

ANGUS COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE.....17 APRIL 2001
 POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE.....8 MAY 2001

REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

ANGUS COUNCIL DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND
 PROGRESS ON SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

ABSTRACT

This report outlines for members a summary of progress of the Angus Partnership on Domestic Abuse and the development of services for people affected by domestic abuse. It also recommends the adoption of a policy on domestic abuse.

1 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee and Policy and Resources Committee:-

I. notes the progress of the work of the Angus Partnership on Domestic Abuse;

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:-

II. adopts the policy on domestic abuse as set out in this report;

2 Introduction

The Angus Partnership on Domestic Abuse was formed in November 1999 to develop an Angus strategy on domestic abuse and to prepare applications to the Scottish Executive and Scottish Homes for funding to develop services for the victims of domestic abuse in Angus. The Partnership includes representation from Angus Council Social Work, Housing, Finance and the Chief Executive's Department, Angus Local Health Care Co-operative, Barnardo's, Victim Support, Women's Aid, Tayside Police, Angus College and Angus Housing Association.

The applications to the Funding bodies were successful. Funding was provided for a domestic abuse officer (Barnardo's), for a full time Angus Women's Aid refuge worker, and to develop a second Women's Aid Refuge in partnership with Scottish Homes.

Funding became available on 1 April 2000 for 2 years subject to satisfactory progress.

The Angus Partnership on Domestic Abuse which is chaired by the social work criminal justice services service manager, Mark Hodgkinson meets every two months. Its purpose is to:-

- act as an advisory group overseeing the developments resulting from the applications to the Executive and Scottish Homes.
- support the Angus Council Policy on Domestic Abuse, through the co-operative actions of the agencies represented on the group.
- share information regarding the incidence of domestic abuse in Angus and the services provided in response.

3 Scale of the Problem

There is known to be a large under reporting of domestic violence. Tayside Police estimate that only 27% of incidents are reported to them. Whilst the actual incidence of domestic abuse may not be rising, victims may be increasingly willing to come forward, in line with the increased support available. In the last 6 months of 2000, the police in Angus recorded 419 incidents of domestic abuse, 139 involving physical abuse, resulting in 155 reports being sent to the Procurator Fiscal. These figures were 20% higher than the same period in 1999. The Angus Partnership is collectively of the view that in order to reduce domestic abuse in the long term, reports of incidents and prosecutions will have to rise meanwhile.

4 Angus Council Policy on Domestic Abuse

The Community Safety, Health and Substance Misuse Strategy Group meeting held on 21 February 2001 approved the following policy on Domestic Abuse. It is recommended that Angus Council adopt this policy.

Angus Council Policy on Domestic Abuse

Angus Council opposes all forms of violence and abuse. In working towards equal opportunities and social inclusion, the Council will take every step within its power to eliminate all forms of violence and abuse, whether mental, physical or sexual.

In particular, Angus Council has resolved to work towards preventing all forms of abuse within intimate relationships particularly against women and children, to ensure that everyone who lives in the Angus area is free from fear, intimidation, violence and abuse.

The Council has also resolved to take every possible step to provide support to those who have experienced abuse, including children and young people who have witnessed the abuse of a parent.

Angus Council therefore resolves to act to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse by working corporately with the Police and other public, private and voluntary organisations to provide:-

- ***Support for victims of domestic abuse and children affected by this abuse.***
- ***Support to enable an increase in the reporting of domestic abuse to the Police.***
- ***A programme (The Fergus Programme) run by Criminal Justice Social Work, which confronts perpetrators of domestic violence and aims to change their behaviour.***

This policy will be taken forward under the auspices of the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Forum, chaired by a Senior Council Officer, and be reviewed annually by means of a written report to the Council.

5 Progress Report

5.1 Domestic Abuse Officer (Barnardo's)

Angus is the only local authority in Scotland to have collaborated with a childcare agency in order to meet some of the needs of the children affected by domestic abuse, although other authorities in Tayside have expressed interest in developing a similar scheme. An appointment was made in July 2000, and the post-holder is central to the development of the partnership.

With respect to support to victims, over 42 women and 60 children have received direct support. Issues addressed have included work with boys displaying aggression, support for women and children prior to Court appearances as witnesses and helping families identify the options for dealing with ongoing threats from abusers. It is anticipated that the volume of referrals will rise as familiarity with the service increases.

With respect to training and publicity, work has been done within the partnership to develop a public relations strategy. This has included awareness training having been provided to schools, Health Visitors, Health Service Managers, and staff in the social work department. An amount of high quality publicity material has been developed, including posters and leaflets which provide contact numbers of key members of the partnership able to provide support and advice to victims. On 18 April 2001, there is a multi-agency domestic abuse training day, to be introduced by Councillor Glennis Middleton, convenor of Angus Council Social Work Committee. The Angus Procurators Fiscal and one of the local Sheriffs are committed to participate. It is expected that this training day will generate positive press publicity of the work of the Angus Partnership and the support available for victims.

5.2 New Angus Refuge

With respect to the Women's Aid Refuge accommodation, Angus has been one of the poorest provided for in Scotland, with just one three-place refuge in Arbroath. Progress has been made towards the development of a second women's aid refuge in Angus. A further application was submitted to the Scottish Executive, for refuge development funding in March 2001. If successful, this funding will not only increase the number of refuge places available in Angus, it will also ensure that the accommodation is to the highest specification providing both internal and external play areas for children and private facilities for all residents in a safe and secure environment. Although the new refuge is awaiting development, a refuge worker has recently been appointed by women's aid, and started work on 26 March 2001. The new worker's role will initially be to supplement and expand the support to victims of abuse who have contact with the existing refuge, and to develop publicity materials for women's aid locally. In the longer term, the role will be the development, promotion and administration of the new refuge. If the bid for new capital is unsuccessful the money awarded in 2000 for additional refuge places will be used in 2001 to provide basic refuge accommodation.

5.3 Fergus Programme

Angus Council Social Work Criminal Justice Services run one of only three programmes in Scotland for the perpetrators of domestic abuse – the Fergus Programme. Over the three years since it started a steady rise in assessments and orders have been ordered by the Courts, who continue to show confidence in this service. The follow-up study on past participants indicates a significant reduction in offending following imposition of attendance at the Fergus Programme.

6 The Way Ahead

It is planned that the partnership will move forward over the next 12 months, with more victims being supported, more women and children receiving refuge and more perpetrators being helped to change via the Fergus Programme.

Specific targets include:-

- the opening of the new refuge
- the completion and implementation of the public relations/training strategy
- the formation and implementation of a work plan and local protocol, in line with The National Strategy
- closer working of the partnership, particularly health professionals, from whom referrals are beginning to increase

The Scottish Executive has indicated that applications will be welcomed in the Summer of 2001 from local partnerships for the funding of existing projects or of further developments for years 2002 – 2004. It is expected that, as a result of the progress made by the Angus Partnership, the services will at least be maintained at current levels and possibly increased.

7 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly in respect of this report.

8 Human Rights

The development of the Angus Partnership on Domestic Abuse and the expansion of support to the victims of domestic abuse including children affected, upholds the rights of victims with respect to Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. There are no other implications of this report with respect to Human Rights legislation.

9 Consultation

The Director of Finance, the Director of Law and Administration, the Director of Housing and the Director of Education have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

10 Conclusion

This report has outlined the progress being made in Angus in tackling the problem of domestic abuse. It has also set out a policy on domestic violence which will guide the future work of the Council in addressing this problem.

A B Watson
Chief Executive

W B Robertson
Director of Social Work

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.