



Foreword

Cllr Mark Hill

Chairman, Local Services and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee



The impact of domestic violence is huge: it can result in death (on average two women per week¹) and injury; plus damage is caused to the economy and to communities. Costs to the Police, Health Service and Local Authority Housing and Social Services are estimated in the region of £97 million per annum in Birmingham.

The Government has recognised this and through its Tackling Violence Action Plan 2008-2011: 'Saving Lives. Reducing Harm. Protecting the Public' aims to roll out good practice in relation to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts in order to reduce repeat victimisation and to ensure there is a safe environment for sensitive domestic violence cases to be heard in court.

For its part, Birmingham saw the launch of the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09 with the aim of bringing together the range of partners involved in tackling domestic violence. Along with the Police and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (B&SWA), Birmingham City Council is a key partner, and has signed up to a number of commitments as part of that Strategy. The Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee saw this as an opportune time to examine what the City Council was doing to meet those commitments. In doing so, we were able to highlight the good work being done, and also raise the profile of a serious issue which can affect the lives of so many.

I am pleased to report our findings demonstrate that Birmingham City Council has shown a great deal of commitment through its innovative work with Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid and the Police. Particularly so is the use of civil orders against perpetrators of domestic violence, which has increased the potential for victims/survivors to obtain justice and to increase their safety.

A concern for the Committee has been the lack of mainstream funding to continue the good work, although we were reassured to learn of continued funding for the Women's Safety Unit which is the focal point of contact for so many women experiencing domestic violence. Our evidence gathering has suggested that there are gaps in the provision provided to children and young people, counselling and independent advocacy together with better practice in sharing information and we have suggested ways in which these could be addressed in a series of suggested actions for the Executive.

In conclusion, we believe that the City Council has a crucial role to play in countering the pernicious nature of domestic violence. The Council can play a leading role in changing attitudes to violence, hence our proposal for a city-wide campaign. A high profile city-wide campaign serves many purposes, not least to communicate the most important message from the strategy that Birmingham is committed to making men, women and children safer by holding perpetrators to account.

¹ Domestic Violence Mini-Site, Crime Reduction, Home Office



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Tackling Domestic Violence

Introduction

Background

In September 2005, the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee conducted an Overview of the Management of Community Safety in the city. This report noted that the issue of domestic violence was “all too often overlooked” and that “domestic violence was a substantially under-reported crime”.² The report made reference to the Government’s targets to increase the reporting of domestic violence whilst also reducing the number of domestic violence incidents.

The report went on to endorse the work of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership’s Violence and Vulnerability Core Priority Group³ which seeks to meet these Government targets through the Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum (BIADVF). The report also asked the Cabinet Member responsible to work within the Community Safety Partnership to formulate and implement a Domestic Violence Reduction Strategy.

That Strategy – the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09 – is now in place. The Committee therefore wished to do its bit to ensure that domestic violence was no longer “overlooked” by prioritising the issue of domestic violence in our work programme over the year.

At our Committee meeting of the 10th September, Members determined to undertake an Overview of Domestic Violence, looking specifically at whether “the commitments in the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09 are being implemented across the Council”. We considered this an opportune time to undertake this piece of work as the Strategy was in Year 2 of its three year cycle, and therefore it was appropriate to take stock and ensure the City Council was on track to meet the commitments for 2009.

Structure of the Report

The starting place for our work was therefore the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09. The Strategy sets out a commitment to reduce domestic violence and to help make Birmingham a safer place for victims/survivors and their children through co-ordinated multi-agency co-operation.

To achieve this, five strategic priorities were set in the Strategy:

- Strategic Priority 1: Safety and Justice;
- Strategic Priority 2: Safety and Support;
- Strategic Priority 3: Prevention and Early Intervention;
- Strategic Priority 4: Children and Young People;
- Strategic Priority 5: Birmingham’s Co-ordinated Response.

² Overview of the Management of Community Safety, a report of the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee, September 2005

³ Birmingham Community Safety Partnership is the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership consisting of agencies involved in reducing crime including Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, Birmingham PCT’s, National Probation Service and West Midlands and Birmingham Voluntary Services Council (BVSC)



Our report reflects this structure, with each section considering one of the five Strategic Priorities and the City Council's contribution to meeting these.

Alongside this, we also consider the City Council's performance against the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 225 (see Table 1). This BVPI was introduced by the Government in April 2005 and includes a basket of 11 indicators to encourage multi-agency working in order to tackle domestic violence.

Table 1: BVPI 225: Actions Against Domestic Violence⁴

<p>The purpose of this BVPI is to assess the overall provision and effectiveness of local authority services designed to help victim/survivors of domestic violence and prevent further domestic violence;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provision of a directory of local domestic violence services;2. Providing 1 refuge space per 10000 population;3. Employing directly or funding a domestic violence co-ordinator;4. Producing and adopting a multi-agency strategy;5. Supporting and facilitating a multi-agency forum;6. Developing an information sharing protocol between key statutory partners;7. Developing, launched and promoted a 'sanctuary' type scheme to enable victim/survivors to remain in their own homes, where they choose to and where safety can be guaranteed;8. Reducing the percentage of cases that had previously been re-housed in the last two years as a result of Domestic violence;9. Providing tenancy conditions to enable eviction of perpetrators;10. Providing Domestic violence education packs for schools and youth groups;11. Carrying out a programme of multi-agency training to front line statutory workers and managerial staff.
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Whilst the focus of this report is the work of the City Council – in line with Scrutiny's responsibility to hold the Council's Executive to account – we also sought to recognise fully the work of our partners, without whom domestic violence in the city could not be adequately tackled. We have therefore interspersed our report with information on some of our partners to emphasise the importance of the City Council's role within the partnerships tackling domestic violence.

Our Methodology

In planning this overview we considered key outcomes under each of the five Strategic Priorities for 2009 and the contribution the City Council is making towards meeting these. Not all outcomes related directly to the City Council, so we have only considered those which are relevant.

We therefore planned a number of sessions during the latter part of 2007 and invited representatives of those Council services which have a direct impact on domestic violence and some of our partners to contribute. We are grateful to the following people for their involvement:

- Peter Hay, Strategic Director for Adults and Communities and Chair of the Violence and Vulnerability Core-Priority Group of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership;
- David Tatlow, Assistant Director, Legal Services;

⁴ From April 2008 these BVPIs will no longer be used and will be replaced by a new set of National Indicators



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- Elaine Webster, Assistant Head of Child Protection and Review North; and Tony Ayers, Health Education Adviser, Children, Young People and Families;
- Neil Tryner, Head of Housing Needs, Housing and Constituencies Directorate;
- Gill Taylor Constituency Director, Sutton Coldfield and Lead Constituency Director for Domestic Violence; and Jan Kimber, Constituency Director, Perry Barr;
- Holly Taylor, Belgrave Road Police Station, West Midlands Police;
- Lynne Laine and Linda Szavoleta, Birmingham East and North PCT.

Particular thanks must go to Maureen Connolly, Chair of Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum and Chief Executive of Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid; and Paula Harding, Domestic Violence Co-ordinator for the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP). Maureen and Paula attended most sessions and were always on hand to give advice.

Domestic Violence

In the first section of the report, it is worth re-visiting why domestic violence is such an important issue for the city. The Government defines domestic violence as "Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality."⁵

Here are some facts on domestic violence we ascertained during our investigation:

- Domestic violence can affect anyone: victims can come from any walk of life, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, class, disability, sexuality or geography. However, whilst it is not solely women who experience domestic violence, women are more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of domestic violence, including sexual violence and consequently are more likely to experience sustained psychological and emotional impact, severe injuries and more likely to be killed;⁶
- Domestic violence claims, on average, the lives of two women per week;⁷
- In some areas of our city, domestic violence accounts for 10% of calls that the police receive. In other areas it accounts for more than half of all violent crime;⁸
- Despite these alarming figures, domestic violence remains significantly under-reported;⁹
- It is estimated that in Birmingham, domestic violence costs society an estimated £97 million per annum¹⁰ including costs to the Police, criminal and civil courts, as well as to the housing, social services and health sectors.

⁵ Domestic Violence Mini-Site, Crime Reduction, Home Office

⁶ Home Office Research Study British Crime Survey; Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09, p.11

⁷ Domestic Violence Mini-Site, Crime Reduction, Home Office

⁸ <http://www.birmingham-csp.org.uk/corepriorities/violenceandvulnerability>, 18 January 2008

⁹ <http://www.birmingham-csp.org.uk/corepriorities/violenceandvulnerability>, 18 January 2008

¹⁰ <http://www.birmingham-csp.org.uk/News/dvstrategylaunch>



However, the full consequences of domestic violence for victims/survivors are not purely financial nor so easily measurable. The effects are felt by families and communities as well as the victims/survivors and can include emotional harm and mental health problems. Families can have to move as a result, leading to disruption of schooling and the fragmentation of local communities.

It is also worth noting that most of we have focused on support for female victims/survivors of domestic violence. This is not to say that men cannot be victims of domestic violence – we recognised that this is a real problem, and domestic violence is every bit as distressing and criminal when it happens to men as well as when it happens to women.

However, the evidence we received suggested that the nature and prevalence of domestic violence against men was of a very different character. Research has shown:

- Women are more likely to be injured through domestic violence;
- Women are more likely to be repeatedly abused – 47% of the male population had experienced a single incident, whilst women on average experience 20 incidents per year;
- Women are more likely to be frightened and more likely to be abused post-separation;
- Women are more likely to be murdered – 42% of women who are killed are killed by a current or former partner: 7% of men murdered are murdered by a current or former partner and 20% of these are murdered by a same sex partner;
- Men are less likely to be impoverished by their experiences of violence.”¹¹

Research by the Scottish Executive to understand a previous British Crime Survey, which revealed that 0.4% of women and 1.3% of men experienced domestic violence in the previous year, concluded that fewer men in Scotland are victims of domestic abuse than was suggested in those figure due to inaccurate completion of the British Crime Survey form and a misunderstanding of what constituted domestic violence.¹²

All this points to a different approach required when dealing with male victims/survivors, and with this in mind, the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) is, at the time of writing, conducting research to determine what would be an appropriate response in Birmingham.

Suggested Actions

1. **That the outcomes of the research being conducted by the BCSP into the experience and needs of male victims/survivors of domestic violence are reported back to this Committee.**

¹¹ Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09, p.11

¹² p.55



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1 Strategic Priority 1: Safety & Justice

1.1 The first Strategic Priority aims:

To ensure that individual perpetrators are held accountable for their actions through a co-ordinated justice response which does not compromise the safety of victims/survivors and their children.

1.2 The City Council's contribution to both the Strategy and its implementation demonstrate that safety and justice are not matters purely for the criminal justice agencies. In this section we explore how the City Council can hold perpetrators "accountable" through policies such as those on housing and also how we can have real involvement in preventing domestic violence and protecting victims/survivors. We have also included a brief section on the work of the Police in this area and how the City Council works with them.

Use of Civil Orders

1.3 The Strategy calls for the use of civil orders "routinely where criminal action is not possible".¹³ Civil orders are legal actions (such as injunctions, anti-social behaviour orders or other court orders) which, whilst they cannot result in the perpetrator being fined or imprisoned, can curtail the movement or behaviour of an individual. Breach of an order can result in imprisonment.

1.4 The City Council is currently participating in a ground-breaking multi-agency partnership through the Community Safety (Legal) Partnership to bring civil actions against those involved in a range of illegal activity, including gang and gun crime, environmental crime, illegal money lending and domestic violence. Funding for this has been obtained from the Community Safety Partnership for 2007/08.

1.5 Civil action is not intended to replace criminal action – criminal prosecution will always be pursued where sufficient evidence is available. However it is recognised that this is not always possible and the use of civil orders allows protection to be given to victims/survivors and the wider community in these cases.

1.6 The Committee recognised that, in the context of domestic violence, particular problems are encountered in taking cases to court. In 2006-07, of 13,446 incidents reported to the Police, only 6,661 resulted in criminal conviction. Due to the nature of the crime, cases sometimes do not result in prosecution due to:

- Lack of evidence;
- Reluctance of victims/survivors to give evidence in court, either through fear or because they blame themselves and feel the onus of keeping the family together.

¹³ Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09, p.23



- 1.7 Civil actions can be taken where there is insufficient evidence for a criminal conviction partly due to the different standards of proof required: the case must be proved “beyond all reasonable doubt” to ensure a criminal conviction, whilst in civil cases the standard is “on the balance of probabilities” (as perpetrators do not gain a criminal record). Furthermore, the rules on evidence are different under the civil system – for example, “hearsay” evidence is permissible (inadmissible in criminal courts). This means the court can take evidence from Council officers, Police officers or others involved in the case who would describe what victims/survivors have told them.
- 1.8 Members expressed concern that this approach might deter victims from seeking support from the outset if it was known that information given might be used in court in the future. However, this has not been found to be an issue so far by those engaged in this work where, in the main, civil action is taken with the victim's consent and co-operation.
- 1.9 The reluctance of victims/survivors to come forward is addressed in part by the fact that civil orders can be requested by the City Council, so the victim/survivor does not have to be the one taking the action. Those who have experienced domestic violence can feel powerless and unable to take legal action, so having the case taken up by a third party can be a “safer” option. The court papers have the name Birmingham City Council (on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership) on them – it is therefore the Council, working in partnership, against the named perpetrators. This sends a powerful message to perpetrators and those who would take this issue less seriously.
- 1.10 The appropriateness of using civil orders within the housing context has been accepted by local judges as being a legitimate interest of a landlord exercising its Housing Management functions. Beyond housing the Authority has successfully argued that Section 222 LGA 1972 can be used to protect women affected. The extent to which the Authority can continue to use Section 222 is currently being reviewed by the Court of Appeal following an adverse decision in a case relating to a Criminal Gang.
- 1.11 The use of civil orders to restrict perpetrators started as an experiment but has proved successful. 410 legal actions (resulting from around 250 cases) have now been, or are being, taken to court by the Council on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership – all successfully.¹⁴ Only 17% of civil orders have been breached so far – with 7% of these cases resulting in imprisonment and 4% suspended sentences. We recognise that this success is the result of extensive partnership working with the Police, Birmingham Women's Aid and the Women's Advice and Information Centre.
- 1.12 An evaluation of the programme has been funded by Government Office West Midlands, and this Committee would like to see the outcomes of that evaluation. In the meantime, we are satisfied, from the evidence we have received thus far, that using civil orders is a successful approach to tackling domestic violence.

¹⁴ This refers to all civil orders, not just those relating to domestic violence.



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- 1.13 There was one note of caution: obviously pursuing the use of civil orders requires resources and that funding is not secured for the future. The funding of domestic violence services and support is a common theme throughout this report and we will return to it in the final section.

Suggested Actions

2. This Committee supports the use of civil orders in tackling domestic violence, however close monitoring of the impact of the use of civil orders should continue to ensure that the approach maximises the safety of victims/survivors, their children and communities generally.
3. The results of the evaluation programme on the use of civil orders funded by Government Office West Midlands should be reported back to this Committee.

Housing Issues

- 1.14 Members welcomed the involvement of the Housing and Constituencies Directorate of the City Council in supporting the Strategy in a number of ways. Not only do housing officers support the work on civil orders as outlined above, but work is also being done to increase independent domestic violence support available to those victims/survivors who present as homeless under the Domestic Violence Home Options scheme. This is discussed in more detail in Section 2.
- 1.15 Housing officers also work to support the Strategy's aim to ensure that all perpetrators of domestic violence are "evicted from registered social landlord tenancies". With regard to the City Council's own housing policy, the Council's tenancy agreement has a specific clause stating that perpetration of domestic violence by a tenant can be considered grounds for eviction, in line with the target under BVPI 225 (see page 5). Therefore, tenants can be evicted if found guilty of domestic violence (as "trespassers") – the court would have to be satisfied that the tenant had breached either the tenancy agreement or civil law. On the question of re-housing these perpetrators, there would be a right to apply for accommodation but the person would generally be categorised as being intentionally homeless and so less likely to get a property. The option for the families to then return to that property is addressed through Home Options and can be backed up with a civil order where necessary.
- 1.16 One difficulty noted is that currently the department does not collect data on perpetrators, and given that the Strategy notes the lack of "consistent and centralised data collection"¹⁵ this would assist the tackling of this issue

¹⁵ Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-09, p.16



1.17 In addition, housing officers are engaged with multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) at a local level. This is a programme being rolled out by the Police where the Police risk assess domestic violence reports and where a very high level of risk is determined, a MARAC draws relevant agencies together, including Council officers (both from the corporate centre and constituency offices), health professionals, probation and Women's Aid staff. MARACs are discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Suggested Actions

4. That the Cabinet Member for Housing initiate a reporting mechanism to inform partners on the number and results of possession proceedings taken on the grounds of domestic violence.
5. That the Cabinet Member for Housing promotes a common approach to perpetrators between all registered social landlords operating within the city.

Birmingham Women's Safety Unit

1.18 The seriousness with which the Community Safety Partnership takes domestic violence is evidenced by the inception of the Birmingham Women's Safety Unit. Commissioned by the Partnership and managed by Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid, the Unit offers independent support and advocacy for those wishing to pursue criminal or civil actions. There are three elements to the work:

- Criminal and Civil Justice: in particular providing Independent Domestic Violence Advisors¹⁶ to work with women referred through the court or from the Police; offering support, advice, information and assistance to women affected by domestic violence, exploring the criminal and civil justice routes as an option.
- Wrap Around Services: including involvement in Home Options (see 2.6) and access to home security measures, helpline and 24-hour Single Referral Route to refuge (within and outside Birmingham); links into Mental Health and Substance Misuse pathways, the NSPCC and Family Support workers;
- Consideration being given to co-located services: including Civil Order Case-builders and litigators, a family law solicitor, and a Police Domestic Violence specialist on secondment.

1.19 The Unit has proved to be a success, with:

- Between 11 and 35 cases being heard in over three Specialist Domestic Violence Courts every day in Birmingham;

¹⁶ Of the four independent advocates in post two members of staff spoke community languages and from the wider staff complement three of the five posts had community language skills. There was also a speaker of Chinese.



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- Service users 75% less likely to suffer repeat incidents of domestic violence within 12 months;
- Women reporting increased feelings of safety, increased confidence in the criminal justice system, increased independence and feelings of control over their lives.

1.20 Funding for the criminal and civil justice arm of the Safety Unit has been primarily via the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (over £300,000) with additional money from the Home Office and Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM). As with the work with civil orders, this funding has to date not been mainstreamed although political and officer commitment to maintaining these essential roles has been evident. This is discussed further in the final section of this report.

Police

A key partner in tackling domestic violence is the Police. The Committee heard evidence of the very positive changes that have been made over the past few years in approaching this problem. There are Police Domestic Abuse Officers dedicated to offering help and support to victims of domestic violence. Public Protection Units work with vulnerable people, including those experiencing domestic violence. The way incidents are recorded has changed – to include details of emotional, mental and financial abuse as well as physical and sexual abuse. A risk assessment is conducted for every incident reported and where children are in the household, Children's Services and Health Services are automatically notified. For those deemed very high risk, the Police will convene and co-ordinate a multi-agency response through the MARAC (see 4.7).

Where appropriate, officers will continue to work with individuals, visiting those deemed to be at high risk and arranging regular patrols around that address. "Flags" can be put on addresses so if a 999 call is received, the operator will upgrade the response time. Officers will work with victims/survivors who wish to pursue either criminal or civil actions against the perpetrator. The approach to evidence-gathering has greatly enhanced, for example, police officers will use headcams when responding to a call-out so that the immediate aftermath can be used, not only in court, but in the interview with the perpetrator.

The Police are just about to launch new arrangements, Public Protection Units, to co-ordinate their work with vulnerable people, including those experiencing domestic violence.

West Midlands Police is represented on the Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum. They are also involved in rolling out the Sanctuary Scheme (see 2.11).



2 Strategic Priority 2: Safety & Support

- 2.1 The second Strategic Priority takes the need for safety and support further, aiming:
- To ensure that the safety and support needs of those experiencing domestic violence in Birmingham are met through well resourced, safe and accessible services.
- 2.2 There is some cross-over with the first Strategic Priority here in that both the work on civil orders and the work undertaken by the Safety Unit complement work to increase Safety and Support. The City Council's Housing and Constituencies Directorate plays a key role and this is further explored in this section, alongside related partnership activity such as the Sanctuary Scheme and the Supporting People Mini Forum. We have also included a section on a key partner in tackling domestic violence: Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid.
- 2.3 Another element within this Strategic Priority which the City Council must address is training – all agencies working with domestic violence victims/survivors should implement a training needs analysis and training programmes on domestic violence for front line staff and managers.

Home Options

- 2.4 There are two key actions relating to housing under this Strategic Priority:
- To have reduced homelessness and repeat homelessness due to domestic violence;
 - To have increased the availability and take up of home security and Home Options.
- 2.5 Under the first, Table 1 shows that the number of homelessness cases due to domestic violence accepted (i.e. accepted as homeless by the City Council) has fallen over the past three years – indeed, the figure has almost halved since 2004/05. The Committee was also reassured that the City Council was meeting one of the indicators included in BVPI 225 (see page 5): to reduce the percentage of cases accepted as homeless due to domestic violence that had previously been re-housed by the Local Authority because of domestic violence in the last 2 years. The city has reduced repeat homelessness for 2006/07 for these cases by 1%

Table 1: Homeless Acceptances Due to Domestic Violence (Victims/survivors)

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Total homeless acceptances	4663	3768	2608
Homeless acceptances due to domestic violence	932	640	521



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- 2.6 The key tool to tackle homelessness will be the Domestic Violence Home Options scheme. Home Options bring together many different kinds of organisations to help prevent homelessness and provide other housing options for households with different needs, including private landlords and Registered Social landlords.
- 2.7 The Domestic Violence Home Options programme, introduced from January 2008 and commissioned by the City Council from Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid, means that any woman who approaches the City Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness due to domestic violence will be offered an appointment with a specialist home options adviser. The adviser will assist with:
- Finding refuge if needed;
 - Accessing support to access other statutory services;
 - Support to take out civil action (if criminal action is not possible); and
 - Access to additional security measures to the property.
- 2.8 The placement of the Home Options service within the Women's Safety Unit is intended to increase safety for women experiencing domestic violence. The Home Options programme recognises that being dealt with as homeless was not always the best route for victims/survivors of domestic violence. Equally, refuge accommodation is not always appropriate (where it is available). For example, experience has shown if a woman has older boys, they were likely to have contact with other adults who might wish to visit them at a refuge and this can have an impact on the feelings of security for other residents.
- 2.9 Other considerations will also come into play as part of the Home Options service: placing women with children in areas where the impact/disruption to their lives (e.g. access to education) would be minimised, and these would be considered as part of the Home Options service.
- 2.10 One issue raised during our discussions was the complexity of housing and homelessness legislation and the difficulty victims/survivors have in understanding it when under great stress and suffering from low self-esteem. It was agreed that the options needed to be set out clearly and concisely to enable those in that position to take informed decisions.

Suggested Action

6. That a clear set of guidelines are produced for those who are experiencing domestic violence, setting out their options, to enable them to make an informed decision on housing options.



Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (B&SWA)

Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid grew, as did many refuge groups, out of the women's movement of the 1970's. At the time there was no provision for women and children who were trying to escape domestic violence. In the late 1970's in Birmingham, a group of women created a "squat" in an empty building and made this space available for women fleeing abuse. This has evolved into an organisation offering Floating Support and Refuge services in Birmingham and Solihull. The aims of B&SWA are:

- to provide safe, secure, temporary accommodation and a counselling support service to women and children affected by domestic violence and abuse;
- to provide advice and information to women survivors of abuse;
- to raise awareness of the issues that face women and children survivors of abuse;
- to ensure that women obtain the benefits to which they are entitled; and
- to provide appropriate play opportunities for children living in refuge and a safe environment for children to explore their feelings.

This is achieved via programmes such as:

- B&SWA Freephone Helpline;
- Safe refuge accommodation, accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, it also takes referrals for the other refuges in the city of Birmingham (see above);
- Floating Support: a point of contact offering support, advice, information and assistance to women and children affected by domestic violence, enabling them to maximise their independence in the community and manage an independent tenancy;
- Family Support Project: available to help and support women and children who have been affected by the experience of domestic violence; and
- Schools Project: a fun and informative package to raise awareness of domestic violence for children aged from 5 to 13 in schools and youth centres in Birmingham.

B&SWA is a member of the Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum.

Sanctuary Scheme

- 2.11 One of the options within the Home Options scheme is to offer victims/survivors protection in their own home. In support of this, the Sanctuary Scheme is being piloted within the Hall Green constituency (linked to Kings Heath Police Station).
- 2.12 Within the scheme, the Police and the City Council work together to allow victims/survivors of domestic violence to stay safely in their own homes. It is hoped that this scheme will have a positive impact upon homelessness figures as more women choose to stay put with additional security measures, reinforcing, where appropriate, civil injunctions (see 1.3 above). Members



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welcomed this scheme, and look forward to its roll out across the city, and noted that it contributes to one of the indicators included in BVPI 225 (see page 5).

Supporting People

- 2.13 Supporting People is a national programme offering vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life, enabling greater independence through high quality housing-related services which complement existing care services and is the major funder of domestic violence services within the city. A needs analysis was conducted for supporting people during 2007 which was fed into the new Supporting People Strategy, currently under consultation.
- 2.14 The Supporting People Mini Fora in Birmingham are designed to give providers of supported accommodation an opportunity to discuss any issues they may have relating to their service, sector and to develop best practice. One of these fora is the Domestic Violence Mini Forum, which aims to increase accessibility of safe services and safe choices for victim/survivors in Birmingham.¹⁷ The Forum has seven key providers, including the City Council. The role of the Forum is to share best practice, policies and procedures, carry out needs analysis and to explore the approach to domestic violence across the city.
- 2.15 The Forum has contributed to greater integration across providers and to the development of key services including the single referral route as an access point for refuge accommodation, and Home Options as a preventive model. Currently the Forum is focusing on conducting a needs analysis across the city – to see what domestic violence provision across the city should look like, the extent to which this is being delivered and to integrate the voluntary sector more.
- 2.16 It is anticipated that Birmingham will be a pathfinder for the new commissioning arrangements for supporting people, whereby the tendering for domestic violence service provision, including refuges, will not be ring-fenced to local or existing providers. There is potential for much change in the landscape of domestic violence services within the next few years.

Suggested Action

- 7. That the Supporting People Strategy 2008 and developments in the commissioning framework, as they would impact upon domestic violence services, be reported back to this Committee.**

¹⁷ Ibid. page v.



Refuge Accommodation

- 2.17 Whilst both the Home Options approach and Supporting People emphasises protecting women in their own home, there will always be a need for refuge accommodation. Birmingham has 9 domestic violence refuges/centres for women experiencing violence run by social landlords: Jyoti Ashram; or the voluntary/community sector: Salvation Army, Birmingham Women's Aid, Gilgal, Birmingham Crisis Centre and Roshni. Three refuges are for Asian women specifically.
- 2.18 The City Council has recently introduced a "single referral scheme" to refuge which is run by Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid helpline, in partnership with other refuge providers. This free-phone helpline is part of the national network so it is possible to move women out of the area if necessary.
- 2.19 BVPI 225 (see page 5) includes an indicator on refuge places: that within the Local Authority area a minimum of 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population is provided. In Birmingham, 116 units of refuge accommodation are provided – surpassing the target. The aim is to maintain the existing 116 refuge bed spaces and to increase the numbers of floating support provision by 160.
- 2.20 However, demand remains greater than the number of refuge places. There had been around 650 referrals through the single referral route by autumn 2007, with half of those referrals being allocated accommodation and the other half choosing not to access City Council Housing accommodation. Around 14 requests are received each day and whilst outreach services and the Home Options initiatives could go some way to improving that situation, it has been made clear to the Committee that there is a need for more spaces.
- 2.21 Members were assured that most refuges in Birmingham were of good quality. Nevertheless there are improvements which could be made on quality and accessibility.
- 2.22 Accessing refuge accommodation can be an issue for some women. Some facilities operate age limits on older boys but in those cases, alternative accommodation is sought and in practice this is rarely a barrier to accommodation provision. Both Midland Heart and the City Council provide dispersed accommodation with attached support to those for whom refuge is impractical, such as working women and families with older boys. There are also spaces adapted for disabled women with newer built refuges providing purpose built accommodation, however accessing accommodation is most difficult for women with mental health and substance misuse problems.
- 2.23 The priority is always to ensure that accommodation found was in the best place for the victims/survivors and children and that their safety was secured.



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Suggested Actions

8. That the Cabinet Member for Housing work with partners in the Community Safety Partnership to ensure equal access to appropriate re-housing options for all victims/survivors of domestic violence, particularly those with mental health problems and substance misuse problems.
9. That the Cabinet Member for Housing work with the Community Safety Partnership to expand the range of housing and support options for people affected by domestic violence.
10. That the issues around diversity within the city are recognised when dealing with domestic violence cases. This includes being flexible in meeting the needs of evolving communities.

Training

- 2.24 Another aim of the Strategy is “to increase specialist training for frontline officers” and “to have had all Birmingham agencies implement a training needs analysis and training programmes on domestic violence for front line staff and managers” by 2009.
- 2.25 Housing and Constituencies Directorate have commissioned independent specialist training to provide domestic violence awareness training to 350 front line staff for 2007/2008 and a further 600 in 2008/09. The training will cover what domestic violence is and why women are reluctant to leave violent relationships as well as looking at links to Child Protection issues and good practice guidelines on, for example, managing disclosure. Information on support agencies will also be provided so that staff can signpost those experiencing domestic violence to the appropriate services.
- 2.26 Members were also informed of various training being undertaken in the Constituencies. One example is the Domestic Violence Awareness Training in Bartley Green. A four day awareness raising/training event linked to responding to domestic violence has been funded. The training is for members from both the statutory and voluntary sector who are often the first point of contact for those experiencing domestic violence and covers :
- Awareness raising;
 - Dealing with disclosure;
 - Guidance in relation to risk assessment;
 - The legal system in relation to health, police, civil law, housing, refuge and support agencies including the voluntary sector;
 - The impact on children and young people.
- 2.27 Members were also advised of other schemes in Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield.



- 2.28 Through funding made available by the Community Safety Partnership, a programme of multi-agency training on domestic violence has reached over 2000 front line workers in the last two years. This training has covered working with families, risk assessment, safety planning, direct questioning and safeguarding children and young people.
- 2.29 Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board, in partnership with Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid and the Forum, is delivering a further six conferences on safeguarding children this year.
- 2.30 Whilst this training has reached substantial numbers of city council staff, it has not been systematically delivered across all front line service providers. Neither has training been provided to managers who may encounter domestic violence in the workforce.

Suggested Actions

11. That the Cabinet Member for Equalities & Human Resources examine the need for, and feasibility of, a training needs analysis to include consideration of mandatory domestic violence training for front-line staff and managers.
12. That the City Council considers joining the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a national employers coalition committed to addressing domestic violence within the workplace.

3 Strategic Priority 3: Prevention and Early Intervention

- 3.1 The third Strategic Priority emphasises the need:

To ensure that in every aspect of Birmingham life, domestic violence is confronted and challenged and that victim/survivors of domestic violence are able to access support earlier.

- 3.2 In this section, we consider the work done to identify those experiencing domestic violence as soon as possible. Some of this lies with health visitors or schools – although there are links to the training some City Council officers need in order to properly help victims/survivors, as discussed in the section above. We also consider information campaigns that have taken place across the city to challenge domestic violence.

Direct Questioning

- 3.3 Critical to early intervention is the use of routine questioning, such as is now standard with pregnant women. This allows women to talk with their health visitor in a safe environment to someone who will be able to assist them. In Birmingham, programmes of routine questioning were initiated by the South West Birmingham Domestic Violence Programme.
- 3.4 As part of our evidence gathering, we heard from representatives of Birmingham East and North Primary Care Trusts explaining the role health visitors and other professionals play in prevention



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and early intervention. The Birmingham PCTs are part of the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership and are engaged with the Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum (see page 27). Health professionals also attend MARACs (see page 23).

- 3.5 In summary, we learned that health visitors can play a critical role here, in
- Identification of victims/survivors: questions on domestic violence are part of the standard questioning for new mothers;
 - The roll out of routine questioning;
 - The use of health visits to discuss domestic violence issues: these visits are often held in private, without the perpetrator being present or suspecting there would be any need to be present;
 - Awareness raising: health visitors are able to sign post victims/survivors to appropriate services.
- 3.6 There is mandatory training for health visitors to ensure they have the confidence and competence to work with those experiencing domestic violence. In addition, there are specialist domestic violence posts.
- 3.7 Taking this a step further, Perry Barr Constituency has become the first Constituency to develop a multi-agency protocol for direct questioning on domestic violence and has provided six domestic violence training days and workshops to accompany it. The training was provided to the City Council, Health professionals, Police and third sector organisations. An action plan to implement the protocol was drawn up. This was co-ordinated and led by Perry Barr Responding to Domestic Violence Task Group.

Schools

- 3.8 Schools are an obvious place to start when looking at prevention and raising awareness. It is also possible for teachers and other staff to be involved in identifying those children who are at risk from domestic violence.
- 3.9 Firstly therefore, there is the training and support on offer to teachers and other staff to help them in identifying risk and dealing with situations where children are at risk from domestic violence, or are in households where domestic violence is taking place. One way in which this takes place is via the Designated Senior Person (DSP) for Child Protection, which every school must have. The DSP in more than 90% of schools in Birmingham has attended specific training around Child Protection within the last 2 years, which includes training on domestic violence. In addition, there was a series of half day conferences for schools about domestic violence arranged for early 2008 in conjunction with Birmingham East and North PCT, Education Welfare Service and Women's Aid.
- 3.10 Further to this, there is the opportunity to raise domestic violence as an issue with children in school in a safe and confidential environment. In curriculum subjects such as Citizenship and Sex and Relationship Education, children and young people can develop knowledge and understanding



in key topics relating to domestic violence including the nature of relationships, bullying and human rights. Both of these areas are explored further in Strategic Priority 4: Children and Young People.

- 3.11 The Domestic Violence Awareness Manual for use with children and young people was published by Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid in May 2007. The manual meets BVPI 225 (10) "providing domestic violence education packs for schools and youth groups".

Suggested Action

- 13. That the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families liaise with B&SWA to agree recommendations for how the schools programme could be implemented across Birmingham's schools.**

Awareness Campaigns

- 3.12 During the course of our exploration we were told that there had not been a city-wide campaign in the last 4 years, though it is a key aim for 2009 in the Strategy that:

City-wide campaigns have been conducted annually with consistent imaging/branding; coinciding with strategy implementation priorities; matched by extra funding to the specialist domestic violence sector.

- 3.13 That is not to say that there has been no activity here – at a local level, a number of campaigns have been taking place over the last couple of years, including:

- In Erdington Constituency, the Local Delivery Group and Ward Committee (via NRF) have funded domestic violence information cards and matching posters to raise awareness;
- Hall Green Constituency has run a District Domestic Abuse campaign; posters, leaflets and survival cards (with phone numbers and essential advice in emergency domestic situations); supermarket road-shows were also used to promote the survival cards and early reporting;
- Campaigns were run in Hall Green, Northfield and Yardley during the 2006 World Cup. Funded through the NRF Violent Crime Reduction Campaign, additional intelligence led targeted patrols in hot spot locations were deployed, in addition to posters, beer mats and leaflets. The aim was to significantly reduce violent crime and domestic abuse between May and October 2006;
- Sutton Coldfield ran a two week domestic abuse awareness campaign in November 2007. The aim of the campaign was to ensure that local residents were aware that domestic abuse can happen in Sutton Coldfield, and that support services are available to help people break out of the cycle of violence. It was linked to the international 'White Ribbon' campaign.

- 3.14 However, the need for a city-wide, properly funded campaign with all the key partners involved was emphasised, and Members endorsed this appeal.



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Suggested Action

14. That the City Council work with the key partners in tackling Domestic Violence to implement a city-wide campaign aimed at:
 - (a) Victims: increasing awareness of domestic violence and the options available to those who are experiencing domestic violence, with particular emphasis on reaching groups of women who are most marginalised and isolated;
 - (b) Perpetrators: highlighting the unacceptability of domestic violence and the consequences that abusers will face;
 - (c) Children and Young People.

4 Strategic Priority 4: Children and Young People

4.1 The fourth Strategic Priority aims:

To ensure that children and young people exposed to domestic violence have access to the services they need and have the skills to build relationships based on respect and equality.

4.2 This section focuses on safeguarding children, and elements of health education which support young people in understanding and building relationships.

Safeguarding

4.3 The Strategy recognises the impact domestic violence has on the health, welfare and education of children and young people. A key body here is the Birmingham Local Safeguarding Children Board, set up following The Children Act 2004. This board has representatives from all those agencies and organisations that engage with children to ensure that children are kept safe from harm. The Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB), has an independent chair and reports to the Children and Young People's Board. It agrees how local services that have daily contact with children should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

4.4 In relation to domestic violence the BSCB operates three local Forums and a range of events focusing on raising awareness. Through the BSCB, multi-agency training is provided for staff in children's services including front line staff and Police by partners such as the Health service. Training is also provided to staff within schools and voluntary organisations working with victims of domestic violence.

4.5 The BSCB reviews serious cases (i.e. those resulting in death or serious injury) on an annual basis. In the last year, 90% of those cases involved domestic violence, of which 75% were drug and alcohol related. As a result of a change nationally in Police reporting procedures, there has been a



considerable increase in referrals from Police officers dealing with incidents of domestic violence where children are present in the last year. This requires 'criteria prioritising' whereby a decision has to be made as to whether immediate action is required or not based on the assessment of the adult and the consequent impact on the child (such as the child having an injury which could result in the child being put on the Child Protection register). This issue is being considered in more detail by the Vulnerable Children O&S Committee.

- 4.6 Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board has been formally represented on Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum since the Domestic Violence Strategy was launched and far greater partnership working, particularly around training has taken place.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

- 4.7 MARACs draw relevant agencies together, including Council officers (both from the corporate centre and Constituency offices), health professionals, probation and Women's Aid staff – the exact configuration locally determined – in order to assess the level of risk to children involved in domestic violence cases and take appropriate action.
- 4.8 Overall there are eight MARACs across the city. Some council officers and partner representatives have suggested that the approach has meant greater awareness of services on offer, leading to an increased number of victims seeking help. This approach could result in increased confidence and trust within communities to access advisers and receive a quality response. An alternative view might be that the sharing of information may deter women from reporting domestic violence to the Police, for fear that their children may be removed, a fear commonly exploited by abusers. Without full engagement and representation through the MARAC process, victims/survivors may feel more disempowered and fearful.
- 4.9 Recognising the inherent dangers of discussing women and children's safety without their engagement, the Government recommended that each MARAC would include an independent advocate for the victim and foresaw local funding being allocated to this activity. Whilst specialist domestic violence services attend where possible, the absence of funding has not made this possible and the integrity of the activity remains at risk.

Suggested Actions

15. That a full multi-agency evaluation of Birmingham MARACs be undertaken.
16. That the Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities consider seeking increased capacity for Birmingham Women's Safety Unit for independent advocates for victims/survivors within MARACs, to enable their full representation on MARACs across the city.



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Health Education

4.10 Research by the NCH charity (National Children's Homes) in 1994 showed that 64% of all mothers suffering domestic violence felt their children should be learning about domestic violence in schools. As a result of this, in 2006 the Local Government Association (LGA) produced guidance which proposed that:

All children and young people should have healthy relationships, education and prevention built into their curriculum or equivalent programme.¹⁸

4.11 The Government White Paper 'Choosing Health' from 2004 introduced the National Healthy Schools Status (NHSS). This set out key areas that a school must achieve to be given the standard and linked these to the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes.

4.12 Domestic violence may be covered in the following curriculum areas:

- Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) (including Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and Citizenship); and
- Emotional Health and Well-being (including bullying).

4.13 The NHSS included the following Emotional Health and Well-being criteria which relates to domestic violence¹⁹:

- Vulnerable individuals and groups should be identified and appropriate strategies to support them and their families be established;
- There should be clear curriculum opportunities for pupils to understand and explore feelings;
- A confidential pastoral support system should be in place for pupils to access advice;
- There should be a clear policy on bullying;
- Appropriate professional training should be provided for those in a pastoral role; and
- There should be a clear confidentiality policy.

4.14 The target for Birmingham schools to have gained NHSS by 2009 and is included in the Children and Young People's Plan, Local Area Agreement and the Council Plan.

4.15 Members were informed that pupils were taught about social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) which are explored in 7 themes. In relation to domestic violence these included:

- i. Theme 2: 'Getting On and Falling Out' – Developing children's knowledge, understanding and skills in empathy, managing feelings (with a focus on anger) and social skills.
- ii. Theme 3: 'Say No to Bullying' – Exploring what bullying is, how it feels and why people do it; children also learn how to prevent and respond to it.

¹⁸ Domestic Violence Awareness Manual for use with Children and Young People, Issue One, May 2007

¹⁹ Health Education National Standards - Reference to be inserted



iii. Theme 6: 'Relationships' – Exploring feelings within the context of important relationships such as family and friends.

- 4.16 Examples given of Key Stage 3 learning areas in Citizenship and PSHE include "Family Problems," "Domestic Violence," "Relationships" and "Bullying". Human Rights and Equality are also covered.
- 4.17 Birmingham Key Stage 4 pupils explored "Aggression and Violence" with "Conflict Resolution" and "Parenting and Changes to Lifestyle".

Children in Refuges

- 4.18 It is recognised that meeting the needs of children in refuges is a particular area of concern and options to address this are currently being considered by the Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum (see page 27). Children represent about two-thirds of the refuge population and whilst some refuges had reasonable provision for children, others had very little. This provision can include work with children and families to promote positive family relationships and prevent family breakdown where domestic violence has placed a strain on that relationship. It can enable children to play where their experience may have damaged their ability to do so and build self esteem and confidence around positive parenting. The emphasis is on promoting positive behaviour in children, and preventing the emotional and psychological impact of abuse developing into mental health problems, thus maximising safety for all.
- 4.19 Members were informed that there were insufficient staff to support the needs of children in the city. There also remains no national funding programme to meet this basic need.
- 4.20 Most refuges did not have provision for boys over the age of 14, citing the security of other women as experience has shown that boys of this age were most likely to have contact with adults who could gain access to the refuge. Families with boys over 14 have access to designated dispersed housing, provided by the Local Authority or by Midland Heart, supported through domestic violence outreach services.

Suggested Action

17. That the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families explore possible funding to support an increase in the number of workers to support children living in refuges.

Local Projects

- 4.21 In addition to the activity outlined above, the Committee was also informed about some projects funded at Constituency level. These have included:
- In Northfield, Women's Aid delivered domestic violence workshops to schools in the district, through a six week programme aimed at 5 and 6 year olds. The aim was to increase self-esteem, healthy living and relationships and was delivered to schools in Kings Norton;



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- Kingstanding Education Action Zone has also run school programmes around Domestic Violence issues; and
- Perry Barr Local Delivery Group funded a Family Support Work in partnership with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), working to minimise the trauma experienced by children exposed to domestic violence.

5 Strategic Priority 5: Birmingham's Co-ordinated Response

5.1 The fifth and final Strategic Priority is concerned with ensuring:

A co-ordinated, co-operative and comprehensive response between Birmingham's agencies.

5.2 There a number of bodies involved in domestic violence which links partners together. The umbrella organisation is the Birmingham Strategic Partnership (Be Birmingham) under which sits the Community Safety Partnership. This section examines the City Council's role within these, as well as its contribution to Strategic Priority 5.

Birmingham Community Safety Partnership

5.3 The Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) brings together those organisations working to ensure Birmingham is a safe place to live and work: the Police, City Council, Fire Service, Probation Service, Birmingham Voluntary Services Council and the three Health PCTs. They do this through partnership working to address six priority themes – one of which is "Violence and Vulnerability".

5.4 One of the key responsibilities under this Strategic Priority is to "ensure that there is a sustained and high profile focus on the priority to reduce domestic violence in the City and make victims and children safer".²⁰ It was the Community Safety Partnership which launched the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy, and currently funds and supports both the Safety Unit and the work on civil orders.

5.5 As we have heard in previous Scrutiny Reviews and Overviews, the City Council is a key partner in the BCSP and indeed it is currently chaired by the City Council's Chief Executive. In addition, the local arms of the BCSP – Local Delivery Groups – are responsible for (solely or in partnership) a number of the locally based projects referred to in this report. This includes setting up local domestic violence forums.

5.6 The approach the BCSP has taken is to provide seed funding for new approaches rather than funding core activities. As a number of these have proved successful, mainstreaming is now being sought. BCSP allots annual funding to a domestic violence co-ordinator post, a requirement of the

²⁰ <http://www.birmingham-csp.org.uk/corepriorities/violenceandvulnerability>, 18 January 2008



Local Authority under Best Value Performance Indicator 225, together with some contribution to information provision, training and events.

Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum

- 5.7 The Home Office recommends that all Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, such as the BCSP, works with the local domestic violence forum. In Birmingham, this is the Birmingham Inter-Agency Domestic Violence Forum (BIADVF), established in 1996. This Forum has recently been strengthened to bring together, at both a city-wide and Constituency level, the key public agencies and representatives of the community and voluntary sectors to achieve a co-ordinated response to domestic violence through Birmingham's first Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy.
- 5.8 In 2004, the Forum was responsible for developing Birmingham's Domestic Violence Standards, endorsed by BCSP, providing minimum standards for all services across Birmingham encountering domestic violence. These are soon to be updated to reflect current challenges around information sharing and the common assessment framework (which relates to vulnerable children).

The City Council's Role

- 5.9 There are three key outcomes for 2009 under this Strategic Priority to which the City Council can directly answer as far as it's own policies are concerned:
- a. Ensuring full integration of domestic violence into wider Birmingham policies;
 - b. Securing representation at a senior enough level to make decisions regarding resources and organisational change;
 - c. Securing representation from a senior member of staff with responsibility for domestic violence in each of the 'responsible authorities' to the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.²¹
- 5.10 All three outcomes go to the heart of how important domestic violence is considered across the breadth of activity the City Council is engaged in.
- 5.11 To start on a positive note, the last of these has clearly been achieved – Stephen Hughes, the Chief Executive, chairs the BCSP and Peter Hay, Strategic Director (Adults and Communities) takes the role of Corporate Lead on domestic violence. In terms of political leadership, Councillor Sue Anderson as Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities was singled out for her contribution by witnesses.
- 5.12 We have also seen some departments take their responsibilities for domestic violence very seriously indeed and responses to domestic violence are embedded in policy in some parts of the Council – and Housing and Constituencies Directorate deserve a special mention here for their contribution to introducing the Domestic Violence Home Options scheme.

²¹ In Birmingham, this is the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP)



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5.13 However, in terms of work across the City Council to fully integrate domestic violence into wider Birmingham policies there is clearly much still to do. Throughout our evidence gathering we have learned about many good projects and much partnership working. However, it is equally apparent that almost all the work is funded via short-term funding streams: whether from the City Council, Community Safety Partnership, Government Office West Midlands or others. Aside from services funded through Supporting People, much of this work is undertaken by the third sector. There is some distance to be travelled in order to thoroughly embed domestic violence support services in City Council policies, however, we are confident that real progress is being made.

Summary

At the outset of this Overview, our chief concern was whether the City Council was “ticking all the boxes” in terms of its commitments in the Strategy. This report sets out the contribution to the Strategy and the contribution to meeting BVPI 225.

However, as we have progressed our examination evolved to consider more fundamental questions of our (i.e. City Council and partners) response to domestic violence and how it is embedded in mainstream activity. This goes to the heart of the importance we attach to tackling this problem.

Discussions on embedding mainstream activity often focuses on funding – and, as discussed above, much of the work on domestic violence support is short-term, and future funding is uncertain, particularly in the light of the cessation of NRF. This is not just true of City Council funding, but of most of our partners. For example, the work done to use civil orders in tackling perpetrators (see page 8) is currently funded through the Community Safety Partnership, but this will soon end. Sources of funding are currently being discussed by the “Violence and Vulnerability” Core Group of the Community Safety Partnership.

There is positive news to report however, the Safety Unit (page 11), which was initially funded via seed funding from GOWM is now supported by the Home Office, BCSP and the City Council. At the time of writing, consideration is being given to mainstreaming Birmingham Women’s Safety Unit, which would be a significant demonstration of the city’s commitment.

One method of targeting funding is via the Local Area Agreement (LAA). Members were pleased to see that domestic violence has been mentioned in the revised (draft) LAA as part of a one of the key priorities on violent crime. However, there is no specific target on domestic violence (in the most recent draft – January 2008) and this may limit the appetite to fund activity. The Chairman has already written to the Deputy Leader to raise this issue. As a result of what we have heard throughout the course of this Overview, it is our strong view that tackling domestic violence should be a priority within the LAA and that appropriate targets be included to ensure that this important area of work continues and is endorsed by appropriate partners.

Our evidence gathering has shown some current gaps in funding around children’s work, independent advocacy, counselling provision and infrastructure support. It is important that this is not be seen solely as a City Council issue, ultimately it is partnership finances that will demonstrate true commitment. Bringing agencies and budgets together into a multi-agency commissioning strategy would demonstrate the strength



in co-ordination needed and would enable savings to be made through investment in prevention and earlier intervention.

The City Council does have a key role to play here – in co-ordinating activity. It is important for the City Council to be seen as leading here. Domestic violence is clearly an area with extensive partnership working – with Police, Health Services, voluntary and third sector agencies and the City Council. However, there is still work to do. There is a view that if domestic violence is to be fully integrated into Birmingham City Council policies, then resources and organisational change is needed. It has been suggested that there is an absence of staffing to support the infrastructure of the Forum and BCSP in respect of domestic violence.

Also, in relation to information gathering and sharing: fifteen months into the Strategy, there is still much work to be done on the systematic retrieval of data to provide evidence that the Strategy is making a difference. Currently monthly information is fed into the Forum through the police, an annual response to the BVPI on repeat homelessness. No data on children and young people is systematically made available, despite a significant growth in referrals being received through the police.

Overall it is clear that the City Council is taking this issue very seriously, and in some respects, leading the agenda. There is a strong history of partnership working in the city and recognising the expertise that the third sector brings in responding to domestic violence, reflected in its Beacon Award this year, which featured its partnership with Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid. There is a wealth of safe and reliable services, particularly within the third sector – although this is not yet commensurate with the scale and need of the city.

In addition, there is much activity within the City Council: for example, collaboration with B&SWA over Home Options, and Children, Young People & Families Directorate's pledge to host 6 schools conferences to begin the strategic engagement with schools and clusters demonstrates real commitment. There is also much activity at a Constituency level, however, it could be better co-ordinated with good practice shared.

There is also a critical role for Elected Members, who can play a decisive role in championing initiatives and making links across organisations.

In conclusion, there is a clear desire by Members and officers to address, in all areas of work, the pernicious nature of domestic violence. The wider consequences for the city of not addressing domestic violence are recognised: the impact on families, particularly children, where the impact of living in areas where domestic violence is endemic, is linked to learned behaviour contributing to public place violence and poor educational attainment. The Council has a role in changing attitudes on violence, hence our proposal for a city-wide campaign (see page 21) – a high profile city wide campaign serves many purposes, not least to communicate the most important message from the strategy that Birmingham is committed to making men, women and children safer by holding perpetrators to account.



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Suggested Actions

18. That the Cabinet Members for Local Services and Community Safety and Adults and Communities examine the infrastructure available to support the Forum in implementing the Domestic Violence Strategy and co-ordinating multi-agency action in order to ensure the City Council is fully meeting its obligations.
19. That the relevant Cabinet Members work with partners to develop a domestic violence commissioning strategy for the city to complement the LAA. This should reflect the savings²² to be made across the public sector by investing in earlier intervention and harm prevention.
20. That the relevant Cabinet Member considers the effectiveness of current data collection in relation to domestic violence, and encourages all relevant departments to contribute systematically.
21. That the Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety ensures that good practice across Constituencies is shared, with the full involvement of local Members.

Summary of Suggested Actions and Executive Responsibility

1	That the outcomes of the research being conducted by the BCSP into the experience and needs of male victims/survivors of domestic violence are reported back to this Committee.	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety
2	This Committee supports the use of civil orders in tackling domestic violence, however close monitoring of the impact of the use of civil orders should continue to ensure that the approach maximises the safety of victims/survivors, their children and communities generally.	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety
3	The results of the evaluation programme on the use of civil orders funded by Government Office West Midlands should be reported back to this Committee.	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety
4	That the Cabinet Member for Housing initiate a reporting mechanism to inform partners on the number and results of possession proceedings taken on the grounds of domestic violence.	Cabinet Member for Housing
5	That the Cabinet Member for Housing promotes a common approach to perpetrators between all registered social landlords operating within the city.	Cabinet Member for Housing
6	That a clear set of guidelines are produced for those who are experiencing domestic violence, setting out their options, to enable them to make an informed decision on housing options.	Cabinet Member for Housing
7	That the Supporting People Strategy 2008 and developments in the commissioning framework, as they would impact upon domestic violence services, be reported back to this Committee.	Cabinet Member for Housing

²² i.e. Where early intervention or prevention negates the need for spending on health or police costs later.



8	That the Cabinet Member for Housing work with partners in the Community Safety Partnership to ensure equal access to appropriate re-housing options for all victims/survivors of domestic violence, particularly those with mental health problems and substance misuse problems.	Cabinet Member for Housing
9	That the Cabinet Member for Housing work with the Community Safety Partnership to expand the range of housing and support options for people affected by domestic violence.	Cabinet Member for Housing
10	That the issues around diversity within the city are recognised when dealing with domestic violence cases. This includes being flexible in meeting the needs of evolving communities.	Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources
11	That the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources examine the need for, and feasibility of, a training needs analysis for all City Council departments to include consideration of mandatory domestic violence training for front-line staff and managers.	Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources
12	That the City Council considers joining the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a national employers coalition committed to addressing domestic violence within the workplace.	Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources
13	That the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families liaise with B&SWA to agree recommendations for how the schools programme could be implemented across Birmingham's schools.	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
14	That the City Council work with the key partners in tackling Domestic Violence to implement a city-wide campaign aimed at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims: increasing awareness of domestic violence and the options available to those who are experiencing domestic violence, with particular emphasis on reaching groups of women who are most marginalised and isolated; • Perpetrators: highlighting the unacceptability of domestic violence and the consequences that abusers will face; • Children and Young People. 	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety; Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
15	That a full evaluation of Birmingham MARACs be undertaken.	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
16	That the Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities consider seeking increased capacity for Birmingham Women's Safety Unit for independent advocates for victims/survivors within MARACs, to enable their full representation on MARACs across the city.	Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families;
17	That the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families explore possible funding to support an increase in the number of workers to support children living in refuges.	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
18	That the Cabinet Members for Local Services and Community Safety and Adults and Communities examine the infrastructure available to support the Forum in implementing the Domestic Violence Strategy and co-ordinating multi-agency action in order to ensure the City Council is fully meeting its obligations.	Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities; Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families; Cabinet Member for Housing; Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety



Tackling Domestic Violence

19	That the relevant Cabinet Members work with partners to develop a domestic violence commissioning strategy for the city to complement the LAA. This should reflect the savings ²³ to be made across the public sector by investing in earlier intervention and harm prevention.	Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities; Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families; Cabinet Member for Housing; Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety
20	That the relevant Cabinet Member considers the effectiveness of current data collection in relation to domestic violence, and encourages all relevant departments to contribute systematically.	Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities; Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families; Cabinet Member for Housing; Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety
21	That the Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety ensures that good practice across Constituencies is shared, with the full involvement of local Members.	Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety

²³ i.e. Where early intervention or prevention negates the need for spending on health or police costs later.