

Report to the Commissioner's Governance Board

Date: 7 November 2016

Title: Safeguarding Domestic Abuse Victims

From: Chief Constable



HISTORIC & CURRENT DEMAND

1. Reports of Domestic Abuse (DA) incidents continue to increase significantly, in line with national trends. 34403 incidents were recorded in Kent during the rolling year to the end of September 2016. This compares to just over 18000 incidents five years ago. The increases can be attributed to growing confidence and responsibility within the wider public to report DA, better accuracy in identifying DA, and a significant emphasis on vulnerability demonstrated by the Force which has encouraged victims to report domestic abuse, for example, through our award-winning awareness campaign in 2015.
2. DA incidents show strong seasonal trends, with a peak in the summer months. The majority of DA is between intimate partners (76%), and a 4:1 ratio of male to female offenders. 24% of DA is between family members, and 10% of reports refer to black and minority ethnic victims. Since 2013 the NPCC definition of DA changed to incorporate over 16s (previously over 18s) and now caters for young relationships and better caters for child on adult abuse, which makes up 6% of the total DA in Force.
3. Domestic Abuse is assessed at three risk levels: High, Medium and Standard, following application of a comprehensive 27-question DASH risk assessment supported by a review of previous incidents. There were 3097 high risk incidents in the last 12 month rolling year to September 2016 (9% of all DA incidents). These are given the most intensive support from a specialist safeguarding police officer and supervised by a detective sergeant. Investigations are conducted by a Detective Constable or a PC on the detective pathway and referrals are made to an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA). All high risk cases are referred to the Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), chaired by Police Public Protection Detective Inspectors.
4. It should be noted that our recording process for 'domestic abuse' includes domestic arguments and disturbances even where abuse, power and/or control from one party to another is either not present or unclear. Officers have a clear mandate to act positively where DA is suspected to have been committed and the presumption will be in favour of arrest with appropriate safeguarding interventions made on behalf of the victim and children.

ARREST & DISPOSAL OUTCOMES

5. The increase in DA call demand has created a capacity challenge for the Force with increasing levels of outstanding calls and outstanding offenders. The Force has responded robustly through a multi-faceted operation: 'Op Unity'. The Force has continued to reinvigorate its positive action policy, supported by a clear strategy from the Chief Officer team. This has led to an increase in the arrest rate for DA offences, with a 66% arrest rate for the last 4 months; that is 2 out of 3 perpetrators arrested in Kent, and the number of outstanding offenders for DA has been reduced. Op Unity 'All-Out' days' throughout October with support from Tactical Operations to Divisions has had a positive impact on the numbers of arrests being made for DA offences.
6. The Force is charging more perpetrators for DA crimes, particularly in relation to those crimes where serious violence has been used. The offence of Coercion and Control was introduced in January 2016 and Kent has been at the forefront in applying this legislation locally in order to protect its vulnerable victims from harm. In September 2016 Kent Police was highlighted by PoliceProfessional.com as one of only 3 Forces to charge more than 10 people with the offence. The conviction rate for DA at court has been increasing since June and is currently 76.4% compared to a national average of 75.3%.

SAFEGUARDING VICTIMS

7. Kent Police continues to enhance its safeguarding of DA victims and children affected by DA. In 2015 significant planning took place to design and embark upon an eighteen month programme to train all police officers on 13 key strands of vulnerability; including DA, child sexual exploitation, human trafficking and honour based abuse. This 3 day Protecting Vulnerable People course was launched in Spring 2016 and reflects the Force's commitment to protect the most vulnerable members of its community from harm. Additionally, Op Unity has been created specifically to enhance staff and officers' response to DA to ensure effective investigation and safeguarding. Corporate messaging has included posters to guide staff responding to DA, aide memoires, best practice and lessons learnt opportunities as well Chief Officer blogs and 'All-Out' days across the Force.
8. Safeguarding children and victims is at the heart of everything the Force does in relation to DA and is subject to daily scrutiny at Divisional Daily Management Meetings. The Quality Assurance (QA) process focusses on the completion of the DASH risk assessment and the quality of the safety plans; ensuring staff are recording their rationale. Reporting of the QA process through the DA Tactical Plan demonstrates increasing quality and consistency of the safeguarding action being taken, and the recording of such action on crime reports is showing a steady improvement. Children identified in DA households are separately assessed by our specialist Central Referral Unit, leading to over half of all children identified notified or referred to Social Care and Health (including all children in high risk cases).
9. The Force Control Room (FCR) Op Unity Hub focuses on intervening in outstanding DA to ensure any risk is minimised, and fast time actions are addressed for a prompt police response, in line with THRIVE. The FCR has proved the concept of this model and realised opportunity for further development, including dedicated staff to the hub and improved working between LPT and FCR. As a result, early indications show attendance times to DA calls have improved, demonstrating that the Force is prioritising and responding to victims of domestic abuse in a timelier manner. These early improvements may not yet be seen in the holistic performance overview, as the sample is too small, but daily performance is showing clear improvements and positive direction of travel.
10. The Force has produced and circulated a 'Supervisor's Guide to Investigating DA', to enhance the supervision of DA investigations. This is underpinned and governed by the DA tactical plan. Monthly reporting shows that frequent QA and feedback is having a positive impact on the standards of investigations and safety planning for victims.
11. The Force has in the last four months doubled the number of Domestic Violence and Prevention Orders (DVPOs) being applied for at court to 104, offering further protection to vulnerable victims. July 2016 saw 100% of the 34 DVPOs applied for at court being granted. Divisions are robustly enforcing DVPOs, tasking staff to visit victims and perpetrators throughout the duration of the order to ensure compliance and deal effectively with breaches.
12. A recently completed independent peer review of DA investigations has shown that the Force is ensuring the voice of the victim is considered and represented through the IDVAs. The Police and Crime Commissioner commissions the Victim Support Service to provide outreach and support to standard and medium risk victims beyond the response by Kent Police and wider voluntary sector organisations.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

13. There is strong governance in place throughout the Force. The overarching governance is provided by the DA (Op Unity) Gold Group chaired by the ACC Central Operations, and further scrutiny is then applied by the Chief Constable at the fortnightly Chief Officers Strategic Meeting. This filters down to a tactical Silver group and then Divisional based groups and DA leads. This structure is supported by a comprehensive Quality Performance Framework (QPF) focussed on improving the service provided to victims of DA.
14. The DA Tactical Delivery Plan is monitored by the Gold group and delivered by the Silver group with support from Divisions. The plan is reviewed regularly and frontline activity is driven through DA Divisional Leads and DA Tactical Advisors within each District. In turn, all DA performance is fed into the County Force Performance Committee, chaired by the DCC.

15. Partnership governance is driven through the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (KMDASG), chaired by the Detective Superintendent Public Protection Unit. The OPCC has standing membership on that group. This operates strong links to the local DA Multiagency Forums and the 'One Stop Shops' providing local drop in advice and information services for DA victims across the whole county. The KMDASG is leading currently on the recommissioning arrangements of DA Services across the county incorporating the renewal of the provision of IDVA services across the county, with a new service specification going out to tender this month for implementation in April 2017.

THREATS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

16. Volumes of DA reports continue to steadily increase and both IDVA and victim feedback indicates this is a positive trend with victims having more and more confidence to report. Though the increase is viewed as positive it presents a challenge in terms of matching resource to the increasing demand.
17. At the Chief Constable's direction the Force Change Team is currently developing options to restructure the Force in order to respond to the increase in DA demand as well as other areas of vulnerability such as child abuse, sexual abuse and mental health. The options being developed are focussed on ensuring the Force is structured to provide the very best quality of service to victims and witnesses.
18. The Force launched a Victim Satisfaction Survey in September 2016 to be able to better understand the needs and wishes of the victim. Data will be available from early January 2017 for analysis to take place. The KMDASG has introduced a pilot Perpetrator Programme to complement the existing perpetrator programme provision and is expected to expand considerably once evaluated.
19. The financial landscape has presented significant challenge in obtaining sufficient funds to redesign and re-commission the DA service model (currently £3.2 million) from April 2017, comparable to the service provided since first commissioned in 2012. There has been a withdrawal of some funds by some district councils and between CCGs and Public Health. Medway and Kent as Local Authorities have also opted to separate how they commission services. This has necessarily presented a risk of decreased provision available to DA victims, but the KMDASG and OPCC is actively working to minimise that risk through engagement with partners and through service design, including enhancing the Victim Support Service commissioned by the OPCC to support 'standard' and 'medium' risk victims.