

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 30 June 2021

Note: This meeting was not held as a public meeting in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972

Present:

Members: Councillor N Akhtar (Chair)
 Councillor M Ali (Deputy Chair)
 Councillor L Bigham
 Councillor J Blundell (substitute for Councillor Ridley)
 Councillor J Clifford
 Councillor J Innes
 Councillor J Lepoidevin
 Councillor C Miks
 Councillor R Singh

Other Members: Councillor P Akhtar, Deputy Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities

Employees (by Directorate):

V Castree, Law and Governance
R Chapman, Public Health
P Hargrave, Adults
C Hickin, Head of Environmental Services
G Holmes, Law and Governance
T Richards, Public Health

Other Representatives: S Manak, Panahgar
 A Kaur, Panahgar

Apologies: Councillors G Ridley,
 Councillor A S Khan, Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st April 2021 were agreed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Councillor P Akhtar, Deputy Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities, introduced the item. The Committee then received a presentation on the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which outlined the following points:

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 outlined a statutory definition of domestic abuse
- It established in law the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and set out the Commissioner's functions and powers. It also established a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.
- It extended controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse. It explicitly recognised children as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear or experience the effects of that abuse
- It placed a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. All eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse, were automatically given 'priority need' for homelessness assistance
- It placed the guidance supporting the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme ("Clare's law") on a statutory footing
- Police were also given new powers including Domestic Abuse Protection Notices which provided victims with immediate protection from abusers, while courts would be able to hand out new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders to help prevent offending by forcing perpetrators to take steps to change their behaviour, including seeking mental health support or drug and alcohol rehabilitation.
- Timescales for the implementation of the Act were outlined
- There had been increase in domestic abuse reported over the past year. This did not necessarily mean that there were higher levels of domestic abuse then pre-pandemic – it could have been that there were higher levels of reporting. Calls to the helpline 20% higher then pre-pandemic and reports to the police were up by 45%.
- Support in the City was via services commissioned by the City Council was outlined. The services had been commissioned through relatively long-term contracts, up to nine years, to provide stability.
- Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment had been commissioned to undertake the Coventry Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment. The needs assessment had identified a number of emerging gaps.
- Representatives from Panahgar outlined the support they offer in Coventry.
- The Committee noted that www.Safetotalk.org.uk is where to go signpost people for support in Coventry

Following the presentation, the Committee asked a number of questions and received the following responses:

- The survey to inform the Needs Assessment had been widely circulated through partner agencies and sessions had taken place with domestic abuse survivors.
- The Needs Assessment would help to build a comprehensive picture of need in the City.
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 activities was part of the wider Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- There was a focus on the prevention of Domestic Abuse, including through links with schools and early years.
- There would be an annual report on Domestic Abuse. Members requested that this report come to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee and contain benchmarking data.
- Clarification on the membership of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board was provided. The membership requirements had been met and there was good engagement from partners.
- The provision of support to those with links to the Armed Forces formed part of the core data set.
- The Act would broaden the emphasis of work on Domestic Abuse to include more preventative work as commissioned Services currently worked predominantly on response services. There was work to pick up those at risk of Domestic Abuse at an earlier stage, and there was training to identify the circle of abuse in families.
- The Police worked closely with schools to identify children and young people who were exposed to Domestic Abuse and there were liaison officers in place.
- One of the challenges was the short-term nature of the funding which had only been awarded for a year.
- The Domestic Abuse Act would help shape work going forward but there were good foundations in Coventry to build on as worked had been well funded in the City, compared to other local authorities.
- Funding proposals included improving family support; investing in additional mental health support for adults, using a trauma informed approach; additional legal support around immigration cases; expanding the sanctuary scheme and increasing the amount of specialist accommodation.
- Examples were given of services innovating to reach out into the community.
- The differences between protection notices and orders were outlined.
- The Needs Assessment would identify what resources were needed to deal with rising cases. We want people to come forward and report domestic abuse and to have the support in place for them when they do.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:-

- 1) Note the contents of the Cabinet Report “Domestic Abuse Act 2021” at Appendix 1**
- 2) Support the Needs Assessment being undertaken to identify the need for domestic support in the area**
- 3) Request that the work of the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership**

Board be added to the Committee's Work Programme and considered at an appropriate time

4) Request:-

- a) That future reports to Scrutiny on Domestic Abuse include Benchmarking data**
- b) That any future surveys for service users be easy to complete**
- c) That when appropriate, service improvement documentation be shared with Scrutiny**
- d) That data on the number of Domestic Abuse referrals from GPs Schools be circulated**
- e) That a breakdown of the gender/ethnicity of Domestic Abuse referrals from MASH be circulated**

4. Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21

The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee received the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:

- 1) Accepts the content of the draft report at Appendix 1**
- 2) Recommends that Council consider the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21 at its next available meeting**

5. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2021/22

The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee considered their Work Programme for the current Municipal year.

RESOLVED that the following items be added to the Work Programme;

- A review of the application of Marmot Principles in Coventry**
- Impact of Brexit**

6. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.00 pm)