Domestic Abuse and Newham Children and Young People’s Services

Briefing Report for the Children's Trust Board: August 2016

1 Introduction

1.1 Improving the lives and outcomes of children who are affected by domestic abuse is a key priority for the council and its partners. The issue of domestic abuse is broad and in some ways more complex in Newham given the diversity and range of cultural narratives at play across the borough. This paper outlines the prevalence of domestic abuse in Newham, it focuses on partnership working and how we want to improve our practice and collective response to a shared problem.

2 London Context

2.1 According to MOPAC figures for the year ending March 2016 Newham is one of the top 5 boroughs in London for volume of domestic abuse incidents and notifiable offences. When figures are adjusted to rate per 10,000 Newham drops to 7th, preceded by Barking and Dagenham, Tower Hamlets, Lewisham, Greenwich, Haringey and Croydon. The detection rate for notifiable domestic abuse offences in Newham is less than 30% (one of the lowest in London) and the greatest detection rate in London is 42% (Kingston upon Thames). There has been an 11% increase in reporting domestic abuse compared to the previous year. Nationally 70% of domestic abuse victims have children therefore the impact of such a high volume of domestic abuse reports in Newham will be felt by children and by schools and services that support them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>No of incidents</th>
<th>Rate per 10000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croydon</td>
<td>7920</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham</td>
<td>6677</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewisham</td>
<td>6391</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>6222</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwark</td>
<td>5842</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 The Newham Children's Social Care Context

3.1 The volume of domestic abuse incidents in Newham has a direct impact on the rate of contact to Children's Social Care. Police Merlins (notifications to Children's Social Care) make up 54% of all contacts with the department and a large proportion of these are related to domestic abuse. Many of the Merlins do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but of those proceeding to statutory CIN almost a third are domestic abuse, reaching 60% for all children who are subjects of child protection plans. The average number of children assessed per month where domestic abuse is a factor is 150.

3.2 The current statutory service offer for families affected by domestic abuse is:
• Assessment under s.17 or s.47 Children Act 1989
• Joint working with Community Safety Unit Police
• Referral to One Stop Shop commissioned services; this is the main hub for all Violence and Women and Girls (VAWG) activity in the borough.
• Referral to/work with Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
• Working with partners under CIN or CP plans to promote sustainable change.
• Children are protected through bringing them into public care.

3.3 The majority of intervention services in the borough focus on the female victim, there are no services that work with families, a limited service from one young people’s IDVA (independent domestic violence advocate) and no commissioned services to work with perpetrators. Whilst the service provided through One Stop Shop is highly successful in that more than 90% of users feel safer as result of intervention, because it works solely with the adult victim this success is often not understood by Children’s Social Care or doesn’t translate into the child’s experience. What has become apparent is there is highly dedicated work in single agencies working with different parts of the family group, the coordination of work across these services requires greater focus.

3.4 There are a number of sources for practice commentary in respect of domestic abuse in Newham: NSCB multi agency case audit December 2015, external review of 20 CIN/LAC children, external review of NSCB and external review of triage and assessment and a NSCB ‘select committee’ style enquiry into domestic abuse. These varied sources indicate:

• Work with commissioned DSV services, although exceeding the target number of referrals is not always joined up.
• There is a belief that the couple can only create safety for the children through separation
• The separation myth renders men invisible even though they are often still living in the home or active participants in children’s lives. Therefore there is little or no engagement with perpetrators.
• The onus on creating safety for children rests with women who are often unable to manage their own safety.
• Measures of safety often rely on no further reported incidents rather than other evidence that violence and abuse has ceased.
• Children are rarely actively engaged in safety planning.
• Working with MARAC required improvement.
• Lack of strategy to enable better partnership work
• Lack of early help response for families with less serious domestic abuse.

3.5 Several families were interviewed as part of the NSCB audit reported that they knew why the social worker was visiting and the social worker had helped parents to stop the fighting. This is encouraging information and is evidence that practitioners are able to effect positive change in these less than ideal conditions.

3.6 Other evidence of the positive impact on Children’s Social Care for children who live with domestic violence is that work does step down from CP plan and CIN plan to universal services
because the risk has diminished. At the chronic and severe end of domestic abuse, Children's Social Care takes firm action to safeguard children though the public law outline and in the family court.

4 New pathways

4.1 The challenge of providing good joined up responses to domestic abuse has been recognised by all partners in the NSCB and this has led to a number of initiatives to improve how we work together within existing resources and a bid to the DfE to develop new approaches.

4.2 A task and finish group to improve joined up working has been set up through NSCB and is led by the DD for Children's Social Care. The progress to date has seen:

- Consistent Children's Social Care representation at MARAC, improved information sharing and follow through on actions.
- One stop shop to join Triage from September 2016
- Police domestic abuse officers to join Triage, to be available to visit with social workers and take part in multi-agency strategy discussions.
- INW Families First response to families not reaching threshold for statutory intervention from INW from October 2016
- Review of risk assessment tools to capture risk to child and adult victims of domestic abuse by October 2016.
- Mapping of gaps and establishing common aspiration across adult and child partnership.
- Review of CYPS procedures for responding to domestic abuse – by September 2016
- Review of information sharing agreement to enable rapid notification to schools and health visitors of all domestic abuse Merlins - by October 2016

4.3 The T&F group will establish clearer pathways for help, enable better early help across universal and targeted services, review thresholds to ensure domestic abuse and levels of risk and need are captured and develop a partnership protocol for working together.

4.4 The CYPS bid to the DfE Innovations fund, if successful, will release just under £2.6 million over 2 years to transform how we work with domestic abuse. This will involve:

- working closer with police to have a rapid response to perpetrators,
- trauma interviews and better direct work with children,
- safety planning with whole families and a programme of therapeutic intervention to help couples safely separate or to stay together safely.
- Virtual school offer to children affected by domestic abuse who have a CIN or CP plan.

4.5 The bid includes a number of positions to support this transformation, some of which will have a shelf life once change is achieved, and others may be mainstreamed. The development is supported by the Institute of Family Therapy.

4.6 There is a clear need for greater community engagement and work with young people to disseminate messages about what is domestic abuse, that it is not tolerated and what help is available. This part of the strategy will be planned in close liaison with DSV commissioners and NSCB partners including schools.
5 Measuring success and the Domestic Abuse Joint Area Inspection

5.1 NSCB is anticipating a Joint Targeted Area Inspection and the focus is on domestic abuse. The Head of Social Work Improvement is leading a multi-agency preparation group and this is well attended by senior leads across the partnership. The group is preparing a risk register of all known gaps and will track actions to evidence improvement.

5.2 If successful, the DfE Innovations bid attracts external evaluation and there are key indicators of success set out in the plan for this work. We have also engaged the LBN Policy and Research team to help us harness learning very quickly.

5.3 The NSCB T&F group will monitor the implementation of agreed changes and track the impact on practice.

6 Early help response to domestic abuse

6.1 We believe there are a number of areas to review and improve in relation to early help support for families affected by domestic abuse. This includes:

- Reviewing threshold documents in relation to domestic abuse
- Identifying what level of presentation can receive an early help response and what support universal, targeted and voluntary organisations can offer
- Raising awareness about domestic abuse and how to tackle it, including sharing training opportunities with other agencies
- Boosting confidence of practitioners in early help to talk to children and adults about domestic abuse.
- Ensuring early help providers are aware of and able to use risk assessment tools
- Providing targeted support for families affected by domestic abuse through Families First
- Up-skilling professionals in Triage so they are able to provide advice in relation to non statutory referrals about possible pathways/ options available to support families

7 Questions for Children’s Trust Board members

- How can partners help to improve our collective response to tackling domestic abuse in Newham?

- Is there more we can do at a community level, to change the narrative around gender and abuse, and who is best placed to make that happen?

- How do partners identify risk of abuse? Do you use a Risk Identification Checklist, and is there more we can do to promote their use?

- Do partners want to be involved in shaping and delivering this work – perhaps as part of the task and finish group?