

To Safe Newcastle Board

Date 27th April 2009

Subject Home Office consultation on Violence Against Women and Girls

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Home Office is currently conducting a consultation on their paper "Together we can end Violence Against Women and Girls". This consultation document is the beginning of a process to develop a cross government strategy to combat violence against women and girls in a co-ordinated and effective way by exploring gaps in preventative work, provision and protection.
- 1.2 The Home Office has organised a wide range of events/road shows, which are taking place over a nine week period across England to encourage people to give their views and ideas on the issue. In addition, stakeholder events and focus groups will also be hosted by the Home Office with members of the public and professionals looking at individual policy areas.
- 1.3 There is a 12-week consultation, which begins on Monday 9 March 2009 and finishes on Friday 29 May 2009.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Corporate Community Safety Officer Working Group facilitate and support consultation from Newcastle City Council and Safe Newcastle through a consultation exercise which will gather cross directorate feedback.
- 2.2 Consultation will also take place with the Safe Newcastle Board and Safe Newcastle Responsible Authorities
- 2.3 The Home Office consultation can be accessed on line and is available at the following web location:
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/violence-against-women1/>

3.0 Community Implications

- 3.1 Using the results of the consultation, Central Government will develop a Strategy, which aims to reduce fear of crime among women and girls and aims to improve safety and outcomes for children and young people affected by violence or who have the potential to experience violence.
- 3.2 One of the central government's proposals is to set up a Safer Streets website where people can report places in their local area (e.g. particular streets, bus stops, or stations) including public car parks where they feel either safe or unsafe and give reasons why. This information will be

made available to all users of the site who can comment and/or add their own concerns.

- 3.3 This proposed website has the potential to raise fear of crime and to identify areas as unsafe based on these reports rather than analysis, research and/or formal consultation.
- 3.4 There are therefore wider implications for Newcastle City Council, Safe Newcastle, Safe Neighbourhoods, and Neighbourhood Management in terms of our statutory requirements to keep residents informed and updated on crime figures and neighbourhoods issues, which is currently done through the websites of Safe Newcastle, Northumbria Police and Newcastle City Council.

4.0 Background

4.1 Definition of violence against women

4.1.1 Central government has adopted the definition from the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (including girls) which is “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or that affects women disproportionately”, which includes “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.

4.1.2 Such violence includes domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, stalking, trafficking, female genital mutilation, force marriage, and crimes committed in the name of honour.

5.0 The scale and extent of violence against women and girls

5.1 The following information comes from the 2007/08 British Crime Survey and Home Office Research and is detailed in the Home Office consultation document:

5.2 Domestic violence

30% of women have experienced domestic violence since age 16. 35% of female homicides were committed by the woman’s partner or ex-partner. 44% of women victims of partner abuse in the past year were repeat victims.

5.3 Sexual violence

23% of women have experienced some form of sexual assault since the age of 16, which is equivalent to 3.7 million victims. 5% of all women have experienced serious sexual assault, but only 12% of those women reported it to the police. For female victims of serious sexual assault, 53% of perpetrators were a partner or ex-partner.

5.4 Stalking

22% of women have experienced stalking since age 16.

5.5 Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation is recognised as a form of domestic abuse and is illegal in the UK. It is also illegal to take women or girls abroad for this purpose.

5.6 Trafficking

In 2003 there were up to 4,000 victims (women and girls) of trafficking for prostitution in the UK with up to 360 children being trafficked to the UK annually.

5.7 Forced Marriage

In 2008, the joint Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit intervened to help victims in over 400 cases of possible forced marriage.

5.8 'Honour' based violence

So-called 'honour' based crimes are categorised by the Government as a form of domestic violence.

6.0 Overview of what has already been achieved

6.1 National achievements

6.1.1 Over the past 10 years much has been done to improve the way in which the criminal justice system deals with domestic and sexual violence. The following legislation has been introduced to better protect victims and manage perpetrators:

- Sexual Offences Act, 2003
- Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2003
- Domestic Violence Crime and Victims' Act, 2004
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act, 2007

6.1.2 Central government has also invested in services to support victims of violence and to improve their support through the criminal justice system. This has led to the development of Domestic Violence Courts and new witness protection arrangements.

6.1.3 New multi agency arrangements have been put in place to case manage the most vulnerable victims and the most dangerous offenders through Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

6.1.4 The Violence Against Women Strategy will be linked and aligned to:

- National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan
- Forced Marriages Unit Two Year Action Plan
- UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking.

6.2 Newcastle achievements

6.3 Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy

6.3.1 In September 2006, Newcastle launched its first ever Domestic Violence Reduction Strategy which enabled the co-ordination of

services and responses, increasing levels to support to those at greatest risk. The strategy has three central themes: Prevention, Protection and Provision and has given a strategic direction to the work to address domestic violence in the city. The following projects and activities have developed out of the strategy:

- Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs)
- Domestic Violence Protection Project
- Homesafe Sanctuary Scheme
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)
- Domestic Violence Training
- The Safe Project

6.3.2 Further information on the above interventions is provided in the Safe Newcastle A-Z.

6.4 Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVC)

6.5 The first Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC) for Newcastle will be launched in April 2009. Its aims are to:

- Provide a coordinated judicial response to criminal proceedings involving domestic violence
- Develop and coordinate the provision of victim/witness services within the criminal justice system
- Encourage the victims of domestic violence incidents to come forward and report cases and to remain engaged with the criminal justice system throughout the process
- Improve the experience of victims and witnesses in domestic violence cases
- Increase the confidence of the public and victims of domestic violence in the criminal justice system to deal justly with these cases
- Increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice.

6.6 It is anticipated that the Courts will have a significant, positive effect on violence against women and girls.

7.0 Overview of key themes for the consultation

7.1 The following areas will be looked at through the consultation process with the intent of using this information to inform long term policy and strategy development:

- a. Teaching young people about healthy relationships
 - Central government sees schools and colleges playing a crucial role along with parents in helping children and young people to develop healthy relationships, deal with their emotions and challenge the way in which some young men behave towards young women.
 - An advisory group is being set up by Central Government with a specific focus on how schools tackle this issue and how relevant strands of work can effectively be harnessed to maximise their impact on preventing violence against women.
- b. Sexualisation of girls and links to violence

- A fact finding review group is being set up to talk to parents and members of the public about this issue and the negative impact it may be having on young girls and boys.
- c. Giving women help when they need it
- Training frontline public sector staff to better identify and support victims
 - Those with no recourse to public funds
- d. Tackling perpetrators of violence against women
- Tracking serial perpetrators
 - Learning from past experiences (e.g. homicide reviews)
 - Lessons from abroad – looking at best practice from other countries
- e. Women's' Fear of Violence
- Enabling women to feel safer when out at night
 - Safe Streets Website
 - Improving women's safety in and around licensed premises
 - Car parks.

8.0 Local Activity contributing to the Consultation

- 8.1 The Home Office consultation road show took place on Thursday 9th April, 9.00am – 3.00pm at Eldon Square, in Newcastle City Centre. Members of the Community Safety Unit helped out with the press releases prior to the event, and were on hand during the day to speak to people who participated in the consultation. We also facilitated the participation of victims/survivors and service providers who were able to feed in their experiences to the Home Office on the day.
- 8.2 Consultation is also taking place with Newcastle City Council through the Corporate Community Safety Officer Working Group and with Safe Newcastle Board and Responsible Authorities' members via the Community Safety unit.

9.0 Corporate and Partnership implications

- 9.1 Once the national strategy has been developed, it is likely that there will be some actions/targets around violence against women and girls which will be required of community safety partnerships. These actions/targets will need to be reflected in future strategies and plans.
- 9.2 A theme running through the Home Office's consultation document is the need for the education of young people about healthy relationships. The Home Office sees a role for schools and colleges in working with parents to help children and young people deal better with their emotions, and how to have healthy relationships. The Home Office have expectations that schools will deal with bullying and appropriate behaviour.
- 9.3 The need to educate young people about healthy relationships has already been identified in a report to SLT as a key issue for Newcastle that will need to be developed across Safe Newcastle and the Children and Young People's Partnership.

10.0 What happens next?

10.1 The feedback from the consultation will be used to inform the development of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, which they hope to publish towards the end of the year.

11.0 Further information

Background papers:

11.1 Together we can end violence against women and girls, A Consultation Paper (Home Office, March 2009)

12.0 Contact Officer Details:

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Appendix 1

Consultation Questions

How should schools encourage young men to treat women and girls with respect, and not to resort to violent behaviour?

How do social attitudes towards girls and women affect the problem of violence against women?

Are we doing enough to protect and support children affected by adult violence?
Who's looking out for them and what do they need?

How can we all better pick up on, and respond to early signs of violence?

How best can we keep track of the most serious offenders and reduce the risks those individuals pose?

What kind of services should you expect to receive from the health service and /or social services if you were a victim of violence?

How can central government, local government and other service providers best work together to promote better consistency and quality of provision in services for victims of violence against women across England?

How can we improve women's confidence that the criminal justice system is working to protect them?

What would make your journey at night safer?

Following completion of the consultation period, the Government will issue a strategy in order to ensure that coordinated activity is undertaken across government to reduce and prevent violence against women.

How should the strategy be delivered?

Who should lead it locally?

How should progress on the strategy be measured and assessed? Who should do this?

Should the strategy include any specific measures on equality and diversity?
What further equalities issues should the violence against women strategy take into account (for example on race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic background or geographical location)?

Are there any other matters we should be considering?