

**REPORT TO:** EQUALITY ACTION COMMITTEE – 8 MAY 2000

**REPORT ON:** DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

**REPORT NO:** 314-2000

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report informs Committee of the response prepared to the above consultation document.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 It is recommended that committee note this report.

## **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising out of this report.

## **4.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The report concerns equality for women and in particular relates to the key equality theme of Respect and Dignity, mirroring our commitment as an authority to work towards the elimination of gender, disability, race or sexuality-based violence.

## **5.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The strategy should offer the Council and partner agencies to more effectively pursue our commitment to the right of individuals to live without fear of personal violence from crime or persecution, which is a key theme of Dundee 21.

## **6.0 BACKGROUND**

6.1 The Appendix contains the City Council's response to the Scottish Executive's recent consultation paper entitled "Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland." This was prepared in consultation with Council Departments who provide services to women experiencing abuse by their partners or ex- partners. The Dundee Domestic Abuse Forum, a multi-agency forum involving the police, health and voluntary sector agencies, has also discussed the document.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Chief Executive and Directors of Support Services, Finance, Education, Corporate Planning, Social Work and Housing have been consulted on the content of this Report.

## **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1 The following background paper as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 was relied on to a material extent in preparing the above Report.

Scottish Executive "Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland".

**Director, Neighbourhood Resources and Development** .....

**Date** .....

### **Dundee City Council Response to Scottish Executive Consultation On Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse In Scotland.**

The strategy very comprehensively covers the key questions relating to the responses to domestic abuse in Scotland. The formation of the Partnership should give the necessary focus to this as a major issue for consideration by a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The definition

"Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a wide range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental/emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends). Children are witness to and subject to much of the abuse; there is a correlation between domestic abuse and the mental, physical and sexual abuse of children.

Domestic abuse is associated with broader inequalities in society, is part of a range of behaviours constituting male abuse of power, and is linked to other forms of male violence, such as rape and child abuse. Domestic abuse occurs in all social groups, is not caused by stress, unemployment, poverty, alcohol or mental illness, nor by the women who experience the abuse.

The range of common effects of domestic abuse includes physical injury, ill health and a range of psychological difficulties. The effects on children who may witness the abuse, or who may be used in the abuse, are also recognised as including a range of forms of stress or fear, as well as the additional correlation between domestic and child sexual abuse"

correctly stresses the nature of domestic abuse, as relating to the unequal status of women in society. All agencies that deal with this issue should be encouraged to adopt this definition and to develop a common approach.

The reference on page 2 to the three Ps of Prevention, Protection and Provision should perhaps be acknowledged. This set of guiding principles may have been first worked out by the Zero Tolerance campaign and this should perhaps be acknowledged in the text. While recognising that there is a need for prevention work with male perpetrators of abuse, the strategy rightly suggests that for the life of the strategy, priority should be given to the needs of women and children who are victims of abuse. The paragraphs on the nature of domestic abuse are welcomed for the fact that they make clear that children are also the victims of domestic abuse. They are also emphatic in dispelling some of the myths around "the causes," of domestic abuse.

It is suggested that:

- ❖ Reference might also be made to the need for awareness –raising training for staff
- ❖ Targets should be identified for children affected by domestic abuse within the Strategic Framework for Children's Services
- ❖ Reference might be made to the central role of Area Child Protection Committees. Such a reference could be made as a bullet point on page 3 under the heading "the Foundation of Protection for Women and Children." The statement could be worded as follows; "The Scottish Executive recognises the important role that Area Child Protection Committees have in addressing issues of child abuse and neglect." The accompanying footnote would be "The Scottish Office (1998) Protecting Children: A Shared Responsibility, The Scottish Office, Edinburgh. Also in this section, it is very helpful to have attention drawn to the relevant legislation and resultant policies.
- ❖ Reference should also be made which would tie activity in to local planning processes in respect of the development and implementation of Children's Services Plans.

In the section headed “the Aims of the Strategy,” the final sentence is to be welcomed as it stresses that women and children who leave home and those who stay at home should all receive the support and service they need.

In the section entitled “It is now recognised Nationally and Internationally that There is a need to Tackle Domestic Abuse”, it is suggested that in the bullet point referring to “children in need,” it should be indicated that children who are affected by domestic abuse should be defined as children in need. (This is the case in this Local Authority, it may not be the case elsewhere)

While encouraging a common approach amongst agencies and multi-agency working at local level, (page 5) the strategy might also aim to create a direct link between local multi-agency forums and the national partnership. This would create a network for the sharing of good practice, opportunities for economies of scale in training programmes and a mechanism for ensuring an approach consistent with the terms of the national strategy.

The proposal on page 6 for a Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act is to be welcomed as a means of giving the issue the status it deserves.

The reference on page 7 to the need for provision of easily accessible interpreting and translation services should be referred to the Scottish Forum of Public Sector Interpreting and Translation Services who are currently drawing up good practice guidelines for consideration by COSLA.

Public awareness campaigns have proven very effective in some instances and the need for these is recognised by the strategy document (page 8). It is vitally important that these are appropriately designed and tested for the target audience as an ill-conceived campaign can do more harm than good. A great deal could be learned from the experience of Zero Tolerance in this field and contact with this group should be encouraged. It should also be recognised that there is a role for education, not just in raising awareness, but in prevention work. Here again the example of the Zero Tolerance Respect campaign for young people should be considered for wide use in schools and youth work settings.