



**To:** Business Co-ordination Board

**From:** Chief Constable

**Date:** 25 November 2013

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE (DA)**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This paper is intended to provide an update on the force response to domestic abuse issues, specifically progress in respect of the PCC objectives of achieving an improvement in the rate of reported incidents of domestic abuse (compared to the baseline) and achieving an improvement in the detection of domestic abuse crime (compared to the baseline).

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 In April 2012, the constabulary formed the Public Protection Department (PPD) which became responsible for the force wide investigation and safeguarding response to vulnerability across eleven functions. One of these functions is police response to domestic abuse, albeit the first response to domestic abuse incidents remains the responsibility of front line officers and staff within the Territorial Policing Command.
- 2.2 The nature of domestic abuse is such that victims (predominantly female) may suffer abuse for a significant period of time before engaging with police and other agencies. A high proportion of homicides are also as a result of domestic abuse and many children are harmed emotionally and physically through exposure to domestic abuse.
- 2.3 The national definition of Domestic abuse was amended in April 2013 to incorporate DA involving 16 and 17 year olds (previously DA was defined as involving those persons of 18 years or older). This has had the effect of increasing reported levels of DA.

### **3. Strategy**

- 3.1 The Constabulary uses specialist officers within the public protection department to investigate domestic abuse, and safeguard victims and children in partnership with other agencies. These officers are employed in two 'Domestic Abuse Investigation and Safeguarding Units' based at Peterborough and Cambridge. The current establishment of 45 officers within those units is the largest group of specialist officers within PPD and is indicative of the commitment the Constabulary has made to providing a specialist response to DA.
- 3.2 First response follows the 'golden hour' principles of securing and preserving evidence as soon as possible, having effective victim care processes and robust suspect management.
- 3.3 Front line officers have received training in responding to incidents of domestic abuse and this includes an instruction to take positive action by arresting suspects as soon as possible. Increased victim reassurance can be achieved by the arrest of an offender and this can encourage victims to pursue a prosecution in the knowledge that police are taking the acts of violence seriously.
- 3.4 The Constabulary recognises that victims can be reluctant to provide evidence against their attackers. The widespread use of headcams by front line officers has proven very effective in recording the circumstances of the violence, allowing follow up specialist officers to better understand and support victims.
- 3.5 It is recognised that a purely criminal justice response is not the complete answer and the Constabulary works closely with Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA's) employed by the County and Unitary Authorities. These individuals directly support victims of DA, offering a confidential support network and practical help to enable victims to break free of their attackers.
- 3.6 The Constabulary is an active participant in the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process which seeks to manage the highest risk DA incidents. Each DA incident is subject to a risk assessment process and those assessed as posing the greatest risk are discussed at weekly or fortnightly MARAC meetings. These involve a range of agencies including Police, IDVA's, Probation Officers, Childrens Services, Housing Services and Health. These agencies agree and implement an action plan for each incident that seeks to stop the violence through a holistic approach. Cambridgeshire MARAC was recently awarded a national 'Beacon' status in recognition of their excellent work.

### **4 Performance**

- 4.1 The number of domestic abuse incidents has increased on a month by month basis over a rolling twelve months. While this suggests that the levels of DA are

rising, it may also be considered a positive indication as a consequence of an increased willingness by victims to involve police and other agencies.

- 4.2 Although the current baseline detection target is challenging at 49.4%, an improvement on 2012 figures has been achieved, with current detection performance over 12 months standing at 47.6%.
- 4.3 The Constabulary identified that during the summer months, the response times for attending DA incidents did dip below acceptable limits. However, the last three months have shown an improvement back to an acceptable norm which is being maintained.
- 4.4 The number of violent domestic incidents has continued to reduce and albeit too early to be sure, a robust approach to arrest and prosecution coupled with good work within MARAC appear to be significant contributory factors to that reduction.

## **5 Current activity**

- 5.1 Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary are conducting a DA inspection of the Constabulary week commencing the 16<sup>th</sup> December and this will provide useful feedback on processes and service delivery.
- 5.2 The Constabulary have also requested that the National College of Policing undertake a peer review of DA delivery and this is expected imminently.
- 5.3 A business mapping process conducted within the Multi-Agency Referral Unit (MARU) indicated that multi-agency case discussions involving safeguarding concerns for children did not use DA information early enough in the assessment process. Remedial action has been taken to ensure that DA information is now always incorporated within a children's safeguarding discussion.

## **6 Summary**

- 6.1 The provision of specialist DA investigation and safeguarding resources within the Constabulary appears to have improved the Police response to DA.

## **7 Recommendation**

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Board notes the report.