

Communities Scrutiny Committee 28th October

The meeting started pretty much on time with the poor turnout of councillors which is customary for the Communities Committee.

The first item looked at item 7: **Domestic Abuse**. Sam Stabler, the council's Crime and Disorder Lead, gave an overview of the report. She said that lessons had been learnt from seven domestic homicide reviews. She went on to say that prevention before issues escalated was now seen as being important to tackling the issue.

The meeting then heard a presentation from Jo, a representative from Broken Rainbow, a domestic abuse charity which offers support to LGBT people. She said that demand for the service had grown dramatically since the charity's founding and she outlined the particular problems LGBT people have while suffering from abuse and the added complications they face when disclosing abuse.

Lisa and Heidi from a Wythenshawe-based charity called Safe Spots spoke to the committee about their personal experiences of abuse and about the charity. Safe Spots was established to both be more relatable to people experiencing domestic abuse and to provide services which were lacking in Wythenshawe.

Having thanked all the contributors the Chair, Cllr Rawlins, asked councillors for their contributions which were as follows: (all councillors preceded their questions with thanks to the contributors)

- A. Cllr Cookson asked how cultural differences were dealt with, particularly in the case of abuse involving LGBT people.
- B. Cllr Fletcher Hackwood asked what was being done around abuse affecting trans people, what was being done to ensure that services were spread across the city and what was being done to 'mainstream' LGBT services.
- C. Cllr Ahmed Ali said that he had had first hand experiences of the subject as a social worker. Having talked about the existing problems he went on to ask where the hotspots were and what the numbers were.
- D. Cllr Cooley made a general statement about what she had heard (MS: I wasn't able to discern a question, but that might be my fault).
- E. Cllr Rawlins then asked what training GMP had currently done in this area.

The answers were as follows:

- A. Jo from Broken Rainbow said that there was a stigma in admitting that there can be problems within LGBT relationships due to societal prejudice. She also noted that coming out in certain religious communities was hard to do. She also noted how rules on funding linked to specific geographical areas meant that it was sometimes very hard to support people who need to leave Greater Manchester for their own safety. She also highlighted the ongoing difficulties she experienced in trying to find refuge spaces for trans people.
- B. Domestic violence coordinator Delia Evans said that her service was working with Broken Rainbow to make the provision of services better. Cllr Sue Murphy said that there was currently a members group on domestic abuse and explained their activities and how a members group differed from a Task and Finish Group.

- C. Cllr Sue Murphy, the Councillor with responsibility in this area, said that she didn't know the overall spend on domestic violence but that the Council thought the figure was around £24 million a year. She said that working with perpetrators and preventive approaches were important going forward. She highlighted the need to be more imaginative in how this issue was approached. A police representative said that PCSOs were visiting addresses where a report of 'no crime' was recorded 24/48 hours after an incident to assess the situation, but that in future a new model possibly including survivors of abuse would be developed as the current model would have to be cut due to a decrease in budgets.
- D. Ten cases the service had been involved with would be picked and circulated to the Committee to give an overview.
- E. The police representative said that the force was not currently working on training with Safe Spots, but that training was being done.

At numerous points during the item Chair Rawlins asked Jo, Lisa and Heidi what could be done better (MS: well done Cllr Rawlins for taking this approach).

Lisa noted that there needed to be long term support for survivors this was echoed by Heidi. Jo said that currently one in four LGBT people suffer domestic abuse and that this rises to four in five for trans people.

The meeting then moved on to the **Hidden Crime Report** starting with section 2 which looked at **prostitution**.

The presenters outlined the current work around prostitution, highlighting the Manchester Prostitution Forum which brings together a number of organisations. Recent changes in the nature of sex work were also spoken about with the shift from street work to less visible forms of sex work being particularly noted. Hailey, a representative from The Men's Room, which works with male sex workers, noted that this change has made it harder to reach people and that potentially made work more difficult.

Kate, a representative from Manchester Action on Street Health, outlined the current make-up of the sex workers her organisation works with and also described the current issues. Kate touched on how sex workers were making more use of phones than they did in the past and also expressed her worry about what would happen around Piccadilly Station as a result of the upcoming building work.

The Chair, Cllr Rawlins, asked for a matrix to be mapping how different agencies worked together. Councillors then asked the following questions:

- A. Cllr Ahmed Ali inquired into demographics of male prostitutes.
- B. Cllr Fletcher Hackwood asked whether street work was being made more dangerous by other sex workers making greater use of the internet.
- C. Cllr Ahmed Ali asked about how the police tackled places which are used as a base for sex work.

The answers were as follows:

- A. The councillor was told that the majority of male prostitutes (78%) did not self-identify as being LGBT. Hailey from The Men's Room spoke of how they had recently started working with men aged over 30 due to an increase in older men re-entering sex work.
- B. The councillor was told women working on the streets often had very chaotic lives. She said she wasn't sure whether the increase in online use by sex workers made street work more dangerous.
- C. A police representative said that this was addressed by the cyber crimes unit and by other sectors of the force.

There was then a discussion around follow-up actions such as finding out why students entered sex work.

The meeting then moved onto part one of the **Hidden Crimes Report** which touches on **female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour-based violence, and modern slavery**. A representative from an anti FGM organisation went into the work her organisation had been doing over the past seven years in schools across London and how this project had been introduced to Greater Manchester. The programme operates in secondary schools and educates all pupils on female genital mutilation (FGM). She said that pupil feedback had been very positive and that staff were also positive after the session, although she noted that staff at schools were often cautious before the training took place. She noted that funding in the future was not assured and as a consequence the organisation aims to train people to continue work in this area even if they cannot in future.

Chief Inspector Joanne Edgerton said that modern slavery was the fastest growing crime worldwide. She said that a new unit was being established as data in this area is currently weak.

Councillors then asked the following:

- A. Cllr Cooley asked what support is currently offered to young women who are resisting family pressure around FGM.
- B. Cllr Ahmed Ali inquired into how many prosecutions had there been.

The answers were as follows:

- A. The councillor was told that young women were not removed from their family unless there was clear evidence of a plan to commit FGM. Education and support was said to be used instead.
- B. There was a discussion into the difficulties in prosecuting as many victims of modern-day slavery did not identify as being victims. There were said to have been no FGM prosecutions.

The next item on the agenda was a report in to **Asylum Services**. The presenters were introduced with Amanda Jones from Rainbow Haven giving a brief overview of her organisation's work providing support and advice to migrants.

Cllr Judge said that she had visited the centre which is based in her ward (Gorton). She then asked what funding was being provided by MCC. Amanda said that MCC funding had now stopped. Amanda went on to say that finding housing was an increasingly difficult task.

Cllr Andrews, the executive member for adult services, said that he was happy to work with Rainbow Haven but went onto say that he had never heard of them. He said that was probably his fault (MS: in my view, Councillor Andrews's portfolio is so large it should be broken up. There is also a tendency for the council to work with who they know rather than to make connections with all groups working in a particular sector). Cllr Cooley said that Councillor Andrews' portfolio was large but that it was worrying that there are organisations which are unknown to MCC.

Cllr Ahmed Ali asked about what resources were available and Katy Wood, Asylum and Immigration Manager, said that more people need accommodation than they did in the past. She said that work had been done and that now more councils in the Northwest were open to asylum seekers. Cllr Andrews noted the problems the Council faces in terms of costs as they do not receive sufficient funding from central Government to deal with the numbers of asylum seekers being resettled in Manchester by the Government.

Amanda Jones said that she felt some of the language used in the discussion made asylum seekers sound like a burden. Cllr Andrews said that this was not his intention and then proceeded to explain (MS: a touch condescendingly, perhaps) the cost implications and practical difficulties faced by MCC offering asylum support.

The Chair thanked and applauded Councillor Andrews' efforts before moving onto the Committee's future work.

Meeting closed at 16:15

The above is an abridged impression of the meeting. For more detail please contact me at: mschreibke@hotmail.co.uk

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