

**ORIGINATOR: LIGHTHOUSE WOMEN'S  
AID**

**PAPER NO: AP15/66**

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL  
27 OCTOBER 2015**

**SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT DOMESTIC ADVISOR SERVICE (IDVA) SUFFOLK**

**SUMMARY:**

This report is the first to the Accountability and Performance Panel on the IDVA Service which started in February 2015. It provides an overview of the service, progress and issues.

A summary of data is provided in Appendix A.

The service is forecast to be slightly under budget at year end despite higher than expected costs for communications and IT.

Changes (increases) in demand continue to be monitored.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The PCC is asked to note progress with the service.

## **DETAIL OF THE SUBMISSION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Following the decision by the Police and Crime Commissioner to award a 3 year grant to Lighthouse Women's Aid (LWA) for the delivery of a county wide Independent Domestic Violence Advisor ( IDVA) service, this was implemented in February 2015. IDVA provision in Suffolk had previously been very minimal and evidence from the HMIC inspection and advice from Safelives suggested IDVA provision in Suffolk was woefully low. The PCC therefore decided to commission a service to increase capacity.
- 1.2 The purpose of the IDVA service is to provide support to victims of domestic abuse at the highest risk. IDVAs will endeavour to make contact with victims within a 48 hour period following referral. The essential purpose of contact is to ensure the victim's safety and ascertain their wishes going forward.
- 1.3 If contact cannot be established within 48 hours, the IDVA will contact the Domestic Abuse Team (DAT) or the referrer to see if we can obtain other contact details. If there are any issues around this the IDVA will request a Police Community Safety Officer (PCSO) or Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) to try and contact the victim. At all times the DAT are made aware of victims IDVAs cannot contact. This may be resolved at the Multi- Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meeting if another agency is involved with the victim and their family.  
LWA do not record how many victims unable to contact but this data can be traced through the MARAC research.
- 1.4 The IDVA service is not a drop in service for advice and support, it's a short term service to work with clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans. IDVAs are not counsellors but can offer practical and emotional support.  
Once IDVA's have ended support they will refer onto external agencies for on going emotional support, or support with any other needs they may have, if the risk escalates the victims will be referred back into the IDVA service.
- 1.5 Any agency can refer into the service and it is expected that all agencies will have completed a robust assessment process to establish that the victim is at high risk before referring. The IDVA will then complete a Safelives DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harrassment) risk assessment to confirm this. Alongside this risk assessment they will complete immediate Safety Planning.

### **2. KEY ISSUES AND PROGRESS:**

#### **Progress**

- 2.1 Recruitment and training has been a high priority in the early stages of the contract. The initial recruitment of an experienced IDVA manager has aided this process enormously and we are now fully staffed in line with the remit of contract.
- 2.2 Initial intensive training reduced capacity to receive the full quota of referrals. LWA worked with the DAT to minimise impact during this time. Most IDVA's are now trained with the latest recruits undertaking specific IDVA training in the New Year.
- 2.3 9 IDVA's are now employed covering 8 FTE posts.  
Offices in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft accommodate 3 IDVA's at each base. The flexibility of the service means that IDVA's can travel across county if necessary to meet demand from a different area.

- 2.4 Managed by a full time IDVA manager and supported by administration and senior management, IDVA's have clear processes in place for their welfare, supervision and management:
- All IDVAs receive 6 weekly supervision, 6 weekly clinical supervision, 6 weekly team and case management meetings.
  - LWA have organisation wide access to an Employee Assistance Programme offering individual support and counselling.
  - In addition IDVA's are issued with lone worker devices which have voice recordings and GPS tracking for safety and protection.
- 2.5 LWA are always keen to rethink how services are delivered depending on identified need. As such we have recruited a male IDVA to work with male victims and also to cover the Special Domestic Abuse Courts (SDACs) as this can be very time consuming. This has released other IDVAs to focus on incoming female victim referrals and MARACs.
- 2.6 We are currently developing a process for recording outputs and outcomes at SDACs as this can involve contact with victims not directly referred in to the IDVA service. This should help to give an even clearer picture as to the extent of the issue.
- 2.7 From the outset referrals have been constant with the majority received from the south.
- 2.8 IDVAs attend all MARACs and once high risk has been reduced will refer to agencies for ongoing support as appropriate. IDVA's usually receive MARAC lists in advance of meetings and where possible will already have made contact with victims. The majority of the referrals are received via the DAT, these referrals are contacted and support & safety planning are in place almost immediately. The IDVAs work very closely with the DAT, PCSOs & SNT, who will provide support when an IDVA cannot make contact with a victim. More referrals are being received from external agencies now that the IDVA service is becoming known in Suffolk.
- 2.9 There is now an agreed protocol in place between LWA and the Outreach service to ensure smooth transition between high and medium risk. This works well for stepping up and down when the risk changes. The outreach service will attend case management meetings to ensure there is a seamless referral process and the victim is not left without support.
- 2.10 The DAT are looking at producing a Module of Understanding (MOU) between agencies and this is work in progress.
- 2.11 A robust, bespoke monitoring and evaluation system provides quantitative data including number /type of referrals, age, breakdown of ethnicity and geographical area etc. End of service evaluations are carried out by volunteers to ensure objectivity, providing valuable qualitative feedback on the performance of the contract.
- 2.12 LWA are very keen to encourage and support positive partnership working across the county. As such IDVAs attend local domestic abuse forums, MARACs and other relevant meetings. The IDVA, Police Domestic Abuse, and Outreach Teams regularly meet to keep in touch and to ensure smooth transition of service delivery.

### **Issues**

- 2.13 A key issue to be considered is the inappropriateness of some referrals. We are addressing this with agencies but have a way to go to ensure that all referrals coming through are high risk. This is work in progress.

- 2.14 With levels of referrals varying across the county it is important that all agencies are aware of the IDVA Service and the importance of referring any high risk client in to this service. The IDVA's work within a multi-agency framework consisting of MARAC, Police, and Community partnership agencies, the importance of working closely with these agencies is paramount to the victim due to the level of risk they are at when reporting an incident. It is important for all agencies to have MARAC training (or at least have team members who have the knowledge of MARAC & DASH ) and to be able to complete a DASH RA, to enable the victim & their family to receive the correct support and safety planning to protect them.
- 2.15 Referrals in the north are considerably lower than elsewhere in the county and we are concerned as to why this is the case. In addition the police serious domestic abuse crime and non -crime figures are considerably higher than LWA referrals. We are in discussion with the constabulary with regard to this anomaly.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

- 3.1 From the outset in February, the impact of demand for the IDVA service meant LWA having to "hit the ground running" and embark on a very steep learning curve. The high demand, the immediacy and intense nature of support required by high risk victims of domestic abuse resulted in some early personnel changes and a time for a settled IDVA team to emerge. A full team is now in place. Financially, this has resulted in some early savings in staff costs but which, with PCC flexibility and support, helped Lighthouse to develop a more comprehensive service able to deliver support for all victims of both sexes countywide.
- 3.2 The introduction of a new IDVA service has also enabled LWA to develop a data collection system that will provide comprehensive information on high risk domestic abuse victims in Suffolk; the effectiveness of support provided; and in which areas further work is needed.
- 3.3 Looking at the financial costs in our first year. Whilst in most of our cost centres we are delivering services on or below forecasts, communication costs (mobile phones, phones & IT) have been significantly underestimated. High caseloads, complex, intense and often wide ranging support requirements has resulted in a higher than expected reliance on telephones and computers to deliver much of this need. As a result we now forecast telecom and IT costs for the service to rise to £13,000 for this year against £7,000 budgeted. We expect this demand to continue for the term of the contract and are currently looking at making savings in other areas to meet the ongoing need, but the service is still in its infancy and we will need to remain flexible.
- 3.4 Having said this Lighthouse Women's Aid IDVA Service as a whole is currently running under budget for the year and our projected outturn to 31 March 2016, after adjusting for communication costs, is a saving in the region of £7,500.
- 3.5 Going forward, however, a continuing growth in demand together with improving efficacy and increasing reliance on the service will present significant challenges to maintaining service delivery at current prices. We will, therefore, continually keep our cost model under review and ourselves monitor how services are being delivered in order to manage costs whilst maintaining service effectiveness.

### **4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS:**

- 4.1 As mentioned the IDVA service has received a high level of referrals from the outset. It is yet unknown as to whether this number will increase as the service becomes more established and better known across the county. If this is the case then there needs to be an understanding that demand could outweigh capacity with a requirement to review the service and level of delivery. This is an ongoing concern to be monitored.