

REPORT TO: Health & Wellbeing Board
DATE: 12 October, 2022
REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Adult Social Services
PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Halton Women's Centre
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform the Board on the current position and development of the Women's Centre.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The service provides opportunities and interventions in a safe environment that improve the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of women residing in Halton to positively increase their independence. The Centre also complements, signposts and refer clients to other organisations for specialised support and developmental workshops delivered both in the Centre and in the wider professional community.
- 3.2 Our clients generally fall into three categories:
- Short term therapeutic work through counselling (10-12 weeks)
 - Medium term support through activities / counselling / listening ear / individual support sessions (6-12 months)
 - Long term support through activities and practical support (12 months upwards)
- 3.3 Women who are on licence within the criminal justice system attend the Centre for probation appointments and we also work holistically alongside them and PSS - Women's Turnaround, to support those women who have a history of offending to make better choices, break down barriers to reform and increase self-esteem and confidence.
- 3.4 WHAG, Halton's Domestic Abuse Service, run their Recovery programme from the Centre once a week. This is aimed at recovery from the psychological damage that can be caused by an abusive relationship. Due to the safe and welcoming environment of the Centre the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor's (IDVA's) also hold 1:1 appointments here with women who are currently experiencing or fleeing domestic abuse.

3.5 Service Development

- 3.5.1 The Council took over the running of the service in September 2017. At that time the Centre was only open 2½ days per week and was only offering counselling, two social groups and the occasional self-development course. The Centre has developed dramatically since then and it is now open 9am-5pm five days a week. We offer a selection of activities, social groups, self-development courses, IT courses, specialist courses, 1:1's and counselling every day of the week.
- 3.5.2 Referral numbers have increased over the last three years from an average of 98 per year to over 220 and the number of women actively using the service has also increased from approx. 80 at any one time to our current number of 277, proving there is a high demand for this service.
- 3.5.3 There has been an increase in self-referrals for those experiencing anxiety, depression, low confidence / low self-esteem and social isolation, which may have been amplified through the pandemic. Cases are more complex in nature than previously and there has been an increase in referrals for women experiencing / have experienced domestic abuse.
- 3.5.4 We were successful in our bid from monies from both the Community Safety Partnership (Sept 2020) and the National Probation Services (Dec 2020) as part of a Cheshire wide project. The aim of the project was to build on existing integrated delivery arrangements within a dedicated Women's Centre to provide services to women who offend or are at risk of offending, many of whom have complex needs and who may also be / have been in domestic abusive relationships. The goal was to provide support in a person-centred, non-stigmatised community where a woman's "status" of offender, victim, and / or family member is irrelevant in terms of the service offer. This funding enabled us to appoint an experienced support worker for 16 month period to help develop and deliver an enhanced program of activities and support sessions for **all** women, as well as allowing us to improve our digital offer.
- 3.5.5 The digital offer was enhanced by using some of the grant monies to upgrade our public Centre IT systems, Wi-Fi and equipment. We purchased three lap tops, eight iPad's and a printer to increase our digital accessibility. These are available for the women to use as required within the Centre and are also set up for us to use Zoom and social platforms to engage women in the community. Furthermore we now offer an IT beginner's course in conjunction with WEA, where on completion women will receive a free tablet. The increased digital offer / presence is very popular and well utilised.
- 3.5.6 We have recently worked with students who were on the decorating courses at Riverside College. They chose the Centre as their Community project and redecorated throughout. This project allowed students to gain valuable work experience in a live setting and also gave them the opportunity to learn more about the service provision. The paint was donated free of charge by Albany, a major paint manufacturer. In addition, we received a small amount of money from Croda, a manufacturers who are located in Halton, to purchase some

new chairs for the counselling rooms. Both of these projects have enabled us to start to modernise the appearance of the Centre.

3.6 Funding/Resources

- 3.6.1 Apart from the costs associated with the running and upkeep of the building the only other costs are for staffing. The only permanent post is that of Centre Manager, which is funded by existing HBC and ICB recurrent funding.
- 3.6.2 In 2020 we received funding from the Community Safety Partnership (Sept 2020) and the National Probation Services (Dec 2020):
- 3.6.3 We have been successful in securing additional funding from Cheshire East for 2022-23 to extend the probation project and from the ICB winter pressures fund. Both of these are non-recurring one off payments that would enable us to resource staffing posts on a 12 month fixed term contract.
- 3.6.4 We raise further income from room hire. Although this is not a regular income the amounts may vary in each quarter.
- 3.6.5 Due to the increased demand on the service and the tailored support we are providing, the emphasis is on staffing resources and ensuring the staff are more experienced.

3.7 Future Developments/Considerations

- 3.7.1 We have had increased referrals for women who have experienced historic domestic abuse (over 12 months previous). Currently there is no provision that offers specific support around this and it is a gap that we would like to fill by offering the Freedom or New Beginnings course, both of which are aimed at supporting women to examine the roles, attitudes and beliefs on the actions of abusive men and the responses of victims and survivors. The aim is to help Women to make sense of and understand what has happened to them and improve their emotional health on this matter. Both are a 12 week program however there is a cost implication as you have to be licensed and trained to deliver them.
- 3.7.2 There are fewer younger women (18-30) who attend the Centre so we need to understand the reasoning behind this in order to be able to offer more appropriate and relevant support. Some of the updating of the appearance of the Centre has helped towards being more inviting to Women of all ages however the Centre's logo requires updating to better reflect the developed service and be more appealing to the younger age range. (Currently it is a pink butterfly).
- 3.7.3 To reduce barriers around finances and transport and to increase accessibility consideration needs to be made about having a presence in Widnes, even if just one day a week. There would need to be capacity to suitably accommodate a group, 1:1's and a probation worker in order to replicate some of the provision currently in Runcorn and to maintain links with key services.

3.7.4 Long term funding for staff resources is a concern as income for the support worker / case worker roles for the past 2 years have been generated from short term, (12 month) non-recurring funding streams. If access to further funding was not available in the future then we would struggle to meet the needs of the women in Halton and the Centre could potentially need to reduce service provision.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**
None

6.2 **Employment Learning and Skills**
Opportunities for greater learning for Women

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**
To Improve health and wellbeing for Women in Halton

6.4 **A Safer Halton**
To Increase safer support for Women in Halton

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Will need to continuously review provision due to short term funding

8.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 **None**

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

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.