

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 1 – VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

### **MINUTES**

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Joanna Camadoo (Chair), Fabio Conti, Abdullah Gulaid, Ciaran McCartan, Karam Mohan, Kamaljit Kaur Nagpal, Aysha Raza, Chris Summers, Patricia Walker and *Anthony Young* (Substituting for Seema Kumar).

**Other Members Present:**

Cllr Binda Rai - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People

**Ealing Officers Present:**

Sariah Eagle - Head of Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance  
Jess Murray - Acting Head of Community Safety, Tenancies and Regulatory Operations  
Joyce Parker - Community Safety Team Leader  
Anna-Marie Rattray - Scrutiny Review Officer  
Lee Teasdale - Democratic Services Officer

**External Attendees:**

Seem Alsasa - Service Manager, Hestia  
DSI Robert Mahoney - Ealing Police  
DI Natalie Norris - Ealing Police  
Meena Patel - Operations Manager, Southall Black Sisters  
Pragna Patel - Director, Southall Black Sisters

**1. Apologies for Absence**  
(Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Jon Ball, Mohinder Midha and Lynne Murray.

The Vice-Chair Councillor Seema Kumar was substituted at the meeting by Councillor Anthony Young.

**2. Declarations of Interest**  
(Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

**3. Matters to be Considered in Private**  
(Agenda Item 3)

There were none.

**4. Minutes of the Last Meeting (04.07.17)**  
(Agenda Item 4)

The minutes of the first meeting of the Panel which had taken place on 4 July 2017 were considered by the Panel.

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting of 4 July 2017 be agreed as a true and correct record.

## **5. Metropolitan Police Service – Tackling Domestic Abuse** (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair welcomed Detective Superintendent Robert Mahoney and Detective Inspector Natalie Norris of Ealing Police to make a presentation to the Panel on work being undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to tackle domestic abuse in Ealing.

It was stated that the MPS definition of domestic abuse was any incident, or pattern of incidents, considered to be controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour and violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who were or had been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This included psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional elements.

Common offences related to domestic abuse were detailed. It was advised that increasing types of offences were those in the online and social media sphere, such as malicious online communications and revenge pornography. These provided a complex challenge to officers as the technology which enabled such activity continued to advance.

Ealing was in the top ten boroughs for reported domestic abuse offences in London, and had the highest number of reported offences in the North West London cluster. Statistics on this were provided to the Panel, and Councillor Young asked for clarity on how repeat domestic abuse cases had been defined, as the figures provided did not appear to match up correctly. Officers advised they would look at the figures and report back to the Panel.

With regards to the safety of victims of domestic abuse, it was stated that a 'Positive Action' approach was taken, which primarily sought to ensure effective protection of victims and children, to take criminal proceedings where appropriate and where that was not possible, to ensure effective perpetrator management. To support this, a wide ranging police toolkit was used to protect victims – including TACAU (Treat All Calls as Urgent), panic alarms, refuges, DVPNs (Domestic Violence Prevention Notices) and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law).

A case study of a real recent incident was detailed to the Panel (to note: the case was concluded and no confidentiality issues were breached). This had involved a dispatch to a domestic incident, responding to a call made by a neighbour who had reported screaming in the household. Upon arrival, police officers found a male who stated that he was alone with his children at the property. He appeared pleasant and likeable and stated that he could not understand why the police had been called, however the informant insisted that his wife had not left the property before the police arrived.

The police decided to investigate inside the property, and found the victim hidden inside a cupboard, having clearly suffered grievous bodily harm. Body worn camera recording had taken place at the scene and was used as part of the investigative process. Video was shown to the Panel of the perpetrator attempting to mislead

police officers. The crime was of such violence that the perpetrator went on to receive a six year prison sentence.

Cultural issues were raised, these proved to be barriers in some parts of Ealing, particularly with some Eastern European communities that contained members who did not accept the existence of domestic abuse, feeling that all violence towards a spouse was a husband's right. This was why working with third parties, such as Southall Black Sisters and other DV partners was crucial; particularly when it came to engaging members of the public who had a distrust of the police.

Officers spoke of barriers and challenges currently faced by the police – they had recently been informed that a tri-borough merger would be going ahead, setting a timescale on it was difficult – though it was expected that it would begin to take place by early 2018, if not sooner. What the policing model would look like after the move was still a work in progress. It was felt that a 'super merged MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)' approach would not work, and that there was a vital need to keep elements of localism in the way Ealing was policed.

Reductions in funding were having a significant effect on capacity, and around another £400 million of savings had to be found by 2020 which would result in further reductions of the number of police 'on the beat'.

A HM Inspectorate of Constabulary review on safeguarding was taking place, and it was stated that the Metropolitan Police were absolutely committed to safeguarding; it was an area that was expected to be saved from cuts, and hopefully even grown in capacity.

The Chair thanked the Metropolitan Police officers for their presentation and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

## **Questions**

Councillor Summers asked if there was ever apprehension or a sense of caution when it came to arresting domestic abuse perpetrators due to fears that this may lead to worse reprisals for the victim.

It was advised that in such cases the police always looked to take positive action, and that any evidence that a case of domestic abuse had taken place would be addressed appropriately, they even sought to take action on victimless prosecutions where deemed necessary. If perpetrators were released the police would always look to mitigate risk to the former victims as much they could.

Councillor Summers then made reference to the rehousing of victims. Was the victim of GBH referenced in the case study rehoused? Would the housing association (if relevant) be informed of what had transpired? And what would happen if the tenancy was fully in the perpetrators name?

It was advised that a partnership approach was taken with other boroughs through MARAC meetings, and that all support options were looked at to help victims reintegrate into the community. The police felt that the support received from the council housing team at London Borough of Ealing was superb – and that this

remained the case across the wider picture such as helping ex-gang members and their families.

Council officers advised that the Housing Solutions front desk would interview victims of domestic abuse and help them to make an appropriate assessment on the best approach. A pan-London reciprocal was in place that allowed for house swaps between boroughs. This was a 'pay it back' type arrangement where boroughs had to offer properties themselves if they wished to be considered.

Councillor Mohan asked if the police felt that current legislation on domestic abuse was strong enough, and did this mean that some cases fell 'through the gaps'?

The officers present felt that legislation was out of date and needed to "catch up with the times", particularly when it came to legislation on technology and online abuse issues. There were also concerns that bail conditions were not always working as hoped. It was stated that suspected perpetrators being released and kept under investigation could sometimes be the best way forward. DVPNs could also be used. Police assured members that they had internal processes in place to ensure that no cases fell by the wayside.

Councillor Conti expressed concern about repeat victims of domestic abuse – generally how many reports on abuse were received before a perpetrator was finally 'dealt with' – and what generally proved to be a 'final straw' which led victims to report perpetrators?

It was stated that there was no 'definitive' picture. There were factors that skewed repeat victims statistics, such as the fact that non-crime domestic events reported to the police, such as shouting for example, were considered to be part of this picture. Generally, around 250 non-crime domestic events were reported to Ealing police per month. When the police received a catalogue of such incidents from the same property, it warranted further investigation into the background.

There were other factors which had an impact on repeat victim statistics. Officers cited the example of one lady who had been worked with closely, with a level of trust being built up with her so that she started to report all past incidents with the police, leading to a log of around 18 reports. It had become standard practice for officers to now ask victims if incidents had taken place in the past. If they confirmed that this was the case, then it would also be included within the repeat crime figures.

A representative of Southall Black Sisters stated that they had found that often over 30 incidents of domestic abuse had taken place before the victims' first report was ever made. In some communities this was tied up with worries around potential deportation issues.

Councillor McCartan asked if much usage had been made of Clare's Law (the domestic abuse disclosure scheme in which members of the public are able to make enquires into the background of a person they are in a relationship with, informing them if the partner has a history of abuse offences).

It was advised that the police did try to encourage use of this policy. The amount of requests received varied from around zero to five per month.

Councillor Summers stated his severe displeasure regarding police cuts and station closures. He expressed particular concern about the inability for people to report crimes in a station face-to-face. People in Northolt for example would be expected to go all the way to Acton, which was considered a ridiculous and unfair situation. He noted an example of a police officer who was in a position where he needed to do paperwork on a laptop in a local café due to a lack of other local facilities for officers.

It was advised that a meeting to discuss public concerns in relation to the closures was taking place in the Town Hall concurrent to the scrutiny panel meeting. The introduction of new online reporting systems had resulted in big increases in the utilisation of this method of reporting. It was found that traditional face-to-face over the desk reporting was rarely used anymore. App technology was increasingly being used to report incidents, as was telephone reporting. With regards to paperwork having to be completed in a public place, it was felt that there was actually a degree of good rationale to this approach - as it was considered that police resources would be better used in public with good public visibility.

Councillor Summers sought assurances that there were still policies in place to ensure that highly confidential paperwork was not dealt with in such a public setting. It was confirmed that officers were expected to take appropriate measures when dealing with confidential paperwork.

Councillor Raza complimented Ealing Police's establishment of a separate Twitter account for each of its neighbourhood policing teams, and that this had proved to be a helpful means of building frequent interactivity with local police officers.

The Chair then drew the item to a close, thanking the police officers for their attendance at the meeting.

**Resolved:** That

- (i) the presentation outlining the work of the Metropolitan Police Service in tackling domestic abuse in the borough of Ealing be received; and
- (ii) officers be asked to feedback further information confirming the numbers on repeat domestic abuse cases.

**6. Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Services – Hestia and Southall Black Sisters**  
(Agenda Item 6)

The Chair invited Seem Alsasa, service manager at Hestia, together with Meena Patel, Operations Manager and Pragna Patel, Director of Southall Black Sisters to make a presentation to the Panel on the role of independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and the advocacy work being carried out by services in Ealing to support victims at high risk of domestic abuse.

IDVAs worked with high risk victims of domestic abuse and intervened in crises. The support they provided was short term and the focus was to ensure the safety of victims and their children. IDVAs assessed, identified and managed risks by completing relevant assessment tools. They worked in a multiagency setting

alongside other services including the police, social care, health, probation etc. to agree action plans and manage and reduce identified risks.

Support plans would be agreed with the victim, focusing on actions that both the victim and the IDVA, together with other professionals, would take forward to ensure that the identified risks were managed.

The majority of the cases were referred on to the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference). A MARAC referral could be made with or without the victim's consent, as the purpose of hearing cases at the MARAC was to notify agencies of the victim and arrange an action plan to ensure that risks were managed through a multi-agency discipline.

IDVAs acted as 'the voice of the victim' – advocating on their behalf and assisting with the Criminal Justice System, explaining court processes should a case then proceed to trial. Advice was also given to victims on their options regarding restraining orders, explaining the pros and the cons of such an order (such as potential issues regarding child contact arrangements).

IDVAs were not legal representatives and did not have rights of audience. However they did liaise with the police and the courts to ensure safety measures at trials and supported victims when reporting to the police.

## **Hestia**

Hestia currently employed two IDVAs who could each hold up to 30 cases at any given time. Lots of referrals were received by Hestia with 180 referrals having been received over Q1 and Q2 of 2017-2018.

Hestia had found that the barriers facing their service users included cultural issues, religious issues, financial problems (including having no recourse to public funds), immigration, housing, community issues (LGBT, males, BME), feelings of shame and guilt, limited access to resources and services, lack of knowledge regarding available support, fear of not being believed and being judged.

## **Southall Black Sisters**

Southall Black Sisters was a multiple award-winning organisation for black, minority and ethnic women. It was based in West London but did have a national reach. The bulk of its work was directed at assisting BME women and children to assert their fundamental rights and freedoms in the face of gender-based violence, marginalisation and inequality.

Southall Black Sisters employed 14 full-time and 3 part-time workers, as well as receiving support from 2-3 part-time volunteers at any given time to deliver on all aspects of their services. Two of the full-time IDVA posts, a part-time management post and a contribution to running costs were funded by Ealing Council specifically to undertake advice and advocacy work within Ealing. However, this work was greatly supplemented by funds raised from other sources to meet increasing demands for their advocacy, counselling, support and other activities in the borough.

Statistics had shown that minority ethnic women, particularly Indian women, were disproportionately victims of domestic violence, with many factors exacerbated within their communities, such as cultural issues, and marginalisation, isolation and neglect factors.

A holistic approach to advocacy had been developed – this recognised that the services offered needed to be specialist and multidimensional to meet needs and to achieve lasting and transformative change. The Government's VAWG strategy looked at the three-pronged approach of prevention, protection and justice for victims. This approach also underpinned the Southall Black Sisters Theory of Change model.

The overarching aim was to enable women and children to live in safety and to take control over their lives. This was achieved by undertaking a range of interrelated activities that reduced risk, improved access to legal and other support and built the skills and confidence needed to achieve independence. The service could be broadly broken down as:

- Advice and Advocacy – Whilst legal advice could not be provided, practical assistance and access to welfare and specialist publicly funded legal practitioners was made available. A pro-bono legal scheme had also been developed to facilitate access to pro-bono lawyers where legal aid was not available.
- Counselling and Support – Culturally specific counselling, self-help support groups and therapeutic activities and classes to complement and build upon one-to-one casework. This was vital to sustain engagement in the long-term, enabling women to break out of their isolation, build alternative networks of support, become self-reliant and feel empowered to assert their rights.
- Policy and Campaigning – Educational, developmental, research, policy and campaigning work was undertaken to change social attitudes and seek the reformation of laws and social policy and practice on issues concerning BME women. Community development aimed to raise awareness and to challenge harmful cultural practices and traditional values that restricted women's autonomy.

Southall Black Sisters' DV advocates had specific sets of skills and a knowledge base that very few organisations could claim to have. This included understanding the cultural, religious and family dynamics that underpinned specific forms of harm and knowledge of immigration law and fluency in a number of key languages.

The advocacy work was not time limited or geared solely towards high-risk crisis intervention. The work could be broken down as follows:

- Crisis Intervention – This involved immediate risk assessments, collecting young women and girls from airports following their rescue and repatriation to the UK by British Consular Services and placing them in safe accommodation and providing financial support, obtaining civil protection orders, reporting to the police, finding refuge space or other alternative safe accommodation, making referrals to MARAC and social services in relation to children where appropriate, helping women to make claims for benefits in emergencies,

making Destitution DV Concession applications, collecting women's belongings and essential documents, accompanying women to services including hospitals for emergency treatment, providing emergency food, clothing and medication in cases of destitution and giving emotional and practical support after hours including weekends where necessary.

- Medium and Long Term Casework – This included accompanying women to all legal appointments and to courts until the resolution of their cases, helping women with long term welfare and housing applications and in managing debts, making claims for compensation, liaising with mental health services and supporting women who had extensive mental health issues and working with social services in cases involving child protection and 'children in need'.

Despite many positive developments, there were currently many economic, social and legal challenges that not only made it more difficult to address violence against women and girls but also threatened to undermine the gains made. As other welfare services and financial support were cut back, Southall Black Sisters struggled to meet rising demands for its advice and advocacy services.

Helpline enquiries had increased significantly, and Southall Black Sisters consistently received most referrals from MARAC of all the Ealing VAWG agencies. Drastic cuts in legal aid had also increased the work load as advocates struggled to fill the legal advocacy gap created.

The Chair thanked Hestia and Southall Blacks Sisters representatives for their presentations and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

## **Questions**

Councillor Mohan asked if there was still any community hostility towards the work of Southall Black Sisters.

It was advised that there had been a significant amount of resistance towards the project when first established in 1979. However, there was now a lot more support for their work in the local community, with local religious organisations also working closely with them.

Councillor Mohan asked if there was any way in which men could help, such as assisting on case work.

Whilst support from men was welcome, the 'environment' of the centre was a safe space to work with women and build up the trust necessary to progress their cases, with this in mind the centre was exclusively staffed by women. Support however was received from men through fund-raising initiatives, partnership working with other organisations and legal representations.

Councillor Mohan then asked if support was ever provided to white British women. It was advised that there were occasions when this had happened, as they would never turn any women away who needed support.

Councillor Conti stated that it was also important to educate boys and young men on their responsibilities. Had work been undertaken on such educational initiatives?

It was not felt that a lot had been done on such educational initiatives. A toolkit for schools about how to combat gender stereotypes had been produced by Southall Black Sisters. On the whole though, it was felt that there was a huge gap in such educational imperatives.

Councillor Conti expressed concern that “a trick was being missed” and that a recommendation could be formed around the promotion of educational initiatives – as it was important to take this further in the borough.

The Head of Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance advised that the Council was doing some related work with young men through the DVIP (Domestic Violence Intervention Project). The Prevent Team also had a dedicated post for supporting children’s services and the Health Improvement Team supported work in schools.

Councillor Walker stated that the Council needed to send a very clear message to perpetrators that domestic violence was completely illegal regardless of any heritage or cultural backgrounds. The laws of the land and the universal principles of human rights needed to be obeyed.

Councillor Raza advised that she sat on a sharia commission taking evidence from women. The general finding from the commission was that there had to be a single mainstream approach. The patriarchy was reluctant but coming round to the fact that issues had to be dealt within the mainstream.

Councillor Summers made reference to victims of domestic violence and related suicides. He expressed awareness of a case in which the Crown Prosecution Service had tried to prosecute a perpetrator in a case of domestic violence and failed, with the victim sadly committing suicide following the failed prosecution. Did IDVAs provide training to the Samaritans in reference to calls which were a result of domestic violence?

It was advised that IDVAs provided no direct training to suicide intervention hotlines, but it was presumed that they did receive appropriate training. It was underreported that suicide rates in Indian women were particularly high at the present time.

The Chair asked what the Council could do to help. It was advised that it was important for the Council to retain a sense of localism in regards to third sector partners, it was absolutely vital that such resources were retained within the community.

The Chair then drew the item to a close, again thanking the representatives from Hestia and Southall Black Sisters for the vital service they provide as IDVAs.

**Resolved:** That the presentation by Hestia and Southall Black Sisters informing of the work of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors be received by the Panel.

## **7. Domestic Homicide Reviews and the Findings of Reviews Conducted in Ealing (Agenda Item 7)**

A report was due to be presented which would provide an overview of the Domestic Homicide Review process and the finding arising from reviews carried out in Ealing

and nationally. However, officers suggested to the Chair that the meeting be deferred to a later meeting of the Panel so that there would be time available to consider the item more fully.

The Chair agreed that the item would be deferred until the next meeting of the Panel.

**Resolved:** That the report on Domestic Homicide Reviews and the findings of reviews conducted in Ealing be deferred until the next meeting of the Panel.

**8. Panel Work Programme**  
(Agenda Item 8)

The Panel was advised that Southall Black Sisters had invited members to visit their service. A visit had been arranged for Thursday 19 October 2017.

Members then considered the updated work programme.

**Resolved:** That the updated work programme be received.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**  
(Agenda Item 9)

The next meeting of the Panel was due to take place on Thursday 16 November 2017.

Councillor Joanna Camadoo, Chair.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.