

**Written evidence submitted by the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner's Office (COR0083)**

1. The Committee has invited submissions on domestic abuse and risk of harm within the home during the crisis. Please see the following response under the required headings:

**The prevalence of these issues since the Government issued 'stay at home' guidance on 23 March;**

2. In Sussex we have not yet seen an increase in reported domestic abuse and harm. Local figures from the Police are actually down on a week to week basis at the moment - stabilising at about the mid 300's per week compared to about a 100 a week more DA crimes prior to stay at home measures being introduced - a 24% reduction per week. There has been an increase in calls to some of the domestic abuse helplines provided locally but not in all areas, an increase of calls by about 15%. We have however unfortunately now had what are likely to be 2 Domestic Homicide Reviews since the start of stay at home guidance. These are both in West Sussex, with one including the deaths of two children under 5.
3. Our child sexual exploitation support services have seen a increase in young people contacting them with concerns via their online platform. However social care teams have seen a 20% drop in referrals for this type of issue. Local Authorities in Sussex have reported an increase around 15% in families presenting as homeless as a result of family breakdown due to the stay at home guidance.

**Measures or proposals to help support victims of domestic abuse and child abuse at this time;**

4. All support services including those based in refuges have moved from face to face support to telephone and online only. This has not been an easy transition with several services operating on a very tight budget, having enough technology to provide all staff with mobile work has been a challenge. This is particularly challenging for counselling services for sexual and domestic abuse survivors.

Feedback from services to date has been that on the whole services are able to meet the current demand as there has been a slight reduction, however there is concern about the very vulnerable who are finding the current measures significantly challenging. This is pronounced in this in refuge provision as well as those who have experience rape and sexual abuse where suicidal behaviour has presented itself to some services. Locally we are looking at how mental health provision can be better linked into victim support however this is a challenge with very limited mental health resource. A concern that has also been reported is the complexity of domestic abuse cases that are being worked on is much higher than would normally be seen via helplines. The average call prior to stay at home measures would take around 20 minutes however these are now taking an hour or more.

5. It has also been noted that for MARAC there has been a significant increase in the number of repeat cases than is usual, even though the same number

of cases are being heard. This suggests that stay at home measures may be escalating domestic abuse more quickly.

**Measures or proposals to reduce or avert domestic abuse and child abuse at this time;**

6. A series of communications have been released by partner agencies reminding people domestic abuse and child abuse are not acceptable at any time and that services are available to support them. A broader series of messages is being looked at through the LRF response to COVID-19. Feedback from local Sussex services has been that the national communications on domestic abuse and signposting to national helplines is counterproductive. There is some concern that local figures may have dropped as people are instead accessing the national helpline. Whilst any support is better than none as these national helplines only provide one off support and do not refer into local longer-term provision this is of concern. Any further communications will look at how to target for local providers, however knowing where is best to do this is a challenge in the current climate. There has been discussion about supermarkets, however we understand there is also a national plan for this also and therefore do not want to duplicate. There are also costs associated with printing material or hiring media boards that are not currently budgeted, which needs resolving.

**Preparedness of responders and service providers to address the needs of victims during the pandemic; and**

7. On the whole services have been able to adapt, although as mentioned technology has been an issue with some services still not in a position to provide enough for staff to meet all need.
8. As mentioned above a concern remains about how the most vulnerable will need longer support than previous as a result of the additional anxiety and pressure created by the stay at home measures. This will need to be factored into future work plans.
9. A further concern is the fact that there will be a considerable increase in support required following the release of any stay at home guidance. Therefore, services are worried about what this will look like and having the resources available to manage this.
10. Veritas Justice who provide Stalking advocacy support in Sussex were awarded £40,000 by the Sussex PCC to create an online platform for victims. This platform is now operational and supporting victims with queries and offering safety advice. Since the start of the stay at home measures there has been a 26% increase in cyber stalking reported to Veritas, therefore this platform is allowing more people to receive much needed direct support.
11. REBOOT is an early intervention youth programme initiated by the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner Mrs Katy Bourne which encourages young people to make positive choices instead of becoming involved in crime. REBOOT brings together multiple partners: East Sussex youth offending team, West Sussex youth offending service, Brighton & Hove Youth offending service, YMCA Downslink Group, Trust for developing communities, Audio Active, Hangleton and Knoll, NHS partnership Trust, Sussex Police, Active Sussex, Freedom Leisure and Wave Leisure.

12. Since the start of the Covid-19 crisis the Commissioner's REBOOT early intervention programme has had to adapt to keep everyone safe. Coaching sessions which were previously offered face to face are now taking place via video call and support services are now available digitally allowing the programme to go from strength to strength. Active Sussex have teamed up with REBOOT, providing young people and their families access to local sports and activities, directly from the safety of their homes. There is now available a schedule of activities which are free to access. The programme encourages everyone across Sussex to get involved, keep active and improve their mental well-being during these unprecedented times. Young people on the programme can keep fit during the lockdown or try something different and still maintain contact with the REBOOT team.

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

13. As highlighted above there is some concern that signposting to national campaigns are unhelpful for local providers.

14. There has also been feedback that the response has been very slow from central government on recognising that the stay at home guidance will be having a very significant impact on vulnerable people. There will be a number of children being abused that are not currently seeing teachers as they normally would who can spot signs of abuse. This is where a significant drop in children's social care referrals have come from. This also works the same for those experiencing other forms of abuse who won't be seeing anyone to reach out and seek help or for someone to notice. The current situation is likely to lead to more domestic homicides in Sussex before the measures are lifted and it was felt by providers that it has taken nearly 3 weeks for this to be raised in the daily government briefings.

15. Other feedback has included the very short time frames given for responses back to announcements.

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