

Domestic Abuse update for Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

11th May 2020

This paper has been prepared to update the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission on the impact of Covid-19 on patterns of domestic abuse within the borough and to provide information about service responses.

Summary

The Council's Domestic Abuse Intervention Service has adapted its core service delivery to ensure continuity of service while at the same time leading within the Council and across the Hackney partnership on the promotion of a joined up, adaptive and resilient response. The Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS) remains fully operational and continues to meet what has been a rise in referral rates of around 50% since lockdown commenced. The Council has allocated resources to expand the staff team to meet this demand.

The safety planning guidance which DAIS issued some weeks ago to partner agencies to help professionals respond to victims of domestic abuse is promoted regularly. The Council's web page also contains guidance for professionals and members of the public and a social media campaign is also promoting key messages. Posters have been printed and are being disseminated to key locations including parks, pharmacies and shops.

Fortnightly Covid-19 Domestic Abuse Planning Meetings, chaired and coordinated by DAIS and involving statutory partners and domestic abuse services continue to look at how agencies are ensuring the identification and prompt response to victims of abuse, particularly those who experience multiple vulnerabilities, discrimination or disadvantage. Agencies are aware that the true picture of domestic abuse is likely to be largely hidden at this time so the focus is threefold: reaching victims, providing services, and ensuring resilience so that agencies are able to respond to a surge in demand. Thankfully at this stage the message from statutory partners and domestic abuse agencies is that services remain in place and that there is not yet a shortfall locally in emergency accommodation for those who need it (both via refuge provision in London and provided by Hackney Council).

The Council has offered to take on case work of any third sector Hackney domestic abuse agency struggling to manage due to staffing shortages or a rise in demand. The Council's own Domestic Abuse Intervention Service remains fully staffed and contingency planning is reviewed regularly.

Domestic abuse data

Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS)

DAIS usually average 25 referrals per week. At 24th April 2020, reported numbers had increased to 38 referrals in the week, as shown below:

Indicator	Weekly average (April 2019 - February 2020)	W/e 06/03	W/e 13/03	W/e 20/03	W/e 27/03	W/e 03/04	W/e 10/04	W/e 17/04	W/e 24/04
Number of referrals to DAIS	25	23	21	13	22	31	32	38	38

DAIS are receiving an increase in self-referrals with people emailing the DAIS inbox asking for support for themselves. A significant number of those that are self-referring are victims/survivors who have used DAIS before and are getting in touch as they have renewed concerns during the lockdown. Referrals are also being received from people raising concerns regarding neighbours. The Duty telephone line is very busy.

Accessing victims to advise them on how to seek help can be difficult due to the perpetrator being at home and in the vicinity of phone calls so DAIS are looking at outreach to victims and potential victims through other agencies and groups who have contact with the public in addition to its own efforts.

DAIS are still assessing new referrals for perpetrator work. However, on European guidance, they have stopped trying to deliver perpetrator programme work on a one-to-one basis virtually and are instead checking in with perpetrators to try to reduce more immediate risk.

Domestic Abuse related contacts and referrals received by the Children and Families Service

Referral Category - domestic abuse or domestic violence	Total received 1st-30th April 2019	Total received 23rd Mar-17th April 2020	<u>Received from Police only</u> - 1st-30th April 2019	<u>Received from Police only</u> -23rd Mar-17th April 2020
Contacts	101	152	80	105
Referrals	53	59	45	44
% Contact to referral	52%	39%	56%	42%

The overall number of contacts made to Children's Social Care in relation to domestic abuse has increased compared to the same approximate period last year. The number of contacts received from the Police has also increased in comparison to the same approximate period in the previous year. However, the number of referrals (contacts that have been accepted for a service) from the Police is similar to the previous year, whilst there has been an increase in referrals overall of approximately 10%.

Domestic Abuse Intervention Service and Covid-19

Hackney's Domestic Abuse Intervention Service shares the generally accepted view that the current lockdown is likely to compound the problem of domestic abuse by creating more opportunity for perpetrators to hurt and control victims and by making it harder for victims to be seen and helped.

During the Covid-19 lockdown DAIS has seen an increased number of referrals of around 60%, from approximately 25 referrals per week to almost 40 per week. In response to demand, DAIS has increased its capacity through increasing the numbers of case workers in the team through both agency recruitment and redeployment as well as being assisted by former members of the service now in other roles within the Council. Management capacity has also been enhanced. DAIS is relatively confident that it is in a strong position to meet any rise in demand and the anticipated 'surge' once lockdown ends.

DAIS continues to offer a service to victims of abuse with the only change being that visits and meetings are done via phone or video rather than in person. One of the key challenges is the ability of staff to speak safely with victims of abuse who are self-isolating with perpetrators.

The risks associated with the lockdown are being mitigated in the following ways:

- Checking in on all allocated cases about risks in light of current health crisis requirements and supporting service users with safety planning.
- Ensuring all partner agencies involved in cases are aware of current risks and difficulties that may present in contacting victims and are taking steps to reduce and monitor these.
- Proactively contacting victims/survivors who were former service users and who staff feel were safe at the point of their case being closed but may be vulnerable to potential escalation of risk.
- Modifying work with perpetrators of abuse; advice on a pan-European level has been that it is unsafe in this health crisis to undertake structured and challenging work with perpetrators similar to what would ordinarily be done in a group setting to change their behaviour. While referrals to DAIS of perpetrators are still being received and, where safe to do so, perpetrators are being assessed. Engagement with them is in the form of regularly checking in and advising on techniques to better manage their emotions thus hopefully reducing some of their behaviour.
- Publicising again Hackney Council's Domestic Abuse Staff Protocol to ensure staff who are working from home and at increased risk are aware of how to get help and to ensure managers are aware of the need to explore staff safety.
- Launching a public facing campaign using the Council website, social and local media, partner agencies, Hackney Gazette and online postings and posters in public spaces such as parks, supermarkets, pharmacies and food banks to give key messages about safety planning and accessing help.
- Developing and disseminating safety planning and risk management guidance for professionals across partner agencies.
- Chairing regular Covid-19 Domestic Abuse Planning Meetings with statutory partners and local domestic abuse agencies to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are able to be identified and helped, to mitigate any risks in the professional system e.g. due to staffing depletion / rising demand and to link agencies to one another and to the Council's efforts to address Covid-19.

- Working with local networks including community, faith and volunteer groups and mutual aid organisations, providing them with material and training on identifying and responding safely to domestic abuse.
- Working with the Council's Humanitarian Aid Group to provide training to its Covid-19 Helpline staff and managers, to general customer service staff and to volunteers.
- Working with Hackney CVS and CCG to participate in 8 "Neighbourhood Conversations', beginning with London Fields to promote key messages.

Specialist Domestic Abuse Court

Hackney is part of the East London Specialist Domestic Abuse Court. The Court is a specially adapted magistrates' court which seeks to increase the number of successful prosecutions and improve victim safety. Hackney co-funds the Specialist Domestic Abuse Court Co-ordinator post along with Tower Hamlets Council. The Court is currently closed and domestic abuse trials have been suspended until further notice. All custody matters (known as priority/urgent) are being heard at Thames Magistrates Court.

The Metropolitan Police Central East Borough Command Unit - covering Hackney and Tower Hamlets - has confirmed that Domestic Violence Prevention Orders (DVPOs) are still being applied for, which is reassuring given their effectiveness as a tool for protecting women from perpetrators. The Police Borough Command Unit will notify Hackney immediately should the situation change for any reason so steps can be taken to address the escalation of risk that would be likely to result.

Refuge Provision and Emergency Accommodation

Hackney has for many years been one of the leading London local authorities in funding local refuge provision and this continues currently. Our refuge provider services, Hestia and Refuge, have been closely involved in the Covid-19 Domestic Abuse Planning Meetings as have the Council's Benefits and Housing Needs Service. Both have been operating 'business as usual'; though demand is increasing they have available staff and accommodation. There are still refuge spaces in London. Refuge providers along with our Cabinet Lead for Community Safety (including Violence Against Women and Girls) are involved in the ongoing work being undertaken by MOPAC to monitor availability of refuge provision. As a Council there has been a flexible, needs-led approach which is drawing on partnership working with local accommodation providers such as hotels, if needed to meet any rise in demand for accommodation due to domestic abuse. The Council's Gold Group is monitoring the issue of accommodation and resources and any reduction in capacity or difficulty in meeting demand will be reported to the Gold Group.

Domestic abuse and women with particular vulnerabilities

Women with no recourse to public funds

Migrant women with no recourse to public funds will be particularly vulnerable during this crisis, especially if they are or become victims of domestic abuse. The Council continues to support women who are parents and in need of accommodation due to domestic abuse under existing Children Act provisions. During the current health

crisis the Council has been acting to provide domestic abuse victims with no recourse to public funds who are not parents with accommodation. The Council - along with other Councils across London - are petitioning MHCLG to review and amend its current stance whereby they will not provide central government funding to Local Authorities to support the protection of women with no recourse at this time. Agencies working with NRPF women are involved in DAIS' campaign and Covid-19 strategy.

Black and Minority Ethnic / Minoritised Women

DAIS are in contact with domestic abuse agencies working with women from specific ethnic and cultural backgrounds and have linked domestic abuse charities in Hackney with Council departments involved in supporting volunteer organisations. The Covid-19 domestic abuse posters are being translated into Hackney's community languages (Turkish, Polish, Spanish, French, Yiddish, Bengali, Portuguese, Gujarati, German).

Women exploited through prostitution

Open Doors, STEPS / Pause, WDP, Benefits and Housing Needs and Public Health are part of the Covid-19 Domestic Abuse Planning Meetings. These meetings have discussed women with multiple vulnerabilities and helped link work undertaken across the partnership to ensure a joined-up response.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

In Quarter 3 of Financial Year 2019/2020, 136 cases were heard at MARAC, an increase of 7% from the same period the previous year when 127 cases were heard, and the general increase continued through Q1 and Q2 of this Financial Year. In 65 of the 136 cases (48%) there were children in the household which reflected a similar proportion as seen throughout Q1 and Q2 of this Financial Year.

22 (16%) of the total number of cases heard at MARAC in Q1 and Q2 were 'repeat' referrals; this rate of repeat referrals (defined as being when any incident of domestic abuse occurs within 12 months of the case previously being heard at MARAC) is significantly below the expected range (SafeLives advises that a rate between 28% - 40% is expected). Across FY 2019/20 the rate was 18%. It is difficult to tell whether this low rate is because of interventions being successful so that further incidents of domestic abuse do not occur or due to repeat referrals not being correctly identified as such. The importance of agencies correctly identifying and bringing back to MARAC repeat referrals is being flagged with members of the Domestic Abuse Steering Group for dissemination within their workforces.

MARAC continues to operate as usual during the current health crisis through virtual meetings. Numbers have not seen a marked increase or decrease so far.

Safe and Together Implementation

Safe and Together is an approach, developed in the USA and practiced with significant impact in a number of countries. The approach is designed to support Children's Services and other professionals to improve their response to domestic abuse, partnering with victims and holding perpetrators to account as parents. The underpinning belief of the Safe & Together approach is that children are almost always best served by being kept 'safe and together' with the adult domestic abuse survivor. This does not mean allowing children to continue to be exposed to harm

and thresholds for the protection of children do not change. Safe and Together aims to reduce the necessity for removal of children into care by holding perpetrators to account for their behaviour and protecting survivors of domestic abuse.

The domestic abuse specialist agency Respect, along with the London Boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest are working together until March 2021 to implement the Safe and Together Model across the two boroughs. This is a major development programme for the Children and Families Service (CFS).

33 Hackney CFS staff have been trained in the Safe and Together model; the majority of these are practicing managers in the Family Intervention and Support Service who work directly with families to assess and reduce risk and also supervise social workers. These staff offer a weekly case consultation forum to CFS staff. Audit activity continues to measure progress in terms of practice change.

Due to Covid-19 the training schedule has been severely disrupted. The Safe and Together Institute has developed a virtual Core Training offer which is going to be trialled by Hackney staff and if felt successful will be utilised further.

Safe and Together resources around safety planning have been disseminated within the Children and Families Service and have informed Hackney's guidance to partner agencies / public.

Housing

The Domestic Abuse Housing Specialist based within DAIS and funded by Hackney Housing continues to work closely with colleagues in Hackney Housing to bring together a service model that is based on the principles of Awareness, Prevention, Early Intervention, and Protection.

A key priority for the specialist is to lead in the achievement of Hackney's Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation for the Benefits and Housing Need service. The accreditation process is allowing Hackney to examine key elements of service delivery and assess our existing practice in order to improve our response to clients experiencing domestic abuse. If successful, Hackney will be one of a few Local Authorities in the country to obtain the accreditation which is the highest standard a housing organisation can receive to demonstrate its commitment to addressing domestic abuse.

Work towards obtaining DAHA accreditation continues virtually at this time.