



Introduction

As you may be aware, there have been a number of changes in the way that Devon County Council is helping domestic abuse survivors and reducing the potential for people to experience domestic violence and abuse. Public health will be taking the lead role in tackling sexual and domestic violence and abuse in Devon bringing these two crucial and linked agendas together.

The Public Health team within the Council have lead responsibility for improving the health and wellbeing of Devon residents and tackling sexual and domestic violence is a key public health issue.

While public health will provide the strategic lead it is vital that all partners work together to tackle this agenda. Recognising the strong existing commitment to partnership working to tackle domestic violence, we therefore propose to create a new alliance, building on the excellent partnerships that already exist within Devon. Devon's alliance against sexual and domestic violence will bring together organisations, agencies and people committed to working together to tackle sexual and domestic violence and abuse in Devon. This will enable commissioners, service providers, the voluntary sector and survivors to work collaboratively, bringing the obvious passion and commitment that all partners have to ensure resources and services in Devon are co-ordinated, maximised and able to respond to local need in a timely, co-ordinated and evidence based way.

Recent guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence published last month (February 2014), give clear guidance and 17 recommendations on how services should work effectively to tackle domestic violence and abuse services. Key recommendations include ensuring services are based on the local need, a local multi-agency partnership should be established and an integrated commissioning strategy should be developed. Within Devon a Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Joint Strategic Needs Assessment was completed in 2013 and the establishment of a new Alliance will be vital to support an integrated commissioning strategy.

New service commissioned to tackle domestic violence

A new countywide support service for victims of domestic violence and their families has been secured by Devon County Council.

A comprehensive, full and transparent multi-agency tendering process was undertaken to coincide with the end of the existing contract. Local and national organisations including the existing providers were invited to apply, with the emphasis being more on quality and equality than cost.

Following the process, Splitz Support Service was chosen by a diverse and experienced evaluation panel partnership to provide a Devon-wide support service for victims and their families, and for preventive work with perpetrators.

The contract, worth around £800,000 a year, will begin from 1 April 2014, and continue this important area of work for the county council and its partners for up to three years.

Splitz Support Service is a charity which has been providing support to survivors of domestic abuse in a variety of geographical areas in the South West. The new service aims to tackle domestic violence at its core, and improve the health and wellbeing of domestic violence victims and their families across

the whole county, reducing repeat offences and enabling families to stay in their own homes where possible.

Splitz has set up a Devon base where it will ensure a consistent, countywide service with highly trained advisors on hand to support victims and their families and help keep them safe from harm and further abuse.

The new contract will enable the work to continue with partners across the county to build on the legacy that has already been established in Devon, to provide appropriate and quality support for victims and their families, and to support perpetrators reduce their offending behaviour and break the cycle within families.

A transition process between the current providers and the new provider is underway to ensure a seamless handover when the new contract comes into effect, and the Council expects the new provider to work closely with the current providers to continue to improve the service. DCC's Social Care Commissioning team is actively leading and supporting the transition phase between the three existing providers and Splitz.

We want to ensure that we respond effectively to local needs as well as working to minimise the long-term effects of violence and abuse on people's lives.

Devon County Council is proposing to invest a further £17.4 million on services that support the most vulnerable. This includes an increase in spending on child and adult protection including those that support people experiencing domestic violence.

What does the future look like?

Following the award of the new contract to Splitz Support Services there has already been some extremely positive and joined up response by the existing providers, housing, health and social care organisations regarding the existing refuge provision. Exeter City Council has offered reassurances that anyone experiencing Domestic Abuse and in need of a safe place to stay will be offered immediate, temporary accommodation. They will then work with the individual or family alongside Splitz to help them find longer term, safe accommodation.

Exeter refuge landlord, Devon & Cornwall Housing, has also committed to ensuring that no one will be left homeless as the smaller, more personalised accommodation offers replace the larger, shared buildings.

The service will support adults and children experiencing domestic violence, contribute to the "early help" offer to families, continue to work with perpetrators, and will maintain the delivery of the very well-regarded training programme. The contracts will not only include continuation of a help line, but will broaden the ways that people can be supported through introducing texting services and other forms of communication.

A note from the Chief Executive – Splitz Support Services

Fran Lewis is the Executive Director of Splitz Support Services. A strong supporter of multi-agency working, Splitz Support Service actively encourages a community, coordinated response to the issue of domestic abuse.

"We believe strongly in dealing with domestic abuse at its source," said Fran.

"Through providing help to enable perpetrators to change their harmful behaviour we believe that families will be safer. It is important to recognise that attending a structured programme is not a magic wand, but is the beginning of a long journey. The important thing is that individuals who experience domestic abuse need not be alone; there is somewhere to turn, and we and others are here to help.

"We consider it a privilege to be part of the response to domestic abuse in Devon and we will be

talking to local people as we develop our service. I am very grateful to have been welcomed so warmly and look forward to working with others who are so passionate about making changes.

“No single organisation can deal with this huge problem alone and our intention is very much to work in partnership with existing providers to achieve the safest possible outcome for everyone with experience of domestic abuse.

“We are keen to build on the outstanding work that is already happening in the County and recognise the excellence of the existing skills, knowledge and experience of our new colleagues in the area.

“It is important to us all that everyone experiencing domestic violence can continue to feel safe in your daily life and we would like to do all we can to help them to achieve and sustain this, especially when they move on into the community.

“Service users are at the heart of everything we do and I can well understand that people might be feeling anxious as the new plans for services for survivors of domestic abuse begin to take shape.

“The new service we will be providing includes personalised support for any victim or survivor living in the county. This is ‘one to one’ on a face to face basis as well as telephone support; structured workshops and drop In opportunities. When people move on from supported accommodation, we will support them to settle into independent accommodation ensuring that they can live safely and live well.

We will also provide services to help children and young people affected through witnessing domestic abuse at home enabling them to identify their personal challenges in relation to this, and we will be further developing voluntary perpetrator programmes helping perpetrators of domestic abuse change their harmful behaviour.

“We intend to consult regularly with service users to help us to identify further services which may help them and their families come to terms with any personal difficulties and find ways to help them achieve and sustain independence in the community.”

MARAC Process

There are four Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) in Devon and in 2012-2013, a total of 670 high risk cases were taken to Devon’s MARACs, with 832 children and young people associated with these cases.

Splitz’s model for supporting victims through MARAC and the Courts is slightly different to the existing model in Devon. However, we intend to work with existing partners and providers during this transition phase to maintain the existing MARAC model (with MARAC IDVAs) and Specialist DVA Court model (with SDVC IDVAs) during the first year of the contract.

Meetings are being set up with each of the MARAC Chairs in w/c 10th March to talk about the way forward and address any concerns.

New contact details

A new e-mail address has been set up for the new domestic violence partnership. All e-mails sent to the ADVA inbox will also be redirected to the new address:

domesticviolence@devon.gov.uk