

Written evidence submitted by the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network on behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and Lancashire Constabulary (COR0041)

- 1. The prevalence of these issues since the Government issued 'stay at home' guidance on 23 March;
 2. Specialist Domestic Abuse community support services in Lancashire, both commissioned and non-commissioned, are reporting no significant increase in the level of referrals into the service either from the Constabulary or by self-referral. Evidence up to the Easter holiday weekend has shown a slight decrease in referrals, although not at significant level. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) serving the Lancashire County Council area has reported an overall 14% reduction from 1 January to 3rd April. DA services have speculated that this may be partially due to the lockdown providing less opportunities for victims to make contact with either the police or support services. However, there is also anecdotal evidence from discussions with clients that there may also be a reduction in opportunity for perpetrators who do not live with the victim and might have used child contact as opportunities to abuse.
 3. However, Lancashire Constabulary has noted a shift in the peak times of domestic abuse incidents from pre-Covid 19 times when they were 3-4pm and 7-11pm. The incidents tend now to be reported across a wider timeframe, from anytime between 11am to 11pm. This raises concern in families with children, as children may be exposed to domestic abuse for a longer period during the day, which in turn could impact on the level and severity of trauma experienced.
- 4. Measures or proposals to help support victims of domestic abuse and child abuse at this time;
 5. Local commissioned and non-commissioned services are still fully functional, all staff are home based and are providing support via phone/skype/video call rather than face to face. Some providers have also develop on-line chat and self-help portals to maximize the opportunities for victims to access support and guidance. MARAC meetings are still functioning by teleconferencing and all local DV agencies are having weekly skype meetings to discuss any concerns and ensure that they are working collaboratively. Service providers are prioritising cases whereby the perpetrator is still living with the victim and revising safety plans and communication channels. Operation Encompass (the reporting of DA incidents where children are present to the relevant local school) is continuing to function and advice specific to the Covid-19 situation is being sent to all Op Encompass contacts. This will encourage schools to contact families where a DA incident is reported and where the child may not qualify for a school place. One IDVA service has continued to provide some awareness raising and support via a presence in local supermarkets in their area.
 6. Some independent providers who are non-commissioned services are struggling to obtain financial support to maintain their staff and services as they fall outside of the small business grant criteria and, as a non-commissioned service, will not benefit from any additional funding provided via Police and Crime Commissioners.
- 7. Measures or proposals to reduce or avert domestic abuse and child abuse at this time;

8. The raising of awareness of domestic abuse at a national level has been welcome although more national level advice and information about surviving as a family during lock down would be welcome.

Locally the OPCC, commissioned and non-commissioned services have developed a range of key messages and safety advice that is being promoted via social media and various websites. This has provided a series of consistent message whilst providing opportunities for victims to access very localised support within Lancashire. This has been linked with work that the Constabulary and the LRF are also undertaking to ensure that people with vulnerabilities are aware of the support that is available to them.

The Violence Reduction Network and the OPCC are looking at other options for distributing information, advice and awareness raising through locations that are still open and accessed by people – e.g. local shops, pharmacies, etc.

- 9. Preparedness of responders and service providers to address the needs of victims during the pandemic;

10. Most DA service providers have been able to adapt their delivery of support relatively quickly and easily to home based working for the majority of their staff. This has ensured that there has been continuity of support offered, even if in a different, non-face to face method.

The situation in refuges does cause some concern as the lack of PPE for staff and the close proximity of residents living in the refuge has resulted in most refuge facilities becoming full. As well as the impact that the restrictions have on victims not being able to move on from the refuge this has also limited the options available for those victims who would want to leave an abusive situation. Whilst we know that refuge capacity has been limited for a number of years the current situation has made this significantly harder and reinforces the need for a substantial review of the system of provision of refuge resources.

- 11. The effectiveness of Government advice, co-ordination and support for responders and service providers.

12. The homelessness guidance from Public Health England is still being awaited (HM Govt, 2020), but there is a ministerial letter which outlines the overarching principles for local authorities (HM Government, 2020). Other than stating a principles of “If possible, separating people who have significant drug and alcohol needs from those who do not” there is not real reference to those at risk of serious violence and how to manage this, particularly those who use illicit substances. It would be helpful if national guidance could be offered regarding local management of the situation with drugs markets and serious violence in temporary homelessness accommodation.

13. The Guidance on Domestic Abuse (HM Government, 2020) that has been released and focusses on safe social distancing within refuges. There is limited information to local areas about how best to monitor, record, respond to or prevent domestic abuse at the current time. This might be useful guidance.

14. In the guidance for Schools (Department of Education, 2020), there is very little information about safeguarding children whilst at home other than “Schools should work with local authorities to monitor the welfare of vulnerable children who are not attending school, and other pupils they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes.” There is no specific guidance about the role that schools might be able to play in helping

to keep children and young people safe online, or how they might be able to maintain the 'trusted adult' status for children who were perhaps not at all on their radar because their vulnerabilities have only surfaced because of the stay at home situation. More guidance on this from the Home Office and DFE might be useful.

15. Anecdotal evidence from our VRU education team would suggest that some of our most vulnerable are not interacting with school online lessons leaving some clear issues not least the lack of the positive influence of a single trusted adult.

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