholders should contribute to the charge for providing the democratic role of the council and the management structure around the administration. It was also highlighted that the cost for the provision of bins were not always part of the core costs. Collection services were, on some estates, an additional cost for doorstep collections for those in flats who do not have access to rubbish shoots and communal bins.
- 4.5 Members pointed out that open spaces were used by all and yet the leaseholders paid for the upkeep of the area. There was a difference between the council as landlord and the council in a borough governance role. Other members commented that there had been no comparative or benchmarking studies made around this issue because of the wide sample needed to adequately inform a view. The council had to take an objective stance and it was on that basis that it made its decisions.
- 4.6 It was noted by a tenants and leaseholders representative that the review of the re-charging arrangements was lengthy and difficult to understand.
- 4.7 It was agreed that the action plan report returns for scrutiny at a future date.

5. UPDATE ON LEASEHOLDERS AUDIT ACTION PLAN

- 5.1 This item was incorporated into item 4, Report Back on Review of Recharging Arrangements Between General Fund and HRA.

6. DISCUSSION OF DRAFT SCRUTINY REPORT ON LEASEHOLDER CHARGING

6.1 The Chair highlighted the findings of the report:

- It was possible that excessive charging was still taking place and this should stop
- Defects liability for works was not assertive enough and non-existent works were being charged for
- There was a well motivated customer service but there were some problems immediately outside that team
- There was a disconnect between the provision of services, for instance cleaning and upkeep. Staff were not keeping in mind that leaseholders are being charged for the services and processes were not being adequately followed
- There should be a two-tier system of charges which should be introduced to cater for requests to make minor changes to properties
- Leaseholders have a poor model of a repairs service
- There needs to be more focus on contract management

6.2 The sub-committee agreed the following recommendations, to be included in the report:

- Details of service charges should be on-line and clear for leaseholders to log-in and access
- Leaseholders should be able to follow up on their service charges and be able to monitor their accounts so that challenges can be made if necessary
- Extension on the current IT changes for works and charges to be detailed in on-line, personalised accounts for residents.
- Contracted repair service to follow an 'i-model' with direct management control in-house
- Homeowners should not be required to pay for substandard works
- A designated officer to be the designated officer for signing off works for leaseholders and the details of the work to be made publically available
- Scrutiny to do follow up review into contract management services within the housing department later in the year
- Leaseholders to continue to have a face to face contact service available, to give residents information and a co-ordinated response when dealing with repair works.
- Cross departmental work to be developed to ensure a coordinated, more

efficient overall service

- An expanded role of leaseholder offices, based in other services to enhance joined up working between departments.
 - More attention to be given to 'future notice' of works planned. (Section 20). The stipulation should be that if there is not adequate future notice for works, the consultation process cannot take place. Section 20 should not be allowed to slide
 - Flat rate service charges to be considered
 - A fixed service charge to be connected to a formula year on year. Fixed service charge to be an additional option available to leaseholders
- 6.3 Members commented that changing the current system to put leaseholders accounts on-line might be at a considerable cost. Members wanted to know if this cost was to be passed on to the leaseholder. However, In view of the BAR project, the chair did not feel that this was going to be a huge expansion and felt it was a realistic expectation. Further exploration into the details of such an implementation would be pursued.
- 6.4 Members felt that repairs should be coming back in house. It was also the view of members that there should be increased training to raise awareness amongst staff dealing with leaseholders, promoting a more integrated system.
- 6.5 It was noted by the sub-committee that this year the underestimated and actual costs of services to the leaseholder was more in line. However members felt that over-estimating costs and asking leaseholders for less money rather than more, might offer a more attractive alternative. Members felt that whilst fixed services charges were a good idea, the details of this needed to be investigated further.
- 6.6 It was noted that the action plan needed to be incorporated into the report. The chair agreed to amend the report and get clearance from the sub-committee via email before the report was submitted Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

7. TACKLING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SOUTHWARK

- 7.1 Angela d'Urso, Commissioning and Service Manager and Jonathon Toy, Head of Community Safety and Enforcement gave a presentation on the Safer Southwark Partnership's response to the problems of Domestic Abuse.

The definition of domestic abuse is '...a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person, usually a man, over another, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate relationship. It can be manifested in a variety of ways, including but not restricted to, physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and the imposition of social isolation and is most commonly a combination of them all.

The abuse of power can take place in a range of personal relationship contexts, including:

*Heterosexual men abused by heterosexual women
Same sex relationships
Relationships involving a personal/family/otherwise carer
Parent/other adult relationships with children
Former partners and relationships
'Honour crimes'
Between young people under 18 in the context of 'dating violence''*

Female genital mutilation was also cited as an abusive act.

7.2 The legislative framework covers:

*The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
The Children Act 2004
The Homelessness Act 2002
The Adoption and Children Act 2002
The Local Government Act 2000
The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the
The Human Rights Act 1998
The NHS and Community Care Act 1999
The Children Act 1989
The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974*

7.3 Despite the comprehensive coverage of legislation available to address the issues of domestic violence and abuse, it can be very difficult to secure convictions and protect victims from their perpetrators.

7.4 Securing convictions can be a complex issue. Victims are often afraid of reprisals from the perpetrator and/or can be financially dependent on their abuser. More recently work has been done around the emotionally traumatic attachments that form between the victim and abuser. One of the complications of such an attachment is that the victim may not be aware, or is not willing to accept that she is being subjected to abuse and/or exploitation. A history of abuse in childhood can mean that the victim has come to expect abusive and/or exploitative relationships and view the behaviour of their abuser as normal and what they have come to expect and accept.

7.5 Women can end up in a cycle of abuse and it's possible that it can take a while to deal the underlying traumatic emotional issues. It's not always easy for women to walk away or accept help.

The presentation slides set out the Key Legislative areas:

'The Safer Southwark Partnership, the local community safety partnership, has a duty to tackle crime and disorder in the local area, including domestic violence (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act and the Children's Act (2004) placed a duty of care on local authorities to provide services to victims of domestic abuse, including children. Duties have recently increased to include a duty to conduct domestic violence homicide reviews

The Housing Act 1996 allows local authorities to prevent domestic violence in the context of housing management functions (s.153A), also to respond to homelessness (Homelessness Act 2002)

- 7.6 The statutory services in Southwark are keen to intervene especially where there are children who may be victims themselves or where they may be witnessing violence.

'Local authorities play a vital and central role in tackling domestic violence - providing services, developing policies, raising awareness and facilitating partnership working

Most domestic abuse services are delivered outside of the council, so the commissioning role is critical e.g. independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs), refuges, sanctuary scheme

Coordination of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – a multi agency response to the most high risk victims of domestic abuse.'

- 7.7 The Council has a duty to hold partners to account. Currently there are around 20 – 25 victims per month who are classified 'at high risk.'

'Domestic abuse is a very serious issue for Southwark:

Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls is a key priority in the council's Violent Crime Strategy 2010-15, adopted in December 2010 and the Safer Southwark Partnership's (SSP) Rolling Action and Commissioning Plan 2011-12

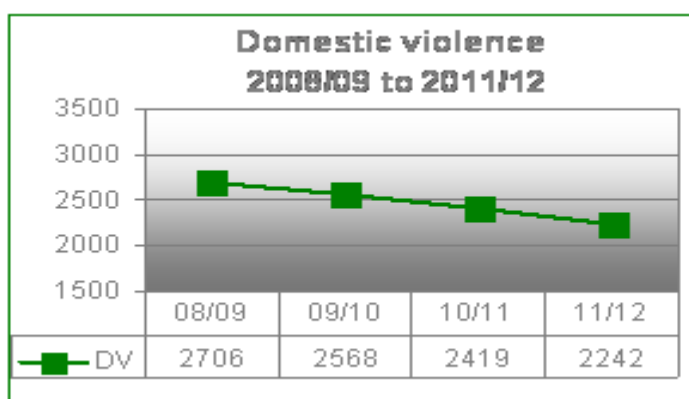
One in every five recorded crimes in Southwark is classified as violence against the person (10,553 reports in 2010/11). One in every four of these violent crimes is linked to domestic abuse (2,419 in 2010/11)

*In Southwark, 40% of *Merlin referrals are domestic abuse related; 30% of these trigger initial assessments*

In 2011, 225 cases were heard at the MARAC, involving 254 children and young people.'

- 7.8 *The organisation 'Merlin' deals with children in the home where domestic abuse is being perpetrated. They also deal with issues such as the problems of contact with the abuser after there has been intervention and separation. The perpetrators of domestic violence will seek contact with children after intervention has occurred and this situation has to be managed sensitively.

- 7.9 Domestic Abuse incidents mainly occur in the 16 – 30 age range. Issues of relationship violence amongst young people rarely gets recorded. Young women with abusive experiences often find that the tolerance for abuse remains with them into adulthood.
- 7.10 In BME groups, there is a larger portion of women being effected and more work needs to be done to redesign more appropriate services around those communities.
- 7.11 83% of reported cases are from women, however there is a slight increase in reported cases where men are the victim and where parents and/or carers are also experiencing violence from children and young people. The trajectory for reported and recorded domestic abuse is downwards:



'The SSP's recent strategic assessment showed that:

One third of total reported incidents occur at the weekend

The peak time period for domestic abuse is between 17:00 - 01:00. 49% of all incidents occur during this time

The peak months for reported domestic abuse are May to July, with a third of all incidents reported

Nunhead and Peckham are the peak wards for reported domestic abuse'

- 7.12 Members heard that the scale of the problem is huge in Southwark, however it is not the true picture of domestic abuse with evidence showing that it can take an average of 36 incidences of domestic abuse before a victim will call the police. Most of the unreported cases are regarded as 'hidden' violent crime. There are many suspected cases but women are reluctant to come forward because of fears for their safety and/or their economic dependence on their perpetrator can mean finding adequate funds for future independent living can be difficult to obtain.
- 7.13 Most cases of domestic abuse occurs in the victims home. 50% take place in or around the vicinity of their own home with only 1 in 35 incidents reported.

- 7.14 There are peaks in the number of cases of serious sexual assault and rape reported around the times of major sporting events such as the world cup. There are links between the increased excitement and energy of the games and the increase in alcohol consumption. At the last world cup, more police officers were deployed and this had helped to curb the rise in incidents considerably.
- 7.15 It was not felt that the economic downturn had impacted on the numbers of domestic abuse incidents. However, it was felt that with problems such as the loss of secure tenancies and with more women being financially dependent on men, that whilst the reporting was not rising, domestic abuse incidents were now more likely to be hidden. There could be more of a feeling of insecurity and vulnerability which might fuel the perpetrator's psychological need to regain some power and control over his environment. Overall, the reporting of acquisitive crime had risen. In the last economic downturn, 1989 – 1993, acquisitive crime increased, similar to the current situation.
- 7.16 Up to now the system of reporting and the subsequent pathways through the variety of services, has been complex. The new service will help streamline the passage through the legal system for victims and make the process less daunting. Often when women have been harmed, they are not keen to face the conviction process or come into contact with the perpetrator once they have been separated from them. Currently there is 'bespoke' response to individual cases, with the victim's needs taking priority.
- 7.17 In 2010 the SSP worked with the Children's and Families Trust and the Southwark Safeguarding Children Board to review domestic abuse services. The review showed a number of improvements that could be made, including the addressing of complex service pathways.
- 7.18 The SSP has been working since the review to address the issues of a new service on an outcomes based commissioning model.

'Community safety partnership services has been identified as lead commissioner. Old services decommissioned and a new service commissioned

Solace will provide the service from April 1 2012. It will include several key improvements, including:

A borough wide service, with a new centre for domestic violence and a single point of entry – one phone number, one email

24/7 access to the service

Improved response time to high risk victims

Improved outcomes in reducing victimisation and risk

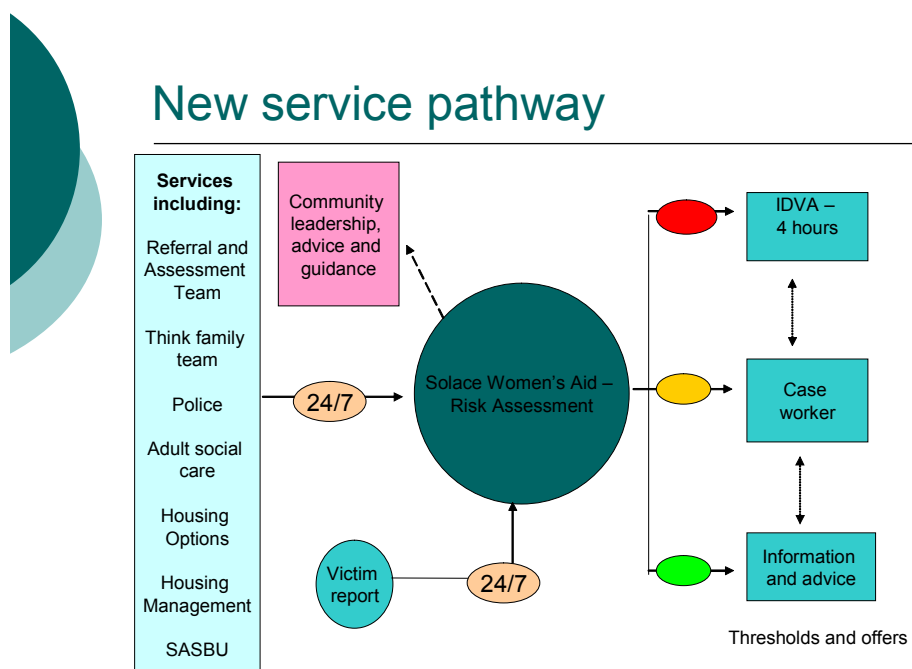
A perpetrator programme

Specialist support programmes for children and young people

Other benefits including a service user forum, a volunteer programme etc'

7.19 Members were keen to hear that there would be better joined up working from all organisations involved in providing domestic violence services and that the referral pathways were being reviewed for better access. It was noted that there are increased reports when victims have accessed other social services.

*'A MARAC improvement plan has been developed and delivered:
 Referrals are improved in quality and appropriateness
 Increased partnership working
 Focus on the Perpetrators
 The MARAC has been assessed by CAADA and significant improvement was noted.'*



7.20 'Solace' will be working with providers to deliver an integrated service centring on the wishes of the victim. The desire is to work more closely with the Court service, ensuring proper sentencing and fluidity throughout the system, although it was acknowledged that this is currently a future ambition.

7.30 Clarity over the workings of the Court system is continuing. There are a variety of different orders such as molestation orders and harassment orders. The head of community safety said that he could produce more information on what orders are available for the courts to use and the frequency with which they're being used.

7.31 Members were keen to ensure that the service was going to be fully accountable.

The Commissioning Service Manager reported to the committee that the performance targets link in with the Every Child Matters programme. There is a risk assessment toolkit with low, medium and high risk options, along with reassessment toolkits thereafter. If service providers do not perform adequately and meet those targets, then they do not receive financial allocations.

- 7.32 The Service will provide signposts to help centres and other resources and there will be a full communication strategy with details of funding allocations. Leaflets will be distributed at Housing Options Centres and there will be a lot of press coverage around the launch.
- 7.33 There are big challenges to provide services for women with indeterminate immigration status, who have no recourse to public funds. Often there are no community connections which makes vulnerable women 'hard to reach.' The new provider will be expected to do a substantial amount of outreach work.
- 7.34 In some communities, language can be a barrier for women who want to come forward to report domestic violence. There is a translation service presently employed with appropriate and culturally aware case workers to assist with an individual's needs. There are also support networks for domestic abuse caseworkers themselves, coordinated through Solace.
- 7.35 The SSP has successfully bid for European funding and is delivering two large projects in schools - SHER and HEDGEHOG. The projects support young people in preventing domestic/dating abuse and sexual exploitation
- 7.36 The SSP worked with community engagement to hold a community budgeting event to tackle violence against women and girls in Peckham and Nunhead raising awareness and increasing community involvement
- 7.37 The SSP is now unfortunately conducting our first domestic homicide review. There will be further work emerging from the review findings.
- 7.38 In ensure continuous improvement, the SSP is currently working on:
- Implementing and embedding the new service provided by Solace
 - Further European funding bids in partnership with Solace
 - Progressing the lead commissioner arrangement
 - Exploring future possibilities in relation to perpetrators for example tenancy conditions, contact centres

'A MARAC improvement plan has been developed and delivered:

Referrals are improved in quality and appropriateness

Increased partnership working

Focus on perpetrators

The MARAC has been assessed by CAADA and significant

improvement was noted

The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) solution Reducing And Deterring Adult Reoffending (RADAR) will work with offenders whose offences had a domestic abuse flag'

NB: MARAC: Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

'Progress:

Successful bidding for DAPHNE funded projects – SHER and HEDGEHOG. The projects support young people in preventing domestic/dating abuse and sexual exploitation

A community budgeting event to tackle violence against women and girls in Peckham and Nunhead – raising awareness and increasing community involvement

We are conducting our first domestic homicide review

The Future:

Implementing and embedding the new service

Further DAPHNE bids in partnership with Solace

Progressing the lead commissioner arrangements

Future possibilities in relation to perpetrators for example tenancy conditions, contact centres'

- 7.39 There are a variety of different orders such as molestation orders and harassment orders. The head of community safety said that he could produce more information on what orders are available for the courts to use and the frequency with which they're being used. There has been extensive work to ensure engagement from the courts, but improvements are possible.
- 7.40 In some communities, language can be a barrier for women who want to come forward to report domestic violence. To address this there is a translation service employed with appropriate and culturally aware case workers to assist with an individual's needs. The new provider will conduct outreach work and work with community leaders.
- 7.41 Members felt that scrutiny could help develop the work in the following ways:
- Interview with the Mayoral team to enable Southwark's scrutiny work ties in with the work of the GLA and the Domestic Abuse Strategy. Jonathan Toy agreed to identify key contacts.

- Southwark to look at and set up liaisons with the Court Service to find ways of strengthening the relationships and procedures between the Council, police and other providers where necessary.
- Invite two representatives from Solace to help inform the committee's discussion and to reassure the committee that they will be completely linked in with other services provided by Southwark, along with working closely with other groups offering services/help in Southwark.
- Southwark to make enquiries of Solace as to whether it is possible to find a survivor of Domestic Abuse to come to the next committee meeting to speak of their experiences.
- Chair/committee to write to Community Councils recommending the presentation on Domestic Abuse from Southwark's Community Safety Department.

7.42 Data and information requested by the committee:

- i. The numbers of victims re-housed
- ii. Exact cost of investment going to Solace (£350,000 per year).
- iii. The number of convictions in Southwark per year.
- iv. A breakdown of figures showing the repeat rates of offending from perpetrators. Special focus on a breakdown of offending rates in Walworth, Nunhead and Peckham.
- v. Figures showing a breakdown of crime, violent crime and sexual assault patterns over the last few years across the borough (Area by area).
- vi. Jonathan Toy to provided more detailed figures regarding the types of crime that were now more prevalent in the current economic downturn.
- vii. A breakdown along demographic lines: Domestic abuse incidents occurring north and south of the borough, ethnicity, class and age.
- viii. Jonathan Toy to provide more detailed figures regarding the types of crime that were now more prevalent in the current economic downturn.
- ix. Jonathan Toy and Angela d'Urso, to provide a breakdown of figures affecting BME reported cases of domestic abuse.
- x. Jonathan Toy, head of community safety said that he could produce more information on what orders are available for the courts to use and the frequency with which they're used.

7.43 Members paid tribute to Councillor Linda Manchester who hosted a special meeting on domestic abuse at Bermondsey Community Council.

8. WORKPLAN

- 8.1 The council has chosen enhanced refurbishment for the Hawkstone low rise blocks of flats as the preferred option. Members agreed that scrutiny should receive a written briefing considering the lessons learned in relation to the consultation, in a

one session meeting.

- 8.2 It was also agreed to consider the Abbeyfields blocks in light of the works planned for the Hawkstone blocks.