

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee
DATE: 22 July 2010
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Adult & Community
SUBJECT: Sexual Violence Support Services
WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek approval to commit funding to a 5 year contract of Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) for the Cheshire Area Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) to the value of £20,552 per year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) Approval is given to participate in the SARC joint commissioning of after care services for victims of sexual assault, namely ISVA's.**
- ii) Approval to fund this support service for victims is agreed.**
- iii) This decision to be reviewed after 3 years.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Currently Halton has one full time ISVA who provides support and advice to adults from the age of 16, including one to one counselling sessions, support through the court process or reporting to the police, and acute case support such as Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) appointments. The service works with both current and historic incidences of sexual assault and receives both police and self referrals. Through the service provider, the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre, funding also ensures a level of promotional and networking activity within the borough to ensure awareness of the issue and develop stronger multi agency working relationships to tackle the problem.
- 3.2 Year end figures for 2009/10 demonstrated that the Halton ISVA had received 105 referrals and completed 78 assessments. This is against a reported 78 serious sexual offences reported to the Northern Basic Command Unit (BSU) between January and December 2009.

- 3.3 The Halton ISVA source of referrals has historically been divided mainly between Police and self referrals demonstrating the need for this independent role to ensure non reporting and historic incident victims feel confident to seek support.
- 3.4 Previously Halton has been able to maintain this service for £20,000 as the provider has secured match funding from other sources to maintain a full time position which equates to approximately £40,000. In the current economic climate this has proved more difficult and so Halton is facing the prospect of part time provision of service against the full time level of demand.
- 3.5 In line with central government requirements Cheshire has been developing a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) to respond to victims of serious sexual offences. This SARC is designed to develop multi agency partnership working through high quality forensic examination and support services tailored to the needs of the victim. It represents a one stop shop approach to responding to sexual violence victims with the view to improving the criminal justice response and promoting recovery and health of victims. This initiative seeks to centrally commission ISVA provision across Cheshire as part of the SARC project.
- 3.6 Government plans are to ensure every police force area has a SARC in operation by 2011. This focus has come about due to rape having the highest health-related costs of any violent crime at £73,487 per case. According to recent commissioner specifications treating the related physical injuries and mental health problems costs the NHS nationally almost £1.4 billion a year.
- 3.7 Cheshire SARC is based upon joint commissioning and officially commenced operation as of April 2010. The service is a joint initiative, which will be recurrently funded by:
- Central and Eastern Cheshire PCT
 - Western Cheshire PCT
 - Warrington PCT
 - Halton and St Helens PCT
 - Cheshire East BC
 - Cheshire West and Chester BC
 - Warrington BC
 - Halton BC
 - Mid-Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
 - RASASC- The Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
 - East Cheshire Trust
 - Cheshire Police Authority
- 3.8 Some of the key specifications of ISVA provision under this joint initiative are:

- Timely and tailored responses to victims of serious sexual offences
- Improved chances of conviction and reduction in long term care needed and the strains on the NHS in the future.
- Full time Independent Sexual Violence Advisor and Initial Counselling service for Cheshire service users
- A pro-active service to victims aged (13+) who have suffered sexual violence both within and outside of the criminal justice system.
- Training and awareness raising to professionals and the public

Subsequently, partners are expecting the following outcomes including improving prevention:

- A high standard of victim care & levels of service satisfaction.
- More offenders brought to justice on the basis of better evidence, fewer withdrawals because of better victim care, increased reporting and access to intelligence from self-referrals.
- To develop strong links with the Cheshire SARC, enabling a seamless provision of care for victims and the sharing of information and good practice.

3.9 Whilst there will be a dedicated building for forensic medical examination based in Leighton, Halton service users will continue to be offered ISVA services in the locality and so see no real change in service provision under current specifications. For Halton Borough Council this project offers long term approach to ISVA commissioning with some associated cost savings. Namely, continued full time ISVA provision for approximately £20,000.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 As sexual violence is recognised as disproportionately affecting Women and girls the provision of this service represents a feature of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy launched by central government in 2009.

4.2 Halton will be required to produce its own Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy by March 2011 within which the ISVA service will play a central role. Lack of funding to secure this service in the future may leave both this and the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Strategy with gaps in provision. Potentially this may leave the area open to criticism from future Map the Gaps assessments and scrutiny by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Due to the review of ISVA need across Cheshire and the inclusion

of historic alongside current cases in the SARC focus the proposed costs for inclusion have increased.

- 5.2 The current request for funding is £10,276 from October 2010 for the commencement of central commissioning of ISVA services from 1st of October. The partners have then identified the cost for Halton Borough Council for ongoing ISVA provision for 2011/12 as £20,552
- 5.3 The SARC Management Board will review the demand placed on the ISVA service after the periods outlined above to identify fair service provision and cost allocation based on area need.
- 5.4 At this time the Halton Domestic Abuse Forum (HDAF) funds the ISVA provision through Working Neighbourhood Funds (WNF). Presently £20,000 is allocated within the budget for ISVA provision and so would provide the majority of funding required for this years commitment Future years will be funded by the Supporting People Grant with a built in review after three years.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 SARC models have been built around the National Action Plan which outlines the key objectives of central government around sexual violence:
- To maximise prevention of sexual violence and abuse
 - To increase access to support and health services for victims of sexual violence and abuse
 - To improve the criminal justice response to sexual violence and abuse

- 6.2 These objectives subsequently under pin the following specific local priorities:

LAA Outcome 1 - Reduce the level of violent crime by 3%

National indicators - PSA 23 'Making communities Safer' priority action No. 1, which is to '*Reduce the most serious violence, including tackling serious sexual offences and domestic violence.*' Includes the following National Indicators:

NI26: Specialist support to victims of serious sexual assault

NI32: Repeat incidents of domestic violence

NI34: Domestic violence murders

- 6.3 Other potentially impacted targets include improving health and wellbeing, tackling violence and abuse, reducing inequalities and tackling discrimination. It can be expected to contribute to a number of crosscutting *Public Service Agreements* (PSAs) including the following:

- PSA12 Improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people;
- PSA 13 Improve children and young people's safety;
- PSA 18 Promote better health and wellbeing for all;
- PSA 19 Ensure better care for all;
- PSA 24 Deliver a more effective, transparent and responsive Criminal Justice System for victims and the public;
- PSA 25 Reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The prime function of the area ISVA is to safeguard individuals in Halton from sexual violence through minimising their risk and to enable them to address the effects of sexual assault and reduce repeat incidents. If the area can not identify the means to support this approach it will depend on voluntary organisations. Currently, the local voluntary organisation offering this type of support is the provider of the ISVA service and can do so through local authority commissioning.

7.2 Thus, Halton may be left with no service provision and face increased costs from victims not being adequately supported.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 ISVA after care provision contracts produced by the SARC commissioner would be expected to comply with the Council policies relating to Ethnicity and Cultural Diversity as well as promoting inclusion. Currently, the specifications exclude only those not resident within this geographical area.

8.2 ISVA service specifications outlines a requirement on the provider of aftercare that they must conduct a Bi-annual Equality Impact Assessment and ensure an action plan is produced to improve the accessibility of the service for key hard to reach groups as identified by the Home Office (2008).

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None identified.