

REPORT TO: Safer Halton Partnership
DATE: 15th May
REPORTING OFFICER: Sally Clarke
SUBJECT: Sexual Violence
WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise the Safer Halton Partnership as to potential developments in the area of sexual violence/violent crime

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The partnership notes and comments on the report
- (2) The partnership supports the Domestic Abuse Forum to develop a system of services for victims of sexual violence.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The emphasis on domestic abuse within the Government's agenda is rising and over recent months there have been increasing links to the issue of sexual violence. Following on from the success of IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) in 06/07 the Home Office made available limited funding to support the roll out of ISVAs (Independent Sexual Violence Advisors). Locally Cheshire & Merseyside Rape & Sexual Assault Support Centre delivered this across Halton & St Helens. Funding for this shared post ceased in March 07.

In the vast majority of rapes and sexual assaults, the victim knows their attacker – 56% are partners or ex partners. Victims of sexual violence perpetrated by a current or former partner are also more likely to be victims of the most severe forms of domestic abuse. As is the case with domestic abuse, it is common for victims to experience multiple incidents, sometimes over long periods of time, before they seek support or report to the police, that incidents of sexual violence are severely under reported to the police, and that conviction rates are low. Sexual violence also severely impacts on a victim's physical and mental well-being. A study of women in prison also indicated that up to a third had previously experienced sexual abuse. The British Crime Survey showed that women have a greater fear of this crime than any other.

While Cheshire Constabulary is currently working with partners to develop a countywide Sexual Assault Referral Centre, local service provision to victims of sexual violence is extremely poor. The development of services in this area will support the partnership in meeting its 'fear of crime' and 'community reassurance' targets, the Local Criminal Justice Board in 'increasing the number of offences brought to justice' and should also have a significant impact on other health and social care targets. It would also provide 'added value' to the proposed Women's Centre that is currently under discussion and development.

The publication of "Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse" in April 2007 by HM Government contains a chapter on the links between sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence – including domestic abuse.

Because of the close links with domestic abuse and sexual violence, it is the intentions of the Domestic Abuse Forum to extend its remit to cover sexual violence.

The Domestic Abuse Forum has recently commissioned the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) to provide a full time ISVA for Halton to support victims of sexual assault/violence in the area.

Statistics from the last three months suggest that the service is receiving five referrals a month from clients in the Halton area alone.

Within the Government action plan there are sections throughout that detail ongoing commitments for 2007/08. These include:

- A new performance management framework for criminal justice agencies on the investigation and prosecution of serious sexual offences
- Supporting the sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse voluntary sector through grants totalling £1.25 million
- Encouraging CDRP's to assist in the local sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse sector in building up capacity, and involve them in the development of strategies on sexual violence
- Further developing the network of SARCs through additional funding worth £1.1m and practical support.

By addressing this issue at an early stage and implementing services and strategies ahead of Government guidance, Halton should be able to show good practice and trail blazing qualities.