Chair’s Foreword

In 2014 the Council published a Strategic Plan for ending violence against women and girls. A key plank of this was tackling domestic violence and addressing the key concerns around how victims and perpetrators are supported.

Councillors will have been contacted by victims of domestic violence seeking assistance. They will also have heard their stories at public meetings or annual events such as International Women’s Day in March or the White Ribbon Campaign, which the Council supports and promotes. It sounds shocking that more than a third of violent crimes in the borough are incidences of domestic violence. However this sadly does not even reflect the true scale of abuse as crimes of this type are significantly underreported.

Domestic violence can have a huge and devastating impact on the victims and their families. These women, men and their families often need considerable help and support to overcome this. This Scrutiny Review was set out to look at how the response to domestic violence is coordinated, work undertaken to prevent domestic violence and the support given to victims and their families.

The Council’s commitment to this area was shown by an award of £90,000 made by the Department of Community and Local Government to the Council. This funding was made available to help an extra 50 families every year who are forced into homelessness to escape domestic violence. Tackling domestic violence is not the sole responsibility of the Council, it also involves
a range of partners including the police and healthcare providers. It is hoped that the recommendations from this report will help the Council and partner organisations that also work in this area, to further develop and improve their services and delivery.

Cllr Shabana Dhedhi

Members of Community Safety Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Shabana Dhedhi, Chair  Cllr Jacob Edwards, Vice-Chair  Cllr Roy Berg  Cllr Sally Littlejohn

Philip Dundon, Co-opted Member
Executive Summary

1.1 Waltham Forest Council, like all local authorities, has a number of responsibilities in relation to reducing domestic violence and supporting both the victims and perpetrators of such violence. These powers and duties enable the Council to commission and provide a range of services to support victims of domestic violence and also to work to reduce offending.

1.2 The Community Safety Scrutiny Committee looked at the issues around domestic violence at three meetings, taking evidence from the Families Team and the Metropolitan Police Service about the work undertaken in this area.

1.3 The Council has set out how it will work in this area in its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Plan 2014 – 17 and has recently completed a recommissioning exercise for the services that are provided to victims of domestic violence and their families.

The challenge of tackling domestic violence

1.4 Domestic violence accounts for around 37 per cent of all violent crime but it remains considerably underreported. The Council has worked hard to promote awareness of domestic violence and greater reporting and there are clearly opportunities for local authorities to help tackle this national problem.
Coordinated Community Response

1.5 Tackling domestic violence is the responsibility of a number of public sector bodies including the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police Service, the Council, Clinical Commissioning Group, and MOPAC who provide funding for work in this area. However, we were concerned that future funding from MOPAC is uncertain and we recommend that the Council contacts them about future funding opportunities.

Prevention

1.6 The Committee was especially interested in the pioneering work being undertaken with perpetrators of domestic violence to prevent them from engaging in abusive behaviour, in addition to providing the support that victims can normally expect and the Council should consider how this work could be made more sustainable in the future.
Supporting Victims

1.7 Victims of domestic violence require significant support if they chose to leave an abusive relationship. This includes accessing financial and legal support, and can mean assistance in finding somewhere to live, both in the immediate and longer term. The support has come under considerable pressure in recent years as a result of broader budgetary pressures of local authorities and changes to the way local authorities are commissioning services.

1.8 The Committee were particularly concerned about the challenges for victims of domestic violence in accessing refuges, especially for people who have No Recourse to Public Funds. We recommend that monitoring and research is carried out so the Council retains an overview and understanding of people who are accessing refuges in the borough, as well as those who are unsuccessful.

1.9 The Committee recognises the importance of therapies for victims of domestic violence and children brought up in households where domestic violence occurs. We were pleased to hear that the Council has sought to use Family Functional Therapies to help people who may need to access support, and we believe there could be greater coordination of the public bodies involved in delivering this kind of support to victims and their families.
Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** There are clearly opportunities for local authorities to help tackle underreporting of domestic violence. We recommend that the Council writes to Local Government Association’s Safer and Stronger Communities Board to ask them to share best practice from local authorities about innovative approaches that encourage greater reporting of domestic violence.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee recommends that the Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety and Cohesion writes to the Mayor of London about the future funding opportunities via the Crime Prevention Fund post April 2017, and the importance of continuing funding to tackle domestic violence, and support for victims.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee welcomes the pioneering work that the Council is doing to work with perpetrators of domestic violence. The Council should consider whether this work could be made more sustainable by seeking additional external funding, as well as looking for opportunities to promote and share this work with other local authorities.

**Recommendation 4:** The Council’s new approach towards commissioning refuge provision is for it to move away from specialist provision for Asian women, towards provision that can be accessed by any female victim of domestic violence in Waltham Forest. The Committee recommends that in taking this forward, the Council put monitoring in place to ensure that provision is still
meeting the needs of the particular sections of the community to whom provision was previously designed to support.

**Recommendation 5:** The committee recommends that further mapping work is carried out on people seeking support from a refuge or other housing support who have no recourse to public funds. This could perhaps be undertaken as part of a wider cross-cutting review, considering the profile of individuals in Waltham Forest with no recourse to public funds.

**Recommendation 6:** The Committee recommends that the Council’s Social Care, Community Safety, Public Health teams and Waltham Forest CCG establish a joint working group to review access to mental health services for victims of domestic violence and young people who witness domestic violence, and to review funding for provision of children-focused therapeutic services.

**Recommendation 7:** The Committee recommends that an approach is made to the Borough Commander of the Metropolitan Police via the Portfolio Holder that it establishes a focus group of victims of domestic violence to provide feedback about whether the charter is meeting the specific needs of those who have experienced domestic violence.

**Recommendation 8:** The Committee would welcome an update about the implementation of these recommendations at our first meeting of 2017, as well as a chance to hear about the progress that has been made in addressing the other areas that we have identified.
Introduction

2.1 The Community Safety Committee is undertaking two themed reviews across the 2015/16 municipal year, firstly on domestic violence and secondly on support for victims. This report focuses on domestic violence; the next report will build on this to look more widely at support for victims. The Home Office definition of domestic violence and abuse is: “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional”.¹ We follow that definition in this report.

2.2 As part of this review, we looked at domestic violence at three meetings across the 15/16 municipal year, considering it from a number of different angles:

- on 21st July the Committee heard about how the Families Team are working with perpetrators,²
- on 14th October the Committee heard from the Metropolitan Police Service about their work in this area,³
- on 24th November the Committee heard from the Families Team about their work with victims of domestic violence.⁴

2.3 A representative from The Kiran Project, a local charity whose work is focussed on (but not limited to) supporting women from the Indian sub-continent experiencing domestic violence, was also invited to the first meeting to help provide a different perspective.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse
² http://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=552&MId=3938&Ver=4
³ http://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=552&MId=3887&Ver=4
⁴ http://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=552&MId=3888&Ver=4
The Work of Waltham Forest Council

3.1 Waltham Forest Council, like all local authorities, has a number of responsibilities in relation to reducing domestic violence and supporting both the victims and perpetrators of such violence, including powers and duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. In addition to these specific powers and duties the Council has a power of general competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. These powers and duties enable the Council to commission and provide the services outlined in this report.

3.2 The Council has set out how it will work in this area in its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Plan 2014 – 17. This sets out the following ambitions in relation to tackling domestic violence/ violence against women and girls in Waltham Forest:

- prevent abuse before it happens through education and awareness work, challenging attitudes and beliefs that underpin and condone VAWG, and building consensus and momentum in the community to help address it;
- intervene earlier on to reduce repeat victimisation and the harm it causes and stop it from happening again;
- make sure victims (and their families) are provided with adequate information, support and care increasing the safety and options of people experiencing any form of VAWG;
- preserve families, where appropriate, and achieve a managed separation where not;
- take action to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour, supporting them to understand the impact of their crimes and change their behaviour; and
- ensure that agencies work together in a coordinated way to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families.

3.3 The Strategy says its ambitions are supported by Council investment of “more than £1 million in the programme, which represents the majority of the funding we have. This funding is overwhelmingly directed at providing specialist services for victims and their families.” Additional annual funding of £144,000 is provided by MOPAC.

3.4 In order to achieve the ambitions set out in the strategy, the Council has recently completed a recommissioning exercise for the services that are provided to victims of domestic violence and their families, and in March the Cabinet agreed to:

- recommission specialist refuge services to support victims of domestic violence and their children,
- refocus refuge services towards non-culturally specific provision for victims and children who are assessed as high risk,
- recommission a specialist refuge service for women at risk of forced marriage.\(^6\)

3.5 The Cabinet has agreed that these services would be supported by a domestic violence support, advocacy and brokerage service; therapeutic support for victims of domestic violence and their children, and a programme of support and therapy for perpetrators of domestic violence to enable positive behaviour change. New services will commence on the 1\(^{st}\) of March 2016 and the providers are as follows:

- Independent Domestic Violence Advocates Service: Solace
- Perpetrator Programme: RISE
- Market place: includes a variety of different preferred providers to meet the therapeutic needs of DV victims and their children.
- Forced Marriage specialist refuge: Ashiana
- Single women refuge: Refuge
- Women and children refuge: Refuge

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\(^6\) http://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=287&MId=3531&Ver=4
The Challenge of Tackling Domestic Violence

4.1 The Committee heard that in Waltham Forest, domestic violence accounts for around 37 per cent of all violent crime. In 2014/15, there were 5,192 domestic crime reports created which attracted a domestic abuse flag, including crimes and non-crimes. Of these, 2,462 were considered actual crimes, and roughly 30 per cent were deemed violent offences.

4.2 79 per cent of domestic violence victims were female, with a more pronounced risk for females between 20 and 39 years old, and 83 per cent of suspects were male, mainly aged between 20 and 39 years old. It has also been estimated that a quarter of domestic violence is perpetrated by former partners.

4.3 The Committee heard that there is considerable underreporting of domestic violence. This is a national problem, and can occur because: “victims of domestic violence are less likely than victims of other forms of violence to report their experiences to the authorities because of beliefs that their abuse is not a matter for police involvement, their experiences too trivial, or from fear of reprisal.” The Committee were told that the British Crime Survey suggests that in Waltham Forest we could expect there to be 12,000 reports of domestic violence each year. A significant number of local incidences of domestic violence are clearly not being reported. The Committee were told it is widely acknowledged that underreporting is particularly acute for male victims, and victims from ethnic minority communities.

4.4 The Council has worked to promote awareness of domestic violence and greater reporting when it occurs, through initiatives like the White Ribbon Campaign. This is an international initiative which works to end men’s violence against women through educational work and supporting local women’s groups. The Council supports White Ribbons Fortnight, which runs every November and December with local

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7 www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN00950.pdf

8 http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/FAQs#what
community support, to promote awareness of domestic violence and what support and help is available.⁹

4.5 **There are clearly opportunities for local authorities to help tackle underreporting of domestic violence. We recommend that the Council writes to Local Government Association’s Safer and Stronger Communities Board to ask them to share best practice from local authorities about innovative approaches that encourage greater reporting of domestic violence.**

4.6 The impact of domestic violence is not limited to physical injury of the victim, and the impact of domestic violence on adult mental health services has been likened to that of smoking on the NHS. The need for mental health services comes not just from victims, but from other family members, including children. Domestic violence is the single most cited risk factor in Waltham Forest’s Children’s Social Care risk assessments, and is a leading cause of child protection proceedings and children being taken into care. The second most common cause is neglect, which could also be an indication that domestic violence is occurring within that home.

4.7 There are significant costs to local authorities and other bodies in responding to domestic violence. The Greater London Authority’s demographic projections suggest that the borough’s population will reach 300,000 by 2022, and the Families Team have estimated that this could mean the cost for the borough of domestic violence will rise to £31.2m. By 2041, these costs could be £35.36m, based on a projected population of 340,000. This means there are compelling human, health and financial imperatives for the Council to invest in early intervention and support to prevent domestic violence, and minimise its impacts on victims and their families.

Co-ordinated Community Response

5.1 Tackling domestic violence is the responsibility of a number of public sector bodies. In 2010, the Home Office produced its Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategic Narrative and Action Plan, which covers domestic against both female and male victims and encompasses the four priorities of Prevention, Provision, Partnership, and Perpetrators. In 2013, the Mayor of London, who has responsibility for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), published a London-wide plan which includes: working with partners to intervene with perpetrators of violence in order to stop the violence, hold them to account, change their behaviour, and deter others.

5.2 When giving evidence to the Committee, the Borough Commander, DS Richard Tucker, made it clear that domestic violence is an absolute priority for the local police and the wider MPS, not least because of the high risks associated with incidents of domestic violence.

5.3 A significant proportion of the Council’s support for domestic violence services comes via MOPACs Crime Prevention Fund, and we were informed that this is due to expire by April 2017. The Committee recommends that the Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety and Cohesion writes to the Mayor of London about the future funding opportunities via the Crime Prevention Fund post April 2017, and the importance of continuing funding to tackle domestic violence, and support for victims.

5.4 Local healthcare partners also have a role to play. Waltham Forest Care Commissioning Group has responsibilities for ensuring that commissioned services appropriately safeguard children and adults who at risk or victims of domestic violence, placing Independent Domestic Violence Advocates within setting such as Whipps Cross Hospital and other community health services. They also commission services that support victims of domestic violence, such as those covering mental health for adults and children.

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10 https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls

11 http://www.ldan.org.uk/PDFs/March2014Sarahper cent20Easeyper cent20MOPACper cent20per cent20VAWGper cent20strategyper cent20presentation.pdf
Prevention

6.1 The Committee heard that the dominant theory underpinning service delivery in response to domestic violence in the UK has grown from feminist theory and is based on the Duluth model. This holds that men’s violence is about power and control, and as a result services for perpetrators and victims of domestic violence should be provided separately. This is because of concerns about the physical and emotional safety of victims in work with couples or families, and the inability for the victims to be truly open and honest in an environment where the perpetrator is hearing what is being said and may abuse his victims further outside of these sessions if he is criticised.

6.2 The Committee heard about the new approach that the Council is beginning to undertake, increasing the Council’s work with perpetrators of domestic violence to prevent them from engaging in abusive behaviour, in addition to providing the support that victims can normally expect.

6.3 The Domestic Violence Intervention Programme (DVIP) offers a group-work perpetrator programme that runs at the same time as a separate partner’s service and professional consultations. It consists of three separate but linked elements:

- domestic violence support, advocacy and brokerage service,
- therapeutic support to victims of domestic violence and their children
- a programme of support for perpetrators of domestic violence to enable positive behaviour change.

6.4 Referrals for the DVIP are limited to families who are known to Children’s Social Services and subject to statutory intervention. Whilst uptake was initially slow, data from 2014/15 indicates that 52 referrals were made in that financial year, 24 were assessed and 9 started the programme. In addition, 12 women were referred to the partners support element chose to engage with the service.
6.5 The Committee welcomes the pioneering work that the Council is doing to work with perpetrators of domestic violence. The Council should consider whether this work could be made more sustainable by seeking additional external funding, as well as looking for opportunities to promote and share this work with other local authorities.
Supporting Victims

7.1 Victims of domestic violence require significant support if they chose to leave an abusive relationship. This includes accessing financial and legal support, and can mean assistance in finding somewhere to live, both in the immediate and longer term.

7.2 Refuges are an important source of support for people leaving abusive relationships, in terms of housing and support and it is regrettable that refuge services have come under considerable pressure over the past couple of years as a result of broader budgetary pressures of local authorities and changes to the way local authorities are commissioning services.12 It has been estimated that 32 refuges closed between 2010 and 2014, and Women’s Aid have estimated that there is a 32 per cent shortage of beds nationally.13 The Committee was struck by the observation that there are more refuges for animal than there are for women, and there are now none for men.

7.3 In Waltham Forest, there are 27 specialist beds for victims of domestic violence, with a further two available as “floating support”. As a comparison, 34 are available in Newham and 48 in Hackney. Two thirds of referrals for a place in a refuge in the borough were unsuccessful, broadly in line with the London average. Failure to find a refuge often means that victims of domestic violence either have to remain at home with the perpetrator of violence or end up in unsuitable accommodation.

7.4 The failure to access refuge provision is not solely down to the availability of a bed. In many cases a refuge cannot admit a woman because of her circumstances: an inability to support women with substance misuse or mental health problems, women accompanied by male children above a certain age or pets, and women with No Recourse to Public Funds.

7.5 Local Victim Support has estimated that 45 per cent of unsuccessful applications to refuges failed because the victim had No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). This is imposed on someone due to their immigration status, and could occur because they

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have a spousal visa, are the adult dependent of someone or relative of someone with settled status, have overstayed their visa or entered the country illegally.

7.6 We recognise that difficulties accessing refuges are not limited to Waltham Forest, and that problems are reflective of wider difficulties across London and the rest if the country. However, we were particularly concerned about the plight of people with NRPF who are unable to access services.

7.7 The Council's new approach towards commissioning refuge provision is for it to move away from specialist provision for Asian women, towards provision that can be accessed by any female victim of domestic violence in Waltham Forest. The Committee recommends that in taking this forward, the Council put monitoring in place to ensure that provision is still meeting the needs of the particular sections of the community to whom provision was previously designed to support.

7.8 The committee recommends that further mapping work is carried out on people seeking support from a refuge or other housing support who have no recourse to public funds. This could perhaps be undertaken as part of a wider cross-cutting review, considering the profile of individuals in Waltham Forest with no recourse to public funds.

7.9 The Committee also heard about therapies that are in place for victims of domestic violence and for children who have been brought up in households where domestic violence can occur. Although the damage caused to children from this emotional abuse can be significant, the Committee were told that the focus has traditionally been on supporting the victim rather than working with the wider family.

7.10 Family Functional Therapies (FFT) are normally used as a way of reducing offending, and the Committee were pleased to hear that the Council is looking to increase and improve the support it offers to children by using this approach with children who have been raised in households were domestic violence occurs. This work includes engendering awareness in children of healthy relationships, and how to protect themselves from abusive relationships.

The Committee recommends that the Council’s Social Care, Community Safety, Public Health teams and Waltham Forest CCG establish a joint working group to review access to mental health services for victims of domestic violence and young people who witness domestic violence, and to review funding for provision of children-focused therapeutic services.

We were pleased to hear that the all officers within the police’s Community Safety Unit are trained in domestic abuse investigation and risk management. However, as part of the review of support for victims that is currently being undertaken, we were surprised at how complicated the MPS Victims Charter appears to be. The Committee recommends that an approach is made to the Borough Commander of the Metropolitan Police via the Portfolio Holder that it establishes a focus group of victims of domestic violence to provide feedback about whether the charter is meeting the specific needs of those who have experienced domestic violence.
Conclusion

8.1 Tackling the issues around domestic violence is complicated by the number of agencies – including the Council, MPS, and CCG - that have responsibilities to tackle its occurrence and associated problems. We were pleased that the Council and its partners have made such firm commitments to tackling domestic violence and the funding and programmes that have been put in place.

8.2 The recommendations set out in the report should help the Council and its partners to take this support further. We were especially encouraged by the work being undertaken with perpetrators which is at an early stage of development. The Committee would welcome an update about the implementation of these recommendations at our first meeting of 2017, as well as a chance to hear about the progress that has been made in addressing the other areas that we have identified.