

## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **WEDNESDAY, 21 MAY 2014**

**REPORT BY:** **HEAD OF HOUSING**

**SUBJECT:** **DOMESTIC ABUSE**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and update of the work taking place within Neighbourhood Housing in relation to customers who are affected by domestic abuse.

1.02 Members are requested to consider the report and note its content.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 Measuring the extent of domestic abuse has historically been notoriously difficult. The most reliable estimates of the extent of domestic abuse come from the Crime Survey of England & Wales. Being a household survey, this picks up more crime than official police figures as not all crimes are reported to the police.

The Crime Survey of England & Wales estimated that in 2011/12, an estimated 1.2 million women, and 800,000 men had experienced domestic abuse in that year. This equates to 7% of all women and 5% of all men.

The survey also found that overall, in their lifetime, 5 million women had experienced domestic abuse at some time.

In Flintshire, statistics provided by the police show that in 2012/13, there were 2348 recorded incidents of domestic abuse.

There were 1249 referrals to DASU (Domestic Abuse Safety Unit)

There were 1481 referrals to Delyn Women's Aid

2.02 Flintshire has good multi-agency arrangements around domestic abuse. The MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) plans for the safety of the most high risk individuals. MARAC is a national model, and is audited on a regular basis by CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) to ensure it's effectiveness.

In 2012/13 the MARAC dealt with 195 cases of domestic abuse.

Team Leaders from Housing Services routinely attend the MARAC, sharing information and contributing to the safety planning process.

However, having reviewed the number of referrals made to MARAC by housing staff, the numbers have been historically low. One reason for this is that incidents that housing staff have become aware of, are already known by the police or other agencies who have made the appropriate referrals to MARAC already.

This in itself however has prompted the team in Neighbourhood Housing to ask whether there are opportunities to identify domestic abuse being missed.

Research suggests that people living with domestic abuse often endure more than 30 incidents before they ask for help and whilst domestic abuse incidents often occur within the home, housing staff who are often familiar faces to customers are well placed to identify issues, and ensure the right support and help is in place to keep those affected by domestic abuse, safe.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 The Housing Service is working with the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator within Community Safety and other social landlords in the area to enhance the approach to identifying and dealing with incidents of domestic abuse.

- The starting point for this has been to train Housing Officers, and arrange training for all frontline staff who may be going into customer's homes. In particular as well as Housing Officers, trades staff such as joiners who attend out of hours repairs emergencies will also be given awareness training, so they are clear on what to do if they attend a property and have concerns about domestic abuse.
- Domestic abuse can also include financial abuse in a variety of forms, and therefore the council's Income Officers are also going to be trained in recognising domestic abuse, and being confident to ask the right questions.
- DASU have agreed to provide the training for council staff free of charge.
- In addition, with the recruitment of additional specialist officers in anti-social behaviour, they will be the lead officers within neighbourhood housing for reports of domestic abuse. They will be able to act as a link between neighbourhood housing, support services and other agencies such as the police. The

team have a good mix of skills to enable them to do this. One officer has a background in housing and anti-social behaviour, another has worked for the police and has experience of dealing with domestic abuse, and our most recent recruit has a legal background, with a specialism in family law.

- The service also has in development a leaflet specific to housing to be able to give customers an understanding of the role that housing can play in tackling domestic abuse, and details of the help that is available.
- The Housing Service is also looking to develop clear branding that customers can clearly identify. This will be used on communications, in locations such as Connects and can be chosen to be worn (for example on a badge or lanyard) to identify to customers that they are trained in domestic abuse. This is to overcome concerns that people may have when wanting to disclose domestic abuse, that they may not be believed, or the person they want to disclose to may not know what to do. By developing clear branding, it will be easier to communicate to customers that staff are trained, and will be able to deal with disclosures confidently and compassionately.
- Team Briefings within Neighbourhood Housing will include domestic abuse as a standard agenda item, with opportunities to invite specialist domestic abuse service providers to come and meet the team. The first of these is to include the Independent Domestic Violence Advocates being invited to speak at Team Brief to talk about the work that they do, and increase familiarity and positive relationships between Officers and the service providers.

### 3.02 **Re-housing**

It is common practice across housing providers that when customers request re-housing due to domestic abuse, accommodation is offered out of the local area. The rationale for this is that the further away someone is, the safer they are.

However, each set of individual circumstances needs to be assessed on a case by case basis.

For some people, their support network is crucial and removing them from friends and family's support can be extremely detrimental and isolating.

Housing staff are being encouraged and trained to treat cases on an individual basis, talking through safety implications of leaving, and helping individuals to find somewhere safe to live, giving due consideration to support networks, schooling for children etc.

### 3.03 **Re-Charges**

The council's tenancy agreement holds the tenant responsible for any damage to their home, and where tenants leave a property where there is deliberate damage or neglect, invoices are raised to re-charge the outgoing tenant for the cost.

It is important however, that where there have been incidents of domestic abuse at the family home, where the damage has been caused by the perpetrator of the abuse, that the council pursues the perpetrator and not the victim for financial recompense.

A failure to correctly apportion responsibility for such costs, can leave victims struggling to pay off debts which are not legitimately theirs, and which can adversely affect their prospects of re-housing in the future.

### 3.04 **Antisocial Behaviour**

Housing staff are also becoming mindful of issues of domestic abuse where there have been reports of anti-social behaviour by neighbours.

This is particularly important where a perpetrator of domestic abuse may not be the actual tenant, but may be living with, or visiting a council tenant.

Research carried out by Caroline Hunter & Judy Nixon (Taking the blame and losing the home) identified that nationally female victims of domestic abuse were held accountable for the behaviour of their abusive partners over whom they had no influence or control to amend their behaviour.

It is therefore crucial that Antisocial Behaviour Officers consider whether domestic abuse is a factor when dealing with complaints of anti-social behaviour and ensure the right advice and support is offered in the first instance.

## 4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 Members of this Committee are asked to consider the content of this report and support the ongoing work of the Neighbourhood Housing Team in tackling domestic abuse.

## 5.00 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 Managed within existing resources.  
Training provided free of charge.

## 6.00 **ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 No known impact

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 No known impact

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 The work around domestic abuse is statistically likely to have a more positive effect on females.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 Managed within existing staffing resources.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 No further consultation is required at this stage.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 Consultation with MARAC and feedback from individuals involved in previous cases.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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