

Warwickshire Police Authority –18 December 2009

Report on Protecting Vulnerable People

Summary

This report provides an update for Members on the work and progress relating to the protection from harm for vulnerable people.

Recommendation

That the report be noted and consideration given to some of the points raised.

1. Warwickshire Against Domestic Abuse

This campaign was launched in November to combat the high number of abusive incidents reported annually in Warwickshire. Last year there were over 8000 reports of domestic abuse in the County. The campaign intends to highlight the scale of the problem, to get abusers to take responsibility for their actions and to reassure victims that help is available. Six hundred incidents of domestic abuse are reported every month to Warwickshire Police: a substantial increase is expected over the Christmas holiday period.

There are over 30 public services and voluntary organisations engaged in tackling domestic abuse. The Police work to eliminate the harm caused by providing the right professional response and engaging, along with other agencies, in preventative and supportive measures.

2. Warwickshire Rape Steering Group

In September the Force held a seminar on rape. In its wake officers from Protective Services organised the first meeting of a steering group to consider how the problem should be dealt with in Warwickshire. The first meeting of the steering group was well attended by representatives from a range of agencies and the voluntary sector. Of particular importance was discussion about the opening of a centre to deal with sexual assault referrals made by Warwickshire victims. It is unclear whether local people would be best served by offering independent arrangements within the County, or by entering into a partnership with Coventry. In order to emphasise the supportive nature of such a centre it was agreed that the most appropriate agency to lead the work would be Health.

There will be further discussion when the Steering Group meet again in January.

3. Sexual Assault Referral Centres

The Home Office is committed to having a SARC in each policing area by 2011. Funding is available to achieve this.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres are safe locations where victims can receive medical care and counselling, quickly and sympathetically. They bring together all the different legal and medical agencies and other relevant departments in one place which helps both the victims, and those investigating the crimes.

Many of the SARCs are located in hospitals as this gives easy access to medical staff and equipment. These centres relieve some of the pressure on police services and resources by providing centralised facilities where police officers and staff can meet victims, conduct forensic examinations and collect evidence. It is known that the presence of these centres increases rape reporting to the police.

Rape is a serious crime which often goes unreported. Warwickshire Police want to increase the number of reports they receive. Slightly fewer than 200 rape reports were made to them last year although it is known that the number of crimes committed far exceeds this figure. Many victims are vulnerable young women who are reluctant to contact the Police as they are unsure of the outcome. Disclosure is more often to friends, GPs or voluntary agencies. Police commitment to developing and working within a streamlined facility, either in the County or in partnership with Coventry, would lead to increase reporting and greater law enforcement.

4. Safeguarding Adults Board

Recent statistics show a slight increase in the number of referrals from 95 in 2007, 103 in 2008 and 101 at the end of October 2009.

At the recent meeting of the Safeguarding Board DI Mumford gave a comprehensive account of the work undertaken by Warwickshire Police to protect vulnerable adults which, he informed the Board, is a Force priority. He stated the Force's commitment to identifying ways of reducing abuse and of its willingness to collaborate with other agencies pursuing similar aims. He clarified the distinctive role of the police within the safeguarding framework and made it clear that officers will take firm action against perpetrators of abuse, whilst taking account of the individual circumstances of both the victims and offenders.

Not all vulnerable adults are able to provide an account of the abusive incident and in such cases other evidence will be used to facilitate the safeguarding process. Vulnerable people should have proper access to justice and will be given support to ensure they get it. The Police will use 'special measures' when necessary to achieve it and so improve public confidence in the Police and Justice System

The Safeguarding Board expressed its appreciation of the invaluable contribution made by the Police to the partnership which exists to protect vulnerable adults in Warwickshire.

Angela O'Boyle
Protective Services Deputy Lead Member