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Strathclyde Police Domestic Violence Strategy

ABSTRACT

This entry for The Tilley Award is based on the **Domestic Violence Strategy** developed by Strathclyde Police which addressed how the force tackled domestic abuse.

In particular,

There was a high incidence of violence against women in the home

While many women felt at risk from violence in the street, the reality for many was that the risks were higher in the home

The quality of service from the police to victims of domestic abuse was questionable

There was a need for more positive police action against perpetrators

Through a lack of confidence in the police response to domestic abuse, women felt unwilling or unable to come forward to report domestic abuse

As a consequence there was significant under reporting and under recording of domestic abuse

The evidence used in defining the problem came from a number of sources. Academic research reports were important but equally Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Report "Hitting Home", The Scottish Crime Surveys as well as force crime and incident statistics were: used in the process of defining the problem and implementing the solution. The force, through its own officers who attended literally thousands of domestic incidents,

also had a wealth of personal experience not only on the nature and extent of the problem but in how we might improve service to victims.

The response was multi-functional but can be summarised as follows:

Ensuring our officers were trained and briefed in the strategy

Robust investigation and arrest of the perpetrator wherever possible

Improved recording procedures to ensure that the nature and extent of the problem was identified

Early identification of repeat victims to facilitate an appropriate response

Heightened public awareness of the problem and our response

Improved quality of service to victims and potential victims through a range of initiatives.

> Promotion of a multi-agency response

The response has had an impact, indeed it continues to do so. The quality of service to victims has been improved as evidenced in testimonials from Scottish Women's Aid and Zero Tolerance. Statistical analysis compliments this through the increased number of reported incidents and the high level of arrests of perpetrators. However, the force views this as an initiative without end and the full impact may only be truly apparent in the longer term.

Strathclyde Police Domestic Violence Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Strathclyde Police is the largest force in Scotland. It encompasses 12 local authority areas, covers 13,851 square kilometres and has a population of 2.3 million (almost half of Scotland's population). The force has an establishment of over 7,000 police officers and over 2,0011 support staff. Committed to community safety, the force has retained traditional policing methods with beat and community officers patrolling the streets, preventing and detecting crime as well as interacting with the diverse communities throughout the force area.

The force is committed to continued partnerships with external agencies and groups at all levels to meet the needs and expectations of the community it serves.

The Spotlight Initiative, launched by Strathclyde Police in October 1996, is believed to be the first policing strategy of its kind in the United Kingdom, designed to tackle "quality of life" issues and the fear of crime. Spotlight has evolved into a policing philosophy focusing on those issues of greatest concern to our communities. Maximum impact is achieved by co-ordinating practical implementation of the initiative via a centralised "Consultancy Unit" whose members facilitate a forcewide-structured approach.

THE INITIATIVE

On 11 February 1998, as part of the Spotlight Initiative, the force launched its Women's Safety Initiative. The aims of the initiative were to:

Prevent crimes against women

Detect those who commit crimes against women

✓ Seek partnerships with other organisations involved in women's safety

Reduce fear of crime amongst women by showing them how to avoid dangerous situations

and finally, and most importantly in respect of this response plan, to

Encourage abused women to stop being victims of violence (whether mental, physical or sexual) by giving them more confidence in the actions of the police

It was within this final aim that the force's **Domestic Violence Strategy** was formulated with three main objectives.

- a) The safety and well-being of the victims would be increased
- b) Thorough investigation of all instances of domestic abuse would be carried out obtaining all available evidence in order to secure the conviction of the perpetrator
- c) To provide a professional service to the victims of domestic abuse, ensuring that they were provided with information and advice on the support available through other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, particularly local authorities

THE PROBLEM

Freedom from violence and fear is the right of everyone in our society. Yet for as many as one woman in four living in Britain today this most basic of rights is being denied. For these women, domestic violence and abuse can be as much a part of daily life as eating and sleeping

For many years, police officers and society in general had adopted the attitude of *"it's only a domestic"* or *"it's not our **problem**"*

which led to victims receiving a poor quality of service and a high level of under reporting of incidents of domestic violence. A lack of accurate and available police information on the nature and extent of domestic abuse further exacerbated this indifferent attitude.

The unacceptable level of domestic abuse that pervades our society has been exposed in recent years by groups such as Zero Tolerance and Women's Aid who have done much to awaken us to the hitherto untold truths.

in 1996 the Scottish Crime Survey, whilst acknowledging the high level of under reporting, found that domestic abuse accounted for 30% of all violence against women. These findings were further emphasised by the force's own statistics which highlighted that since 1997, half of the women murdered in Strathclyde had been killed at the hands of their partners or ex-partners (a pattern which is replicated throughout Scotland). The perception among most women is that the danger lies in the streets — the tragic and unacceptable reality is that for many the risks are higher in their own homes. By the time the police intervene the damage has already been done, the victim has been assaulted -- on average, according to research, 35 times.

Following on from the Scottish Crime Survey's findings, a report ("Hitting Home") was published in 1997 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on the Police Response to Domestic Violence. It recognised that the quality of police intervention at the first report of violence and its perceived effect on the offender's behaviour were critical in determining whether the victim would continue to seek help as well as securing immediate safety. The report went on to make 13 major recommendations for consideration by the 8 Scottish police forces.

As a result of these studies and the first hand experience of operational officers, it was apparent that domestic abuse affected thousands of people every year and that Strathclyde Police officers have to deal with this issue on a daily basis.

The Spotlight Consultancy Unit was tasked with formulating a response plan.

THE RESPONSE PLAN

Every Officer's Responsibility

Strathclyde Police, unlike many other forces, decided against the introduction of a limited number of specialist domestic abuse officers. Whilst accepting that this approach may have had some value, and acknowledging that the work of these officers within many forces was highly positive, the force's priority remained with the front line officers and key force support officers.

Definition

Difficulties were experienced by many police officers in identifying domestic abuse incidents, as no formal definition was available. To this end Strathclyde Police formulated its own definition, leaving all front line officers and key force support officers in no doubt as to the circumstances in which they must act. Further to this, on 1 April 1999, all Scottish police forces adopted the following standard definition of domestic violence.

"Domestic violence is any form of physical, non-physical, or sexual abuse, which takes place within the context of a close relationship, committed either in the home or elsewhere. In most cases this relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting or otherwise) or ex-partners."

Training and Awareness

All deliberate violence is a crime, however, in the domestic context, violence is a crime like no other and cannot be treated just like any other crime. It is therefore not enough for police officers to know the law, they must possess an awareness of the issues surrounding domestic abuse, be able to look behind the facade and understand the dynamics that exist within an abusive and controlling relationship. To achieve this it is imperative that all preconceived ideas and myths about domestic abuse are separated from reality.

Every front line officer and key force support officer underwent a programme of retraining in the law, evidence gathering and the revised force procedures. Since the implementation of this response, training has been updated and will continue to be the subject of constant review. A copy of the Training Notes accompanies this entry.

Given the geographical size of the Strathclyde Police force area, the sheer scale of the training programme is apparent. The strategy adopted to deliver information and training in an efficient and focused manner was developed utilising the Spotlight Consultancy Unit and the established framework of nominated "Spotlight" co-ordinators in each division department. These officers ensured delivery of training in accordance with the original plan. To maintain the quality of the material being used and to allow flexibility in matching supply and demand, training and general information were cascaded utilising information technology. This enabled officers in the inner cities to receive group briefings whilst officers in rural areas received individual packages. Co-ordinators were responsible for ensuring that all training was completed by the launch date and dip sampling was undertaken by the Consultancy Unit to ensure standardisation.

Crime and Incident Recording

The analysis further revealed that crime and incident recording facilities in use were unable to differentiate between domestic abuse and other crimes and incidents, which resulted in the force's inability to accurately define the nature and extent of domestic abuse.

With the entire information technology structure of the Scottish Police Service being reviewed, there was no likelihood of a short-term fix. A manual, but nonetheless effective coding system of incidents was implemented. This system enabled the unique coding of domestic abuse incidents allowing statistical interrogation to take place.

By instigating a comprehensive recording procedure we were able to identify incidents of domestic abuse and differentiate between various types of abuse. This improved recording procedure allows officers attending a report of a domestic incident to be provided with

information regarding previously recorded incidents at a particular location, involving the alleged victim or perpetrator. This places the officer in a better position to make the coned decisions and also can make them aware of any dangers with which they may be confronted.

These procedures also facilitated the earliest possible identification of repeat victims.

Arrest Policy

It was also apparent that the 'fast-tracking' of police reports to the Procurator Fiscal's Service was essential. To this effect a senior police officer and Procurator Fiscal were identified as liaison officers. An "arrest wherever possible" ethos was also adopted resulting in 3,429 perpetrators being arrested during the first 15 months of the response. Where appropriate, perpetrators were detained in custody until their appearance in court. Where offenders could not be immediately apprehended, arrest warrants were craved as a matter of urgency. Officers were encouraged to make full use of bail conditions, matrimonial interdicts and non-harassment orders.

Public Awareness

Having completed the training of all officers and liaison with the Procurator Fiscal Service it was equally important to inform the public of the steps being taken by Strathclyde Police to combat domestic abuse. A very successful high profile press launch was held which resulted in an unexpected spin off from newspapers with a high circulation within the Strathclyde area, supporting the force by adopting their own campaigns in the fight against domestic abuse. A sample of the media coverage received can be found at Appendix 'A'.

Women's Safety Presentations

Public awareness was also heightened by 110 specially selected and trained police officers carrying out 2,203 Women's Safety Presentations across the force area involving over

57,000 women. These presentations featured a wide range of issues on the safety of women and included a specific input on the prevalence of domestic abuse, victims' rights and the support available.

Help Cards and Posters

Use was also made of a 'toilet door' poster campaign designed to allow discreet access to the telephone numbers of agencies providing support and advice to domestic abuse victims, removing the fear of being found in possession of a leaflet. All front line officers and key force support officers were also issued with 'help' cards featuring useful telephone contact numbers for distribution to victims. The 'toilet door' posters and the 'help' cards, as can be seen in Appendix 'B', contained information that was appropriate to all local communities within the Strathclyde area.

Practical Support for Victims

Vulnerable victims of domestic abuse can also be provided with a mobile telephone programmed with a number to the emergency services. To date, the force has responded to four emergency calls made by victims, who may otherwise have been unable to contact the police, using these mobile telephones.

Summary

It was always intended to integrate the response plan into day to day policing and as such it has been continually reviewed and updated.

The response plan was based on the fundamental belief that the actions of the first police officer who attends a call made by a victim of domestic abuse can critically affect the future actions of both the victim and the perpetrator. Positive action by the first police officer will cause the victim to realise that she is not alone and more importantly that she is not to blame. It will also send a strong signal to the perpetrator that his behaviour is

criminal and will not be accepted. Positive action at this stage is an effective deterrent to future violence. The police are also in a unique position within the domestic abuse arena, being the only agency which can directly challenge the perpetrator at the time of the crime. The courts and other agencies which deal with the perpetrator can only act following police intervention.

It was for these reasons that Strathclyde Police decided not to introduce small numbers of specialist domestic abuse officers.

This particular response was adopted in order that:

A higher incidence of reporting amongst victims would be encouraged and a lower rate of repeat offending would be achieved

> The safety and well-being of the victims would be increased

I Thorough investigation of all instances of domestic abuse would be carried out obtaining all available evidence in order to secure the conviction of the perpetrator

A professional service would be provided to the victims of domestic abuse, ensuring that they were provided with information and advice on the support available through other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, and in particular the services provided by local authorities

Partnerships could be sought with other organisations with a locus in domestic abuse

Refresher training, systems development and good practice could be provided which would ultimately improve future performance in this area

REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

The Spotlight Consultancy Unit monitored these wide ranging changes to day to day policing of domestic abuse. Consultation across the force was also undertaken. As a result, a number of areas for improvement were identified and changes implemented.

Refresher Training

It was recognised that there were wider issues surrounding domestic abuse which would require reinforcement by further training. Consequently, in partnership with Scottish Women's Aid, a revised training package was formulated. Commencing in May 1999, this joint training was initially targeted at Sub Divisional Officers (Superintendents) who have the responsibility for driving the strategy at the local level. The second phase of this training, again conducted jointly with Scottish Women's Aid, is delivered to all operational officers. Copies of the Scottish Women's Aid training manual and the Strathclyde Police Trainers' manuals are enclosed.

"Action Against Abuse" Conference

Although all of the agencies involved in domestic abuse had accepted the need for a multi-agency approach, there appeared to be scope for greater co-operation. To facilitate this, Strathclyde Police organised a major conference featuring prominent speakers from many disciplines, which was attended by policy makers and practitioners from a wide range of organisations involved in domestic abuse. The goal of the conference was to promote greater co-operation on domestic abuse between the police and other agencies and establish interagency protocols to ensure the provision of a "joined up", seamless service to victims of abuse.

The evaluation of the conference revealed that all respondents benefited from the conference, gaining a better insight into the role of the agencies involved.

Part of the commitment from the Chief Constable to the conference was that Superintendents in every area of the force would review arrangements for multi-agency working on domestic abuse and, where none existed, establish appropriate forums. This is to be achieved by 1 September 1999.

Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer

A Superintendent based at force headquarters has been appointed as the Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer to act as a conduit for contact with outside agencies and to progress and develop policy in respect of domestic abuse.

Repeat Victim Database

The system developed initially proved adequate for divisional purposes however, monitoring identified a gap in information where a victim moved home across territorial divisions. A forcewide computerised database of all domestic abuse victims and perpetrators was developed and is used to identify repeat victims and perpetrators. The database has been in operation for six months and at present is indicating that 11% of the incidents recorded involve repeat victims.

Domestic Violence Incident Report Pro-Forma

To ensure the efficient and effective capture of maximum information, a pro-forma Domestic Violence Incident Report Form, as can be seen in Appendix `C', was introduced to replace the existing system which was based on the force's Command and Control computer system.

Children

Research during the first six months highlighted, indirectly, that children were present in 42% of domestic abuse incidents. From this came more rigorous recording procedures to ensure that the exact nature and extent of the presence/involvement of children during domestic abuse incidents was identified. This ensures that children exposed to violence, even indirectly as a witness, can be referred to the appropriate agency.

Further to this, the force Child Protection Group has established a Domestic Violence Sub-Group, which is examining the most effective way to address the issue of domestic abuse and its effects on young people.

Improved Support for Victims

The force has entered into a formal partnership with the charity "Heatwise" through which physical security including door locks, spy holes, chains and window locks can be installed, if appropriate, in a victim's home following a domestic abuse incident.

Given the success of the issue of mobile telephones to victims, the force is presently negotiating the provision, through sponsorship, of additional mobile telephones.

As part of the continual improvement process the Women's Safety Presentations are being updated, with significant emphasis on the rights of, and support available to, victims.

EVALUATION

One of the main objectives of the Women's Safety Initiative was to increase the confidence of victims in how the police handled domestic abuse incidents and to encourage them to report such incidents. As can be seen in Appendix 'D' noticeable increases have been recorded in all categories of domestic abuse.

This quantitative increase is supported by qualitative evidence provided by Scottish Women's Aid and Zero Tolerance who recognise, in letters reproduced at Appendices `E' and `F. the improvements made by Strathclyde Police in how our officers deal with the victims of domestic abuse.

Crucial to the strategy and a core objective is the arrest policy. In the first year of the initiative 2,73:1. people were arrested for alleged crimes involving domestic abuse.

The domestic abuse training delivered to Superintendents was evaluated and proved extremely encouraging with participants indicating significant increased competency as a result of each input. A rating of "5" was recorded for the overall value of the course, which is the highest grade possible and equates to a grading of "excellent".

FINANCE

Due to budgetary procedures within Strathclyde Police there was no specific costed plan produced. All operational, training and support costs were met from within existing budgets.

For their assistance in training development, the force made a contribution to Scottish Women's Aid.

The mobile telephones and personal attack alarms were secured by sponsorship.

The "*Action Against Abuse*" conference was funded by the Scottish Office Crime Prevention Unit.

CONCLUSION

No response plan can succeed without the commitment of those involved and this particular plan has been fully supported by officers at all levels from the Chief Constable to the newest recruit. Indeed, the Chief Constable has frequently spoken privately and publicly on the strength of feeling which he harbours against this particular crime and his determination that all of his officers will do their utmost to ensure the safety and well-being of victims and their families and to secure the conviction of the offenders. To this end, an essay by the Chief Constable was recently published in a Scottish broadsheet (extract enclosed at Appendix `G') regarding the Strathclyde Police response to domestic abuse and he continues to highlight his commitment in internal publications informing officers of the progress and developments being undertaken.

When the Chief Constable launched the **Domestic Violence Strategy** it was defined as an initiative without a timescale. Success could not be simply measured in a year. This was a strategy seeking continuous improvement not restricted to short term successes.

The improvements in how this force deals with domestic abuse are in their infancy. We will continue to monitor our performance and seek continuous improvement.

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APPENDIX

Appendix `A`	Press Cuttings
Appendix `B`	Help Card and Toilet Door Poster
Appendix `C`	Domestic Violence Incident Report Form
Appendix `D`	Domestic Abuse Incidents Graph
Appendix `E`	Letter from Scottish Women's Aid
Appendix `F`	Letter from Zero Tolerance
Appendix `G`	Extract of the Chief Constable's Essay