

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 14 April 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Update on the DAARC Service (Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Co-ordinator)
Purpose of Report:	To note the updates and progress on the DAARC service.
Report Owner:	Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing
Responsible Officer:	Deb Gibbs - Principal Community Safety Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report will affect all residents of the Vale and therefore no individual ward member consultation has been undertaken. The report has been reviewed by Officers from the Legal and Finance teams
Policy Framework:	This report is within the Policy Framework and Budget.
Executive Summary:	<p>This report shares progress from the DAARC service. Regular updates have been provided to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee since the DAARC's implementation in 2017. However, the effects from the Covid-19 pandemic and recent changes as a result of the Cardiff and Vale South Wales Police BCU merger, present a need to reflect on the current trends and to consider a way forward for the upcoming year.</p> <p>The report presents the performance data for Quarter 3 of the current financial year (April 2020-December 2020) for elected Members to have effective oversight of the performance of the DAARC service.</p>

Recommendations

1. That Scrutiny considers the performance of the DAARC service.
2. That Scrutiny considers the work undertaken to improve services for those affected by domestic abuse in the Vale.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To provide Scrutiny with the information needed to exercise oversight of the DAARC service within Community Safety.
2. To ensure Members are aware of recent developments in the DAARC service.

1. Background

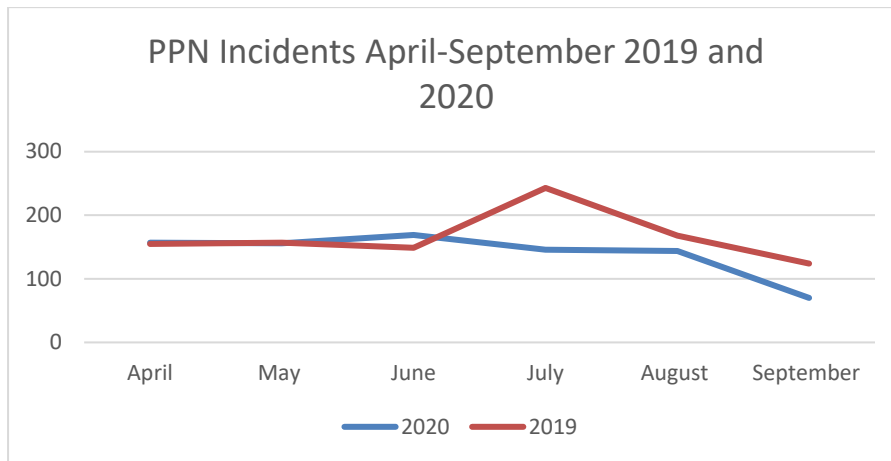
- 1.1 The DAARC service was launched in April 2018 and the support element of the project went 'live' in June 2018 following seven weeks of staff induction.
- 1.2 The DAARC service works in partnership with South Wales Police to receive all standard and medium risk domestic abuse Public Protection Notifications (PPNs). A PPN is the report created by a police officers each time they attend a domestic abuse incident. A 'standard' risk PPN is where there are no significant current indicators of risk of harm. A 'medium' risk is where there are identifiable indicators of risk of harm, the offender has potential to cause harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstance, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, drugs or alcohol misuse. A 'high' risk incident is where there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm, the potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.
- 1.3 The DAARC Co-ordinator works in partnership with other departments within the Local Authority, South Wales Police, Probation and third sector agencies to investigate a victim's current service involvement in order to work with them to develop a referral plan that is best suited to their needs and current situation.
- 1.4 In recognition of the service's innovative approach and the positive outcomes achieved for vulnerable victims, the DAARC service was recognised in the National UK Housing Awards, where the project was shortlisted to the final nine projects within the UK under the category of Innovative Landlord of the Year and won the Vale of Glamorgan Council Annual Staff Award 2019 for Innovation.
- 1.5 The DAARC service has also demonstrated success in its ability to monitor trends and respond to needs, thanks to its excellent data recording system. Since its implementation the team has adapted to include better working protocols with housing, substance misuse and education services.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

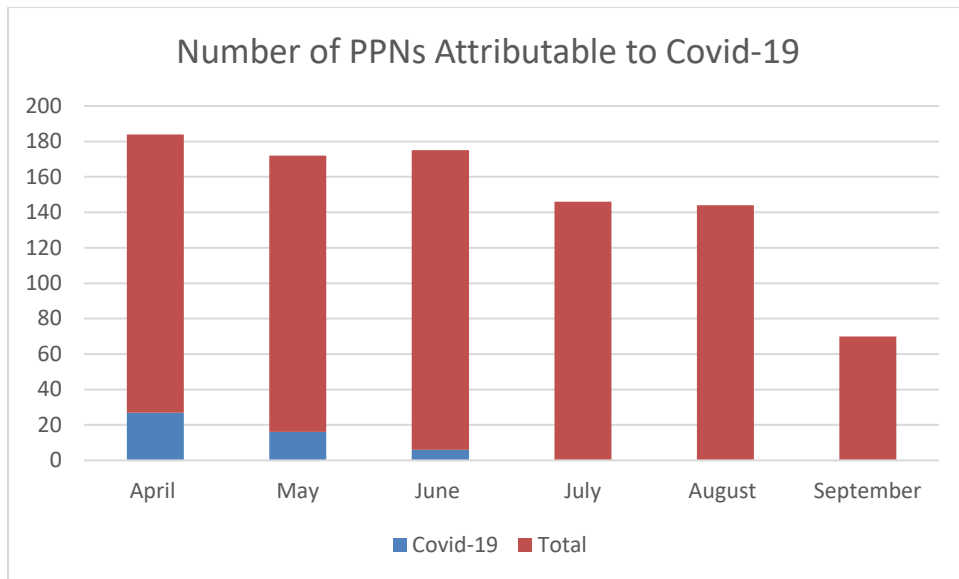
- 2.1** Across the first three quarters of 2020/21, there were 1016 PPNs received and processed by the DAARC team. This compares with 1304 received in the first three quarters of 2019.
- 2.2** A reduction in PPNs could be an indicator that there has been positive effect from the increase in awareness raising campaigns to inform victims of the support available to them, such as Live Fear Free and Atal y Fro. Since Covid-19, these victims, it is thought, are accessing services directly for support and advice leading to a consequential reduction in the number of police call outs.
- 2.3** The reduction in PPNs from the previous year could also be a reflection of a change in protocol that occurred as a result of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan South Wales Police merger. The merger resulted in the team receiving referrals from a new SWP Risk Assessment Team which took the decision to not share a PPN unless the victim's consent was provided. This was due to concern that sharing the information would be in breach of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- 2.4** The team is currently taking a partnership approach to try to resolve these teething issues and options around changing the storage location of the data are being explored with South Wales Police.
- 2.5** The use of consent is something which is being reviewed at a force wide level by South Wales Police given the difficulties in obtaining reliable consent from a victim at a point of crisis. It was previously found that the ways in which consent was being sought by Police Officers often resulted in victims not being able to make a fully informed decision on the sharing of their information, however this improved after training by the DAARC Team. It is therefore hoped that this new issue can be resolved as soon as possible.
- 2.6** Of the 1016 PPNs, 865 were medium risk and 141 were standard risk. This compares with 910 medium risk and 32 standard risk in 2019/20 suggesting that there has been minimal change in the risk rating of victims across the two years.
- 2.7** These figures reflect the reduction in PPNs received so this is likely to mean that no overall reduction in figures were seen across 2020 compared with 2019. It is important to note that this is unlikely to be a reflection of a service that is not providing positive results, rather as a potential outcome of the efforts being made to increase the awareness of domestic abuse, of the support available and the work being undertaken to increase the awareness levels of professionals in identifying domestic abuse.
- 2.8** The numbers of victims who are repeat victims of domestic abuse for the period April 2020-September 2020 (before the loss of PPNs without consent) was 321. This compares with 401 for the same period across April 2019-September 2019. These early indications of a reduction in repeat victims is an encouraging sign that the additional support offered during these crucial earlier experiences of domestic abuse are creating positive behavioural change in the cycle of domestic abuse.

2.9 From March 2020, the team increased safeguarding arrangements ready for an increase in referrals as a result of the global pandemic. Meetings were set up with our own Housing officers, Atal y Fro and Children's Services to closely monitor trends and data in order to be ready to respond to any consequences of the lockdown and restrictions. The main concerns were that victims were suddenly finding themselves locked into an environment with their perpetrators, unable to leave abusive environments and without the flexibility they might previously have had. It was anticipated that as a result of this there would be a need to provide additional refuge accommodation for individuals fleeing their abuser. It was also anticipated that the additional stresses caused by the global pandemic, both in terms of worries relating to people's health and the stresses associated with the new, more isolated ways of working and living, would increase pressure on relationships and increase domestic abuse. There was an additional concern that the physical closure of services would also have a negative impact.

2.10 To date, these concerns have not been reflected in the number of PPNs received by the service and figures have remained relatively consistent with the previous year. An increase was seen in the number of online contacts to Atal y Fro and in response to this the DAARC service ensured an increased number of social media posts promoting different services and support were made. The below table shows the number of incidents between April and September compared across the two years.



2.11 The team also recorded the number of incidents that were as a direct result of Covid-19 which demonstrated that impact was minimal on the total number of domestic abuse PPN incidents received. The graph below demonstrates the number of cases that were attributable to Covid-19 from April 2020.



- 2.12** The team has implemented a new system of twice weekly discussions where complex cases of domestic abuse or those flagged as a particular risk are discussed in a multi-agency setting. This system enables a much more robust, earlier intervention to individuals deemed likely to be in situations that might escalate in risk and reduces the pressure on the MARAC system which is the multi-agency setting that receives all high-risk domestic abuse PPNs.
- 2.13** The team has continued to improve the mechanisms with which the referrals to support services are monitored. Monitoring the uptake of services has meant that the DAARC can continuously ensure the appropriateness of referrals and ensure a rapid response to making any necessary improvements to the system.
- 2.14** The team invested considerable time in establishing an appropriate data monitoring system that enables the recording of information for effective performance management and trend awareness. This data was able to contribute towards evidencing the need for a perpetrator system in the Vale. The DRIVE programme, a programme that works intensively with perpetrators of high-risk domestic abuse victims was established in September 2020 in the Vale and is already demonstrating positive outcomes.
- 2.15** A case study of the project has been included at Appendix A. The case study provides an example of how the DAARC service demonstrates effective partnership working to protect victims and their families. The service ensures a joined up approach is taken by multiple services when working with a family which can respond to the multiple issues that need to be addressed following an incident.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** Long Term: The DAARC service is one that focuses on improving outcomes now to create a benefit for the long-term future of victims of domestic abuse. The service works with victims holistically in order to provide suitable care at the earliest point so that victims don't experience higher risk incidents of domestic abuse later on, which is both significantly harmful for them and their families and significantly resource intensive for services which are left dealing with victims with more developed, more complex issues and at a point of crisis.
- 3.2** Preventative: The service works with victims of domestic abuse who have been identified as standard and medium risk, to provide the right support by the right service early on in order to reduce the likelihood of another incident occurring at a higher risk rating.
- 3.3** Integration & Collaboration: The service works in partnership with other departments of the Local Authority as well as considering the well-being objectives of external partners who are fully integrated in the service in order to provide a more holistic and appropriate level of care to those who need support.
- 3.4** Involvement: Victims of Domestic Abuse were consulted during the planning and development of the DAARC service. Victims are encouraged to provide feedback on the service received once they have completed their involvement with the DAARC.
- 3.5** The proposal evidences a contribution to the wellbeing objective "Providing decent homes and safe communities" by addressing the needs of victims of domestic abuse.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** An ongoing cost pressure bid for £34,000 per annum was considered and approved by full Council on 10th March to ensure the continuation of the service.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no direct employment implications arising from this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The Community Safety team has a number of functions. The DAARC service assists the Council in meeting some of its obligations under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 4.4** The service is available to all victims within the Vale of Glamorgan.

5. Background Papers

None.

DAARC Case Study

The Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Co-ordinator (DAARC) received a number of Public Protection Notifications (PPNs) within a six-month period, nearly all rated as 'medium risk'. The incidents involved a male perpetrator and a female victim who were in a long-term relationship with children.

The perpetrator would become abusive towards the victim under the influence of alcohol and other substances. For a long time, the victim was coerced into staying in the relationship, held under the pressure of a threat by the perpetrator that he would not be able to cope without her. The victim eventually found the confidence to leave the relationship and the couple agreed to remain in contact where matters with the children were concerned.

Initially, verbal arguments over text messages began to emerge which included threats that the perpetrator would report the victim to social services. These messages gradually became more and more persistent. The victim eventually blocked the perpetrator from texting her phone, at which point messages started coming via email. The victim contacted South Wales Police to request their support for when she had to contact her partner in relation to child matters, but she did not want to press charges or receive support from other agencies. Even without the consent, the DAARC information sharing protocol allowed for the sharing of information with Education and Social Services, who were able to open a case and monitor the family.

Eventually, after a number of PPNs the victim consented to her information being shared with Atal y Fro, where she was able to access additional support.

Further PPNs came through to the team following incidents where the perpetrator was either a risk to the children, following the victim to her home or perpetrating more verbal abuse. The victim disclosed that she felt her life was at risk when the perpetrator was intoxicated and that one of her main concerns was that she was unable to feel safe in her property the whole time that he remained on the tenancy agreement. The DAARC linked in with the victim's Registered Social Landlord and measures were put in place for the client to have a safe room within the property. Due to the number of PPNs that had been received through the DAARC process and the concerns around the escalation of risk in the behaviour being perpetrated, the DAARC escalated the concerns to the Police and requested that the case be reviewed to ensure all possible safeguarding measures were in place for the victim. It was agreed that the case should be escalated to the MARAC in light of additional threats from the perpetrator to the victim's new partner's life.

As a result of the MARAC the victim was given advice around a non-molestation order and she was also supported by Atal Y Fro to get an occupation order from the courts to have the perpetrator taken off the tenancy agreement.

To date there have been no further reports of domestic abuse.