

Tackling Violence Against Women across East Lothian and Midlothian

Executive Summary of report from Stakeholder Event held 29th January 2010 between East Lothian Violence Against Women Forum and Midlothian Domestic Abuse Forum to consider a joint strategic approach across both areas.

Domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, child abuse and other forms of violence are often seen as separate. But they are all forms of control and an abuse of power and are a consequence of inequality between women and men. All of us are affected by violence against women to a degree - not just the women and children who experience or fear such violence. It is estimated that violence against women costs public services in Scotland around £2.4 billion a year and costs too many families and communities in ruined lives.

Research and statistics show us that men are more likely to use more severe violence against other men as well as women. It also presents the disproportionate reality that women and girls are affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and other forms of violence committed mainly by men. Knowing that one section of the population is so negatively affected, we need to understand why and more importantly, we need to do something about it.

The Scottish Government and COSLA produced "Safer Lives: Changed Lives - A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland" in 2009 as a commitment to eradicating such violence through effective partnerships at national and local levels.

We've begun developing a shared approach across East Lothian and Midlothian. During the autumn of 2009, the East Lothian Violence Against Women Forum and the Midlothian Domestic Abuse Forum were asked to consider a position paper. This paper backed up an agreement to jointly fund a Coordinator's post; a commitment to develop shared services across both authorities and picked up on aspects of the Scottish Government and COSLA's Safer Lives: Changed Lives document. Since then, the Scottish Government has issued guidance on multi-agency partnerships to support Safer Lives: Changed Lives, and at the end of 2009 the forums agreed to pursue joint work to develop a joint forum and strategy for both areas.

We are pleased to present this report which highlights the steps that have been taken within both local authority areas to work towards a joint multi-agency approach to tackling violence against women in our area. Such a move recognises that sharing resources, ideas and experience can help to achieve better outcomes for individuals and communities across East Lothian and Midlothian. Involvement in developing a shared strategic approach and associated action plans will have an impact on service delivery across health, policing, housing, education, adult social care and children's services as well as in many voluntary sector service areas. We feel that it is important to raise this important development with you at an early stage to allow you to engage fully with this initiative and contribute to future work in this area.



Foreword:



Alan J Blackie
Chief Executive
East Lothian Council



Kenneth Lawrie
Chief Executive
Midlothian Council

Context

A stakeholder event was held in January 2009 to consider developing a joint multi-agency partnership.

The context in which this event took place fall within two key elements:

- Emerging national policy direction
- Local shared services considerations

Emerging national policy direction

The development of a multi-agency approach to delivering violence against women service improvements is heavily influenced by the national policy agenda, most notably:

- **National Outcomes** - Violence Against Women multi-agency partnership work progresses the following national outcomes:
 - We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger
 - We have tackled significant inequalities in Scottish society
 - We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk
 - Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed
 - We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others
- **Safer Lives: Changed Lives**
- **Gender Equality Duty**
- **Various health service initiatives & programmes**
- **Early Years and Early Intervention**
- **Getting It Right for Every Child**
- **HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland: Thematic Inspection - Domestic Abuse**

Local shared services consideration

Midlothian and East Lothian Councils are currently developing shared service agreements in relation to a number of services including drug and alcohol teams, workforce development, criminal justice and adult protection.

In April 2009, there was an agreement to share the post of Violence Against Women Strategy Coordinator, finally recruited in October 2009. During this period, discussions were opened on a joint forum.

Once the Coordinator was in post and given the delays in recruitment; short term funding for the post; the emerging national strategic framework and impending budgetary constraints a joint stakeholder event was held to consider the need for and outline requirements of a joint multi-agency partnership for East Lothian and Midlothian.

Attendees heard from speakers from Scottish Government and Lothian and Borders Police before working through the multi-agency partnership guidance to identify next steps and establish some of the basic requirements of such a joint approach.

RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPANTS

DEFINITION

Everyone agreed with the use of the definition of violence against women given in “Safer Lives: Changed Lives”:

“Gender based violence is a function of gender inequality, and an abuse of male power and privilege. It takes the form of actions that result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women and children, or affront to their human dignity, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It is men who predominantly carry out such violence, and women who are predominantly the victims of such violence. By referring to violence as 'gender based' this definition highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women's and girls' subordinate status in society. Such violence cannot be understood, therefore, in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.

Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, within the general community or in institutions, including: domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse;
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in the public sphere; commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking;
- Dowry related violence;
- Female genital mutilation;
- Forced and child marriages;
- Honour crimes.”

PARTICIPATION

One group responded “(it’s)...about empowering women - encouraging them to tell their story & we need to hear/listen to it - the key is how we listen.”

There was a great deal of consideration about who, how, when and why participation was necessary. As well as victims and survivors, youth groups and the wider community were felt to be essential in getting information out to potential and actual victims as well perpetrators.

Barriers to participation were also recognised and creative and innovative approaches to communication will be necessary. It was suggested that a small group be tasked with progressing this aspect of a work plan for the joint MAP.

ACCOUNTABILITY

As violence against women impacts on everyone it is important that being part of the public protection agenda should be considered. A key element of conveying this is the ability to monitor activity, efficacy and impact and report against agreed indicators to communities through community planning structures.

INFORMATION

It was noted that it was a challenge for all services to identify, record and collate information - especially when domestic abuse is seldom the only reason women access services. There is also the issue of differences in definition, under reporting and possible double counting of cases to consider in trying to gain a full picture of the impact of violence against women and the benefits of any initiatives or interventions.

Some agencies currently may not know what services and support is available locally and better information provision based on a mapping exercise was felt to be useful.

In respect of providing information to the public, it was recognised that the MAP needs a range of communication methods at its disposal and a good working relationship with the media to try to get the right messages heard.

Confidentiality and consent were considered important to achieving better outcomes for individuals. As part of a multi-agency approach consideration is to be given to an information sharing protocol and referral processes.



Each group was asked to provide one or two tasks that they would like to see actioned promptly. There was some duplication between groups. Participants then voted on each option.

The following table indicates the actions that participants felt were possible, practical and necessary to maintain momentum.

On further discussion it was considered that a 'pilot' approach, whilst a good idea, seemed to lack commitment. It was agreed at the subsequent meetings of the forums to go ahead.

Quick Action suggestion	Vote
Progress Partnership immediately	27
Establish short life working group of reps from both forums to pilot a strategic East & Midlothian approach (to be evaluated)	18
Appointment of Coordinator as dedicated resource	26
Develop an Action Plan	9
Engage with Youth participation structures in East & Midlothian	6
Consistency of Risk Assessments e.g Initial Assessment Factors	5
Compile directory of services (info from today) and consider sustainability	4
Disseminate outcomes from today & participants agree to take back to their network	3

MEMBERSHIP AND CHAIR

It was considered appropriate that a working group made up of representatives of both existing forums identify appropriate members and arrangements for chairing meetings as part of developing the joint multi-agency partnership.

The following principles of involvement in the partnership were highlighted.

- Commitment
- Participation
- Communication
- Respect
- Time to develop
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities

It was also felt that an effective multi-agency partnership should lead to better participation.

In order to ensure these principles were upheld participants considered that a contract with members of the MAP would be useful and that the membership and chair of the partnership is reviewed annually.

In terms of providing necessary leadership, the working group has also been charged with devising suitable processes for selecting the chair and vice-chair of the MAP.

“Well organised, well constructed and maximised the opportunities to develop this. I think the work is in place and this event was critical to start identifying what we have done and how we can improve it.”
- Participant feedback

Quick Actions

Alex Neil
Minister for Communities and Housing

Councillor Harry McGuigan
COSLA's Spokesperson for Community Safety

Safer Lives: Changed Lives (2009)

“Partnership working has brought us considerable success in recent years. We must continue to move forward and take whatever action is necessary to achieve our ultimate aim; a Scotland in which violence against women no longer exists.”

Broadening the Agenda

Although one of the forums is currently focuses on the domestic abuse aspects of the wider violence against women remit, participants identified both strengths and barriers to broadening the agenda for a joint multi-agency partnership.

STRENGTHS

- Both areas Single Outcome Agreements already have domestic abuse outcomes incorporated
- Lothian Violence Against Women Training Consortium has a strong training programme in Midlothian
- The Curriculum for Excellence ‘responsible citizenship’ theme provides an avenue for prevention work
- A number of key partners work across both areas
 - Victim Support
 - Lothian & Borders Police
 - NHS Lothian
 - Couple Counselling
 - Edinburgh Womens Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Service

LIKELY BARRIERS (and remedies)

- Violence Against Women agenda is ‘complex’ but our values are an important influence
 - Members need to be clear about the broader agenda
 - Jargon should be minimised
- Different funding sources and processes
 - Clear governance structures
 - Explicit lines of accountability
 - Clarity of roles for everyone

A key concern emerged when groups considered the final question related to the sustainability of resources. Of the 18 various resources currently available to the forum by way of existing services or posts, only 4 were identified as having long term sustainable funding. The majority of resources are temporary and related to the Scottish Government’s Violence Against Women funding stream which ends in March 2011. Critically a number of temporary staffing arrangements were due to cease over the coming few months.

“Partnership members should be at a sufficient level or have sufficient mandate to make decisions and progress multi-agency work. Without this mandate it may be difficult to progress.”

(Guidance for multi-agency partnerships (2009) - p14)

Recommendations

Following the stakeholder event and subsequent meetings with each forum, the following recommendations have been made:

- Small, short life working group with representatives from both existing forums to set out the terms of reference, membership, structure and work plan for a joint multi-agency partnership
- A scoping exercise to be carried out to identify baseline of current service provision using the 4 P’s framework established in “Safer Lives: Changed Lives” (Protection, Provision, Prevention & Participation)
- Ensuring continuity of a coordinator function is essential to developing the joint multi-agency partnership. Confirming funding for the post by the end of March would enable the following suggested work plan activities to be carried out:
 - Completion of the scoping study
 - Harmonisation of data to inform decision making
 - Developing common risk assessments
 - Identifying training and learning opportunities regarding 4Ps and broader VAW agenda
 - Drafting strategy across both areas
 - Anchoring VAW within existing community planning structures

“Overall, the event brought together an impressive range of stakeholders to drive the agenda forward and share a common commitment to a very important subject area. There is still a need to ensure leaders within the Council and other service providers are aware of the significance of this issue in the community.”

- Event participant

-----Latest Developments-----

- Both forums formally agreed with the recommendations above.
- A small working group is to meet before the end of March 2010 to start to establish a joint multi-agency partnership as quickly as possible.
- The working group will learn from the existing multi-agency partnerships of MELDAP and the Joint Adult Protection Committee.
- Existing services will be contacted shortly to provide information that will form part of the scoping study.

Further information is available from:

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