

Internal Audit report – Domestic Abuse Strategy

Audit Committee

Date: 4th April 2017

Author: Head of Internal Audit
Wards: None
Locality Affected: None
Parishes Affected: None

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The Council's Audit Committee has a strategic role to ensure that the Council's assurance framework is operating effectively. To this end it should seek assurance that key areas that contribute to this framework are operating effectively.
- 1.2 Members requested that at least one individual audit report be presented to each meeting of the Committee. Audit Committee selected the Internal Audit report on the Domestic Abuse Strategy that identified an 'of concern' level of risk to be presented to their April meeting.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted.

3. Detail

Background

- 3.1 The Swindon and Wiltshire Strategy to Reduce Domestic Abuse (2015-17) makes clear that domestic abuse is a complex and challenging issue; it is a largely hidden and under-reported crime, as well as a social and public health issue, cutting across all geographic and cultural groups and having a long lasting and devastating impact on those living with its effects.
- 3.2 Reducing domestic abuse is a key priority of the Swindon and Wiltshire Community Safety Partnerships (made up of statutory partners in Swindon and Wiltshire, including Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Local Authorities, NHS and Probation Services), who have responsibilities for reducing crime and disorder across the County. A Local Authority also has statutory responsibilities for reducing crime and safeguarding adults and children at risk of harm and therefore must play a central role in facilitating local partnerships, providing services and raising awareness of domestic abuse across the Borough.
- 3.3 Reducing domestic abuse contributes to two of the Council's Corporate Priorities: ensure clean and safe streets and improve our public spaces; and, help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults.

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- 3.4 The priority of this audit was to review the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategy to Reduce Domestic Abuse (and its supporting framework), to provide assurance to the Head of Housing and Community Safety regarding its robustness and effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse in Swindon.
- 3.5 The Head of Housing Services requested that the audit be included in the 2016/17 audit plan.

Key findings

- 3.6 The key findings of the Internal Audit review were:
- The Strategy to Reduce Domestic Abuse is in place and covers key areas regarding domestic abuse.
 - Key stakeholders of Swindon's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) from within the Council were spoken with during the audit (see Appendix B) and they were satisfied that there is cross agency commitment to tackling domestic abuse in Swindon.
 - However, the available resources in which to deliver on the Strategy across the partnership are limited and there is a requirement to better define the priorities for tackling domestic abuse to ensure the Strategy is achievable.
 - There is also a need to better define the intended outcomes of domestic abuse work and establish a performance framework that is capable of measuring the effectiveness of the Strategy, to inform continuing priorities going forward.

Key recommendations

- 3.7 Key recommendations made as a result of the review are as follows:
- A more pragmatic approach to action planning is needed, with the Strategy clear as to what the key areas of focus are for tackling domestic abuse. In particular the action plan should be reviewed in the context of providing clarity around objectives of actions, resources required, outcomes expected, priorities for actions, realistic timescales, appropriate Lead Officers across the Council and partner agencies and a clear review of actions at the appropriate Domestic Abuse sub-group.
 - A performance framework for measuring the success of the Strategy should be established, which defines the strategic outcomes, performance targets and indicators of success to be measured going forward (see an example from Essex at Appendix D).
 - The Swindon Community Safety Partnership, or appropriate Domestic Abuse sub-group, should identify the data needs regarding domestic abuse, to better monitor performance. This data should be used to continually inform the basis of the Strategy and priorities in the action plan (see Appendix E for potential sources of information).

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- Clearer ownership and commitment from partner agencies is necessary to ensure responsibilities for resources and actions are clearly defined, to reduce over reliance on the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator and ensure an ongoing and sustainable commitment to reducing domestic abuse.
- The Community Safety Partnership or 'Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategic Board' should define their expectations of the quality assurance function of the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Management and Quality Assurance Group. Clear objectives and, where necessary, methodology for undertaking quality assurance should also be discussed and decided upon.
- The Operating Protocol for Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences should be reviewed and updated to ensure agencies are aware of the process and to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of meetings. ('Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences' are a multi-agency meeting for reviewing and responding to high risk domestic abuse cases).

3.8 The report was finalised in December 2016 and is attached as Appendix 1. An update on the implementation of recommendations has been provided by the Head of Housing Services. Additional audit testing has not been carried out since the original review.

3.9 The Head of Housing Services will be at Audit Committee to answer any questions that Members may have.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Not Applicable

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report however the detailed audit report addresses the suitability of internal controls within the systems examined

Legal and Human Rights Implications

5.2 Internal Audit is a statutory requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Internal Audit service also provides assurance to the Director of Finance regarding the requirements of Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

5.3 None

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Links to One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies

- 5.4 Effective systems of internal control within the Council will help to ensure that the Council's corporate objectives and those set out in One Swindon are achieved.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 Not Applicable

Risk Management

- 5.6 Not applicable

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Internal Audit report: *Domestic Abuse Strategy* (December 2016)
- 8.2 Appendix 2 – Management update provided regarding implementation of recommendations (March 2017)