



Surrey Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment

Domestic Abuse Rapid Needs Assessment



Community Impact Assessment – Domestic Abuse

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1. Executive Summary

Stakeholders

Fifteen stakeholders were interviewed to get an understanding of the issues experienced in the Surrey domestic abuse response system throughout the covid19 crisis. Views were provided from our Outreach Services, Refuge Services, Surrey Police, the OPCC, Adults and Children's Services at Surrey County Council. The exercise was led by CFLC Commissioning, who also contributed their views as commissioners. Interviewees provided views on; pre covid-19 challenges, impact of lockdown on survivors of domestic abuse and domestic abuse support services, recovery and planning for future preparedness.

Key findings

Following the covid19 outbreak in March 2020, domestic abuse (DA) has emerged as a priority area, with victims deemed to be at increased risk due to the lockdown and their greater likelihood of forced cohabitation with their perpetrator. As a result, efforts were made to increase awareness of DA and the help available to victims. During lockdown, possibly partly due to increased awareness and partly due to the increased pressure on victims caused by the circumstances, demand for services changed, with increased contacts to helplines, particularly from "third parties" (i.e. family, friends or neighbours), and a higher-than-average number of DA-related incidents. At the same time, outreach services and some refuge staff needed to suspend face-to-face support and move to a remote working model, facing important challenges in continuing their work to support victims. Remaining refuge staff worked with masks, social distancing and hand sanitizing regimes in place. Interviewees agree that the Surrey DA partnership put together an agile and effective response, which materialized in greater coordination among system partners under the leadership of Surrey County Council, work addressing the capacity to cope with increased referrals and the creation of a new refuge to support victims fleeing from their perpetrators during lockdown. This latter is an example of national best practice, as the partnership has no evidence of any other refuges being opened in the same period.

Nevertheless, the partnership agrees that the full impact of covid19 on victims, as well as the national and local DA response systems, is yet to be determined. Interviewees have expressed concerns about the unpredictability of how the long-term impact on victims and their dependants will manifest itself (e.g. in their mental health/behaviour at school) and about the resources they have available to cope with any further increase in demand for services (e.g. a potential further increase in referrals on reopening of schools, causing further pressure on available sources of support).

It is important to note victims of domestic abuse are known to Services and are receiving support.

Common Themes

Services: Some offices shut down and moved to remote working, others worked with skeleton staff. Home visits and in-person contact was reduced or stopped in a context of rising referrals. Support services, including refuges, took on new ways of working; this has been a rapid learning curve for everyone but one that services have adapted to. Short term funding was made available, but there is a worry that the peak of reporting from DA survivors might be yet to come, and therefore further resources may be needed going forward. A new refuge was developed, which accommodated 7 families at a time of crisis. Available evidence points to Surrey being the only locality to open a new refuge during lockdown at national level. There is some evidence of lockdown/post-lockdown

referrals being more complex/of higher severity, but this has not been observed throughout the partnership.

System: Networks across the sector became stronger due to the weekly meetings that were put in place and stakeholders felt partnership arrangements were working better since beginning of lockdown. Partners have made time for meetings, which are more accessible as held virtually, and stakeholders have suggested they would like current partnership arrangements to become permanent. Every agency with no exception said information sharing worked well from the council and that they really valued the opportunity to problem solve together. New links between agencies and services have formed during the pandemic.

Survivors: Lockdown has likely exacerbated pre-existing abuse, and the closure of schools has likely further exposed children to the abuse being perpetrated in the household, increased the duties of victims and decreased opportunities to obtain support. The inability to leave the home environment has provided further opportunities for perpetrators to increase their victim's isolation and lent itself as a tool for greater coercive control. Where victims and perpetrators might have been furloughed, there might be financial stresses on the family also exacerbating any pre-existing control of the victim's finances or facilitating the perpetrator in "muscling their way back in" on financial grounds. There is a concern about the long-term physical and mental impact of lockdown for victims of DA and their dependants. The concern is heightened by uncertainty about how this might manifest in both groups, but worries are now focused particularly on the mental health of children returning to school and a possible "wave" of disclosures in the school environment upon reopening.

Priorities for preparedness – improvement in agency and inter-agency practice

- Partnership dialogue arrangements emerging from covid19 should be cemented into standard practice
- Data sharing arrangements and covid19 modelling should be consolidated and expanded to include further indicators, which will enable the partnership to better understand and make decisions about the multifaceted reality of domestic abuse in Surrey
- As third party reporting is key to identifying people requiring support during a lockdown, targeted awareness raising exercises need to continue to equip the general population to recognising and reporting incidents on behalf of victims as necessary
- New direct arrangements between the police and outreach services should be consolidated, and possibly extended to other system partners so that victims in lockdown can receive support despite reduced opportunities to engage with services
- The new daily information process feeding into a daily Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) is highly valued in the partnership and has made a difference for adult services. Current arrangements, in place since the first lockdown, should be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and as effective as possible
- Further work should be carried out with survivors who have left their homes or sought support during lockdown to understand their experience of lockdown, so that the information can be used strategically to elaborate a lockdown-specific response

Priorities for preparedness – changes requiring additional resources or new systems

- Work should continue at pace to address the challenges identified pre-lockdown, to ensure resilience in the Surrey DA response system. The work will need to take into account the new responsibilities detailed in the new Domestic Abuse Bill, expected in April 2021

- Remote procedures (e.g. remote hearings) have been widely adopted since the beginning of the lockdown to enable agencies to continue operating. The urgency of the transition meant many agencies have not had an opportunity to consistently train their staff in dealing sensitively with remote working, so that the new procedures do not impact negatively on victims. Training in this area will ensure preparedness for future lockdowns, where remote procedures are applied because of public health reasons, but it will also ensure Surrey agencies are ready and able to offer digital remote procedures with confidence when required for the safety and wellbeing of victims regardless of the public health context
- Opportunities for silent/digital reporting should be increased, so that victims can call on services to help even when opportunities to talk are limited. This might require the addition of new services or the expansion of previously available solutions.
- An in-depth analysis of need, coverage and sustainability is needed for all Surrey refuges, so that detailed recommendations can be made about developmental and funding models for this aspect of the Surrey DA response system
- Further ways of ensuring contact with known victims is maintained in case of new lockdowns should be investigated, particularly for victims who are at greater risk of social isolation (e.g. due to a shielding order)
- Training should be made available so that agencies interacting in person with the public during lockdown conditions are aware of how perpetrators have previously exploited lockdown conditions to the detriment of victims, and can react appropriately to similar situations
- Training should be consistently rolled out to school staff to help them identify signs of exposure to domestic abuse in children's appearance and behaviour. While the training already exists, it will be important for the Surrey DA partnership to ensure it achieves sufficient coverage and school staff are trained to deal with the matter sensitively and refer appropriately

2. Brief definition of group

In 2012, a new definition of domestic abuse (DA) was adopted as a cross-government definition in the UK. DA was defined as:

'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse'.

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales ([CSEW 2019](#)), an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years had experienced DA in the year ending March 2019 (1.6 million women and 786,000 men). Following the covid19 outbreak in March 2020, DA has emerged as a priority area, with victims deemed to be at increased risk due to the lockdown and their greater likelihood of forced cohabitation with their perpetrator. The UN has called the rise in violence against women during lockdown a “shadow pandemic”, noting remarkable rises in the requests for support received by DA helplines in countries across the world, including the UK.

DA victims were selected as a key population for the Surrey Community Impact Assessment in light of the clear impact reported by helplines and other support services, as shown in section 4b. Victims of DA might also have other overlapping vulnerabilities linked with the abuse, either in the form of risk factors or as a result of the abuse itself, which might have been exacerbated by lockdown conditions. For example:

- Nationally, disabled people declare having suffered or suffering from DA on average twice as often as their non-disabled counterparts. The disabled victim's reliance on their perpetrator for support with their day-to-day activities contributes to the power imbalance typical of abusive relationships, facilitating perpetrators in acquiring control over their victim. In the context of the covid-19 outbreak, Public Health guidance might have designated some DA victims as “high risk” due to their disability and advised them to shield, further reducing their opportunities to leave their home independently and increasing their reliance on the perpetrator.
- Victims suffering from financial abuse might have seen their condition worsen if they or their perpetrator lost their job and/or were furloughed during lockdown, with the consequent reduction in income. More time at home might also have given the perpetrator greater control over the victim's or the family's finances, reducing opportunities for victims to hide their available financial resources and maintain a level of financial independence.
- Social isolation, an important component in a number of abusive relationships used by perpetrators to achieve control over their victim(s), might have been facilitated as a result of Public Health guidance and the “stay home” instruction issued by the UK government, severing victims from their natural support networks (family and friends) as well as from services.

The following sections discuss the available Surrey DA information and the emerging local picture pre-lockdown (section 3), to then report on findings from lockdown data and interviews with system stakeholders on the impact of the pandemic on support services (section 4) and on victims (section 5), and finally move on to identifying priorities for future preparedness (section 6) and lines of further inquiry (section 7).

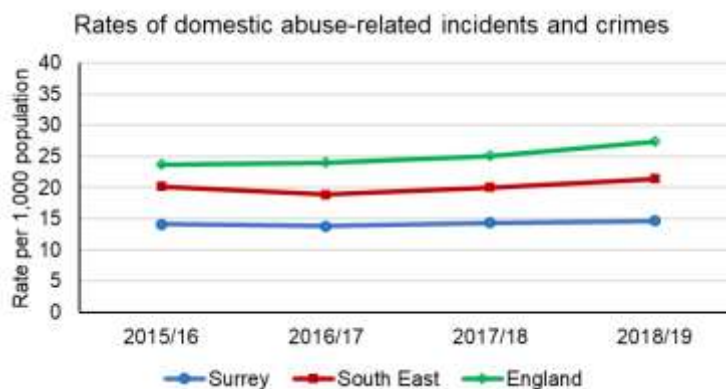
It is to be noted that the following sections do not include a discussion of views obtained directly from victims and survivors of DA; given the recent end to lockdown conditions, it was deemed inappropriate at this stage to reach out to survivors to ask them to discuss such a recent traumatic experience, as this might have caused them undue distress in the early stages of their recovery and

that of any dependants. Instead, this report focuses on the views of system stakeholders partly as a way to establish lines of inquiry to be explored with victims and survivors at a later stage with assistance and facilitation provided by system partners. Findings from this second stage of research will be included in an appendix to this report in November 2020.

3. Surrey DA population and Surrey local picture pre-lockdown

Surrey estimates based on the mid 2018 population count place the number of Surrey DA victims between **14,205 – 48,288** individuals. The reason for such a wide bracket is that DA is still widely underreported, and its real prevalence still poorly understood.

In terms of the known picture, the most recent data from the [Public Health Fingertips tool](#) reported that **the prevalence of DA-related incidents and crimes in Surrey for 2018/19 was estimated at 14.7 per 1,000 population**. Despite reporting a slight increase in prevalence over the previous two financial years, Surrey is the local authority in the South East region with the lowest rate, and the South East is in turn lower than the national average. The above prevalence translates into **14,002 DA-related incidents** reported to Surrey police in 2018/19. 64.4% (9,018) of these DA incidents were recorded as notifiable offences, which equates to 8 crimes per 1,000 population. This is also lower than the national rate of 13 crimes per 1,000 population (England and Wales) but an increase on what was observed in Surrey for the previous financial year (7.7 crimes per 1,000 population) according to [ONS](#) data, following the trend observed nationally by the police.



The volume of DA crimes recorded by borough for 2017/18 were highest in Reigate and Banstead, Elmbridge, Guildford, and Spelthorne. However, once adjusted for population, Spelthorne and Reigate and Banstead had the highest prevalence, followed by Runnymede (9.5 and 9.1 per 1,000 respectively).

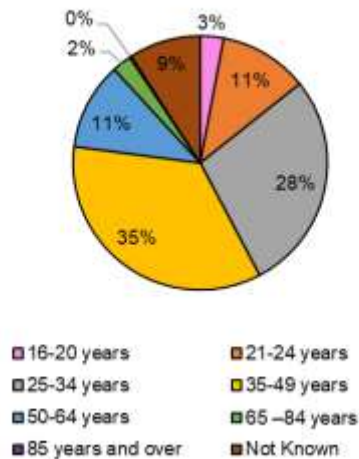
In terms of DA outreach work, in the 2019/20 financial year **the number of outreach referrals received by providers was 4,267**. Of these, 25% were about previous users. By borough, the highest volume of DA referrals to outreach services was recorded in Reigate and Banstead. Once adjusted for population, Reigate and Banstead had the highest prevalence of DA referrals, with a large increase across the second half of the year.

Ninety-two percent of service users being supported by outreach services in 2019/20 were female, consistent with the previous year. However, estimates in the proportion of male DA victims vary considerably, with the DA bill paper stating that a third of DA victims are male. Therefore, the gap between different estimates might be explained by Surrey men not accessing provision or help from services, or by a still poor understanding of DA in male victims, or a mixture of both.

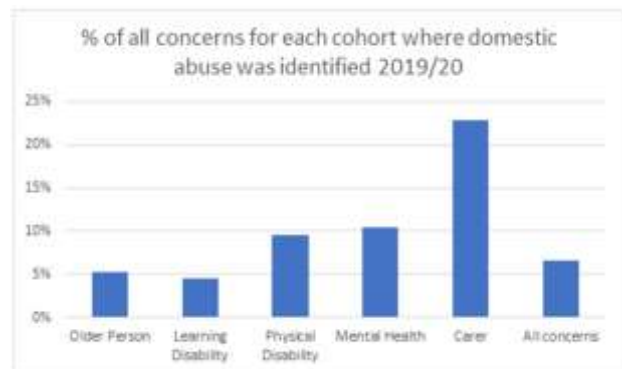
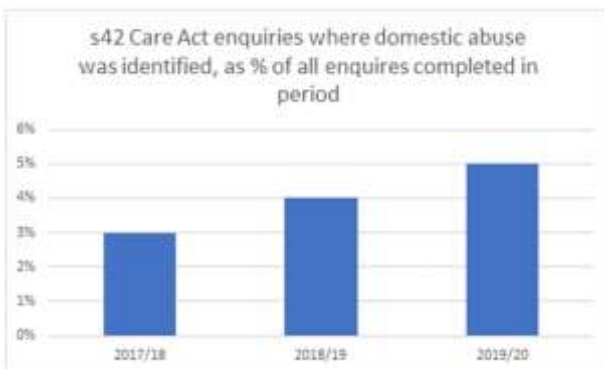
Proportion of DA outreach service users 2018-19 by gender



Average age group of DA outreach service users 2019/20



Data on safeguarding adults saw **5% of Section 42 Safeguarding enquiries in Surrey during 2019/20 recording a risk of domestic abuse**. This represents an increase in the proportion of S42 enquiries where DA is identified compared to previous years. Due to the nature of DA, other safeguarding risks identified may also cover aspects of DA, even though DA is not explicitly identified as a factor. In the context of the overall increase in the proportion of cases where DA is identified, it is also notable that there are significant differences depending on the care and support needs of the adult. For example, carers have a significantly higher proportion of S42 assessments completed in 2019/20 where DA was identified compared to other groups.



This is an important local finding which goes some way to complement the national findings about DA being more prevalent in people with disabilities.

While overall the Surrey DA picture was arguably more positive than average, important challenges existed in the local DA response system even before covid-19. Consistent with the national picture, stakeholders reported the following pre-existing challenges:

It is, it's always a challenge that **grants are usually only ever a year long**, so there's no way that you could even consider expanding or planning for the future, because actually all you're ever doing is making sure you've got enough money to keep going that year, to keep your staff employed, to, you know, so strategically that is a problem [...].

We don't have a specialist stalking service in Surrey and they do in Sussex. So I'm coming under pressure for that as well.

I think funding has always been an issue. [...] there's always more we want to do and not enough funding. So that was the situation before covid. And now I think it's just worse. I think, probably getting some traction on the things that we know would make a difference [...]. Everyone is in the same situation with regards to money. But then we also know that probably a lot of the things that we could do don't necessarily take money, it just needs sort of **a coordinated approach**. And then the right people to be, not just engaged, but actually, you know, taking ownership of it within their agency and solving things.

One of the main [challenges] is the family court. So you have a situation in domestic abuse where you have **almost two opposing sides in the system**, so you have children services, which obviously, is statutory services who would rightly be involved with the family that had experienced domestic abuse. But they would be saying to that woman "you are failing to protect these children. If you don't go into a refuge, and if you don't stop having this relationship, we're going to remove your children." So we then have her come into the refuge, protecting her children according to children services. He will then take her to family court and the judge will say "if you don't let your partner, ex partner, see the children, then you're being vindictive, and actually we will award full custody to him". And that seems incredible to try and believe that those two parts of the system are so opposed.

I think the main challenge, as always, is that resources [...] are limited, in terms of resources that we have to staff the service and **demand was high anyway**, and complex cases were coming through at that point.

Other challenges are **supporting EU residents**, it's very, very difficult for us to support EU residents. It's actually harder for us to support a woman from the EU than it is for us to support someone, say from Nigeria or from Pakistan. Because there is – there is a set route from the Home Office that if somebody from outside the EU comes in on a spousal visa, we would be able to get that woman indefinite leave to remain, which would entitle her to benefits and housing. Whereas if it is somebody from, say, Poland or somewhere like that it is much more difficult for us to help that woman because there is no Home Office route and all the time routes to support are being closed down for European women. And that includes housing, that includes benefits.

Particularly with the community service, we are under-resourced. We were under-resourced at that time. And in particular, **I would say that our children's outreach service is and was severely under-resourced.** We're only able to support, you know, twelve, eleven, maybe thirteen children at any one time. And when we look at our referrals, there are some 400 children a year that are referred to us as linked to a survivor of domestic abuse. And most of those children, I think, would need some level of support, but we are just not able to do

Partly to address these issues, and more widely to renew and update the local response, the Surrey DA partnership came together in 2019 to establish a way forward that would enable system improvement and better outcomes for survivors and their dependants, following the [Surrey Domestic Abuse strategy](#) (2018-2023). The approach of the programme, which was already underway as the covid-19 outbreak hit the UK, is to deliver improvement in Surrey's response to DA focusing on the following areas:

- **Whole System** - Strengthening the way agencies work together, building a foundation to support long-term system change. Updating DA governance, reviewing information sharing pathways, building on workforce development and joint communication strategies
- **Current DA Services** – Adopting a strength-based approach to work with refuges and outreach providers to ensure provision of these key support services is secure and aligned to needs now and in the future
- **Prototyping innovation** – testing new approaches in the following areas of priority:
 - Early Intervention
 - Recovery and Coping
 - Young Offenders and Domestic Abuse
 - Perpetrator Programmes
 - Coercive Control
 - Health Interventions

When the national lockdown came into effect in March 2020, the Surrey DA partnership priorities changed to respond to new needs, and most notably:

- a. Ensuring **dialogue among system partners** to enable reciprocal support and timely decision making
- b. **Modelling system demand and capacity** to be able to forecast spikes in the different components of the Surrey DA response system
- c. Promoting the **continued availability of support services** and **setting up and promoting safe spaces** accessible by members of the public requiring support with DA issues
- d. **Setting up a new refuge** in the county to accommodate demand for safe accommodation for victims during lockdown

The next section discusses the impact of the covid-19 outbreak and the related lockdown on the demand for DA support services and the views of system stakeholders on the local response during and after the lockdown.

4. Impact of covid19/lockdown on the Surrey DA partnership

a. Dialogue among system partners

Starting from the beginning of the lockdown period, the Surrey DA partnership set up regular weekly meetings to ensure dialogue among system partners and a coordinated response to the challenges posed by the circumstances. Stakeholders report this weekly forum was a useful emergency arrangement that supported them in continuing to deliver for DA victims and their dependants in spite of the difficult operational landscape. While the frequency of meetings has decreased since restrictions started to be eased, stakeholders agree this is a useful forum even in non-lockdown times, and a covid-19 arrangement they would like to maintain for the foreseeable future to support them in their partnership work.

So we've had regular meetings, which I think have been really helpful, just **enabled us to solve together, effectively, and quickly** and also to know, kind of what's going on across the whole county, so I think that's that's pretty helpful.

So I mean, I think the support that's been available has been really, really good. You know, if we've needed it. I mean **the weekly domestic abuse meetings have been really valuable** and also to know what's going on outside of the refuge, you know regarding domestic abuse and the virus, it's getting really, really helpful to know what's there and what's available if needed.

b. Modelling system demand and capacity

The restrictions imposed by lockdown had noticeable effects on all parts of the DA system, affecting demand for services as well as capacity from agencies and organisations to offer support, specifically where this was traditionally delivered as face-to-face support.

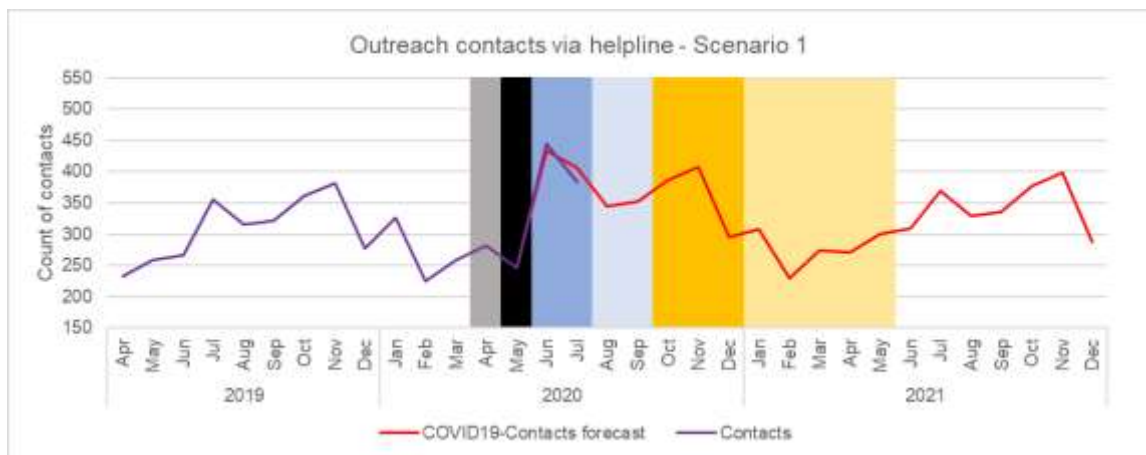
The impact could be observed on different services at different times, and a requirement to forecast demand on services to understand upcoming pressure was expressed by the partnership as a way to inform strategic conversations. Data was contributed by agencies and organisations and fed into a single demand and capacity model looking at three potential covid-19 scenarios. This was deemed a useful planning and communication tool.

[...] **The modelling work was vital in informing and justifying our response**, there was a considerable amount of information regarding national DA demand but it was vital to understand this at a local level so that we could plan accordingly and target resource. The modelling has continued to be useful through the recovery phase to inform demand and capacity work. **Our specialist DA partners also commented on how useful it was for them to have the partnership data played back in a useable way so they could understand and communicate the pressure on their services.**

Below are extracts from the latest available version of the model. Actual data is shown as a purple trend line, while the forecast is shown as red. While projections are reviewed as new data becomes available and are subject to change, projected and actual data for previous months are both available to show the accuracy of the prediction up to the time of writing.

i. Outreach services

Demand and capacity for outreach services shifted considerably as a result of the lockdown. During lockdown contacts were largely in line with previous months, while an unseasonal and disproportionate rise in contacts was observed in June as restrictions started to be eased. Demand is expected to progressively fall back into line with the non-covid19 projection used as baseline over the next few months, returning to normal seasonality in January 2021 if no further lockdown is imposed on Surrey.

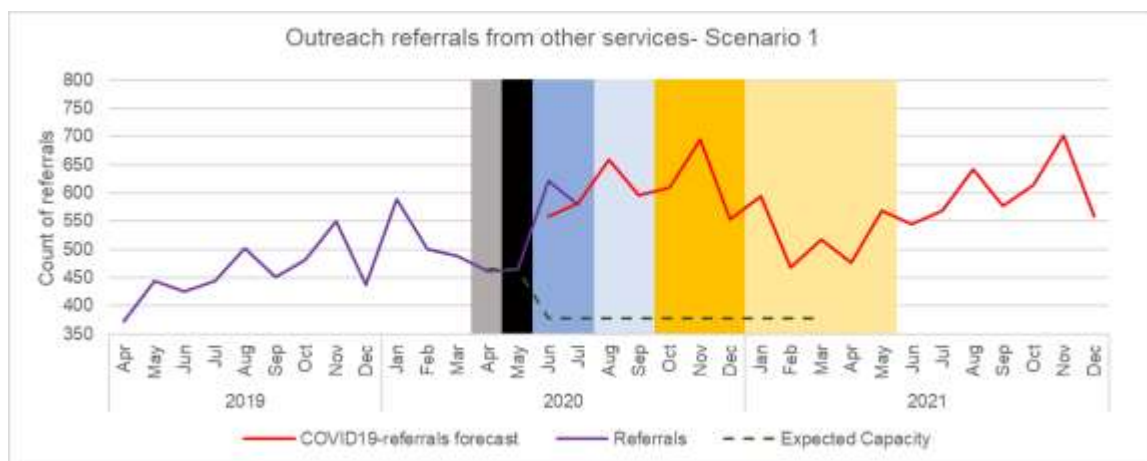


Some partners have observed an increase in third-party contacts and reporting, i.e. family, friends or neighbours making contact with helplines and statutory agencies to seek assistance on behalf of victims.

There has been **a marked increase in third party reporting**, which is how victims, the primary route that they seem to be escaping is via third party reporting, because they're unable to seek assistance themselves. But neighbours or family might be aware of something that's going on and they are reporting, and then stat agencies are getting involved and that's how women are being able to flee. So a number of the women that have come to us have come to us directly as a result of statutory services involvement that they haven't sought. It's been a third party that sought it.

Not sure that we've seen [an increase in third-party reporting] reflected, but **we've certainly been involved in getting the message out there in terms of if you are worried about your neighbour, your friend or relative, that support is available**, such as getting contact with the service. It's more again about awareness raising.

Referrals to domestic abuse outreach from other services was also lower than previous months during lockdown, possibly due to reduction in service delivery from agencies and partners who might have made referrals under normal working conditions and the reduced ability of victims to self-refer. Similarly, to contacts, referrals to outreach experienced a spike in June higher than the prediction, and are then expected to fall back in line with normal seasonality around October 2020.

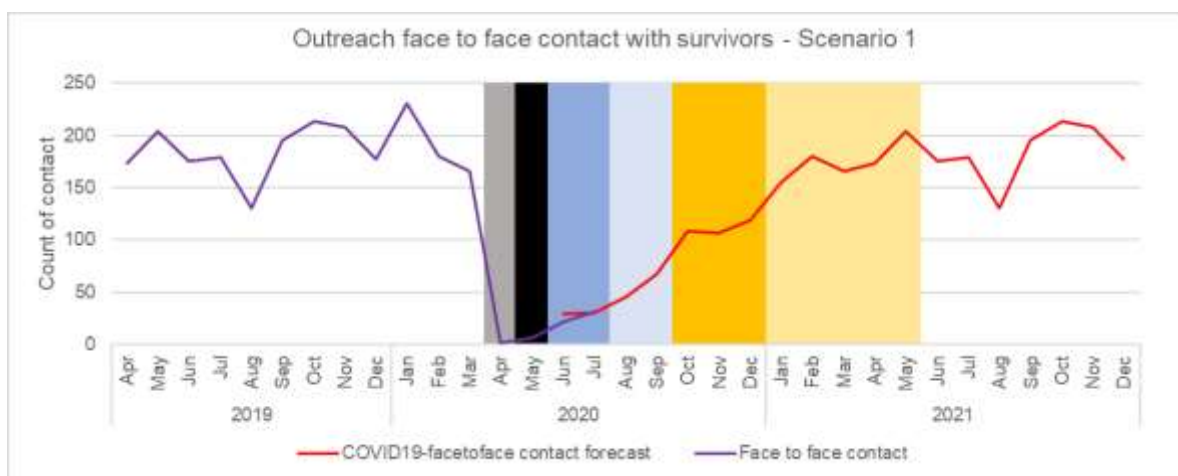


Just after lockdown started to be eased, outreach services started experiencing a surge in demand, but could cope with the increased number of referrals due to the extra capacity granted by the new, remote working arrangements. Post lockdown, there is a sense that the severity of referrals coming through to outreach services has increased.

Looking at the actual demand coming through, so the referrals over the last few months compared to last year, there has been a big increase on the number of referrals coming through. [...] whereas before we'd be going out to see the individuals, we're doing more telephone work, or maybe a video call. **It's given us better capacity to deal with the number of referrals**, because we are having to stay in one location.

So, we had a drop off in the low level stuff, but increase in the high risk stuff. I mean, we've seen all the statistics that, you know, **there is a definite increase in referrals, but all of them seem to be quite high risk at the moment**. It's all stuff that's coming to our attention because, you know, it's big attacks and it's really serious stuff.

Outreach face-to-face casework with victims/survivors fell dramatically given the lockdown restrictions, with extremely limited casework being carried out in person. Levels of face-to-face interaction have seen a limited rise as restrictions started to be lifted, and will progressively increase to an expected return to normal levels of service in January 2021.



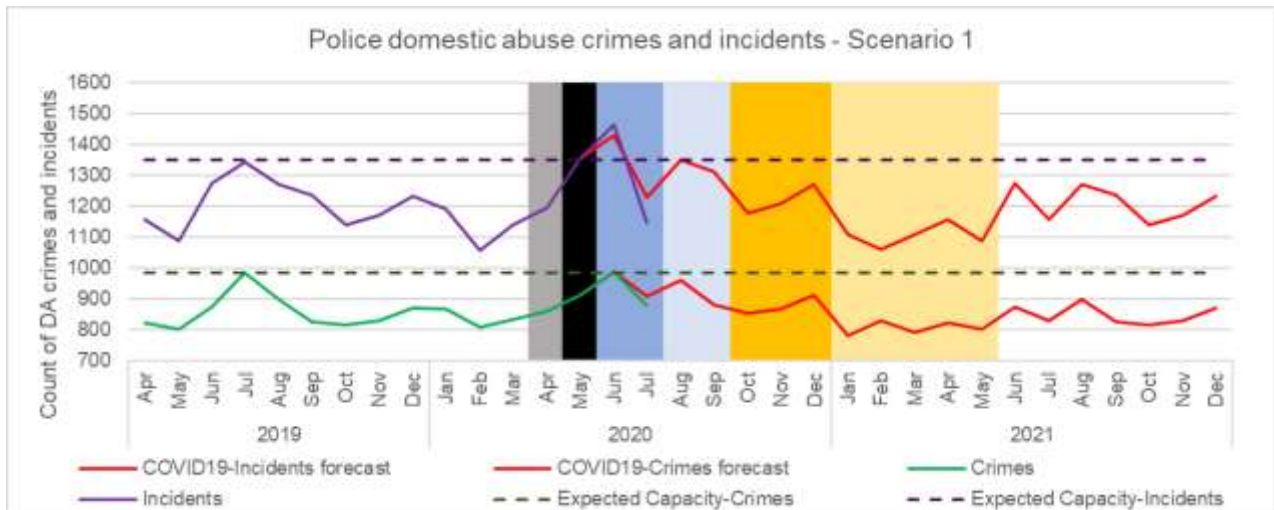
Outreach services have experienced important challenges in maintaining contact with victims, and the impact on the victim themselves has materialized in a loss of previously available support.

Personally, and I know a lot of the other girls, you know, miss that kind of... You might have had a really harrowing phone call and just haven't got that sort of person sat there to sort of offload to. **And of course, for our clients it was terrible. You know, a lot of them, we were their crutches. If you like, you know we were getting them through a really hard time and suddenly we weren't available to see them.**

We are still providing all the support we used to provide, it's just those face to face things that aren't happening. That's not to say we won't sit on the phone and have an hour-long chat with the client, if they need an hour long chat we'll have it, it's just we are not sat in front of them. Some clients have done this kind of thing, have done a Zoom or whatever, but again, **you've got to imagine if the perpetrator's in the house that's not something you can easily do.**

ii. Police incidents and crimes

During lockdown, reported DA incidents and crimes rose compared to previous months, and were unseasonably high compared to the same months in previous years. While Surrey Police has tackled DA incidents systematically, police response was stretched to the limit of their nominal capacity to deal with incidents during lockdown, and beyond their nominal capacity in June and July. A return within the nominal limits of police capacity is expected in August 2020, and a return to normal seasonality in January 2021 for both crimes and incidents.



Partnership work between the police and outreach services has been deemed particularly effective in managing the surge in incidents. Longer working hours were offered by outreach services so that survivors could be linked directly with them by the police rather than a referral coming through to outreach services at a later time, when the victim was unlikely to be able to speak. Interviewees believe this new arrangement showed real engagement from the police and was a good measure to manage potential increases in demand.

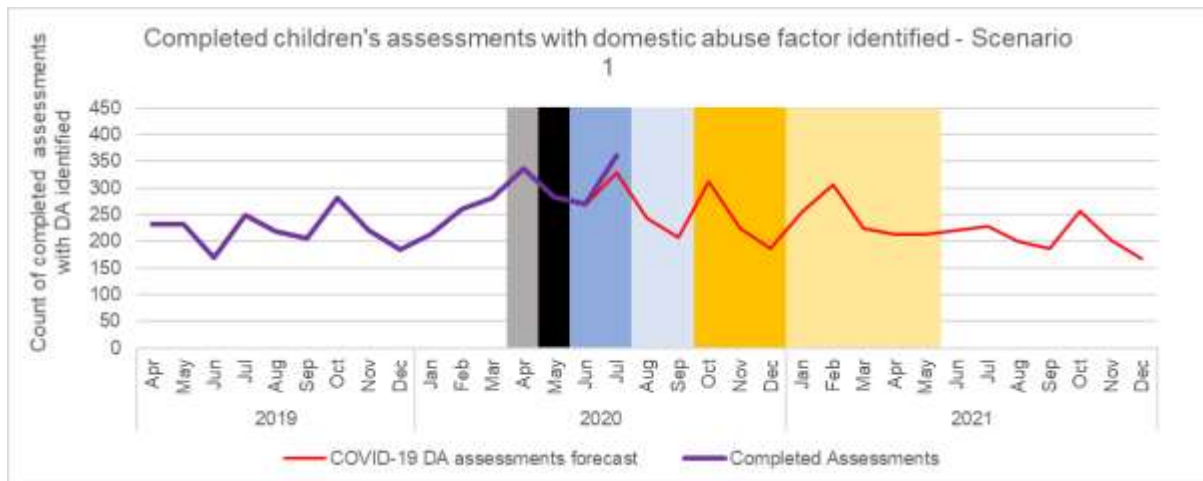
[The] police have responded really well. They've really engaged with the specialist services. That was you know, **they've worked really closely with them during the outbreak to put in special triaging and outreach worked longer hours so they could be on call for the police to help support with cases.** So the partnership working between the police and especially services to manage what they thought might be increased demand was really good.

We [outreach services] were working with the police so that if a call came through and we had an outreach team available to connect that survivor at that point, then the logic was that if they were able to make the call to the police, that they would be able to talk to outreach rather than "I will refer you to outreach" - **and by the time the referrals come through they might not be in a safe place to talk.**

iii. Children's social care assessments with DA identified as a factor

The Surrey Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) has seen a low amount of inquiries during April compared to earlier in the year; these came back to levels more in line with normal seasonality during the second half of lockdown. However, a larger proportion of inquiries to the C-SPA were turned into contacts requiring further consideration and potentially an Early Help or Social Care assessment.

Anecdotally, this might be due to the increased complexity of cases observed at the front door, and the reduced service/absence of partners who would normally be able to identify concerns at an earlier point before escalation (e.g. schools). The number of Social Care assessments with DA identified as a factor at the end of assessment was unseasonably high both in April and May, meaning a larger proportion of C-SPA inquiries resulted in a Social Care assessment with DA identified as a factor during lockdown months. This trend is expected to continue over the summer and slowly return to normal seasonality around November 2020, when most of the impact from the planned reopening of schools is expected to have been absorbed.

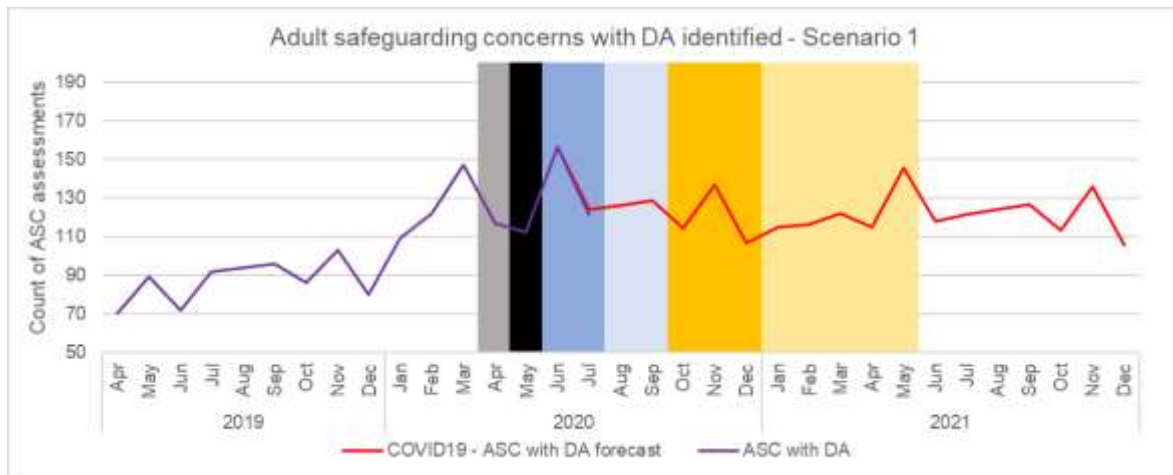


In order to respond to the expected increase in demand and its complexity, Surrey County Council put in place a host of measures, particularly at the front door. These were meant to support children’s services in making better quality judgements on individual cases, in particular in absence of the expertise granted by other professionals in pre-lockdown times.

We put like a 24/7 front door in place, which means that so ***we now have primary mental health workers, domestic abuse workers, substance misuse workers*** [...] so they work as part of the consultation line which families can call and professionals can call if they are not sure. We have all of that running out of hours as well [...] and ***now we are looking at [making] a case for that to kind of be in place as business as usual.***

iv. Adult safeguarding concerns with DA identified as a factor

Adult safeguarding concerns (ASC) with DA identified as a factor were on the rise before covid-19 with general increases observed yearly since 2017 (which may be as a result of changes in practice). The highest number of concerns in the time series was recorded in March 2020. Though there is no real seasonality observed around ASC, during lockdown the number of ASC was lower than in March (pre lockdown) and after restrictions started to be lifted, adult safeguarding concerns increased significantly immediately before falling again.



Prisoners being released because of the government guidance, that had a huge impact on the victims and we were seeing very very high risk **very very serious incidents of victims presenting with very serious injuries.**

c. Continued availability of support services and safe spaces

From the beginning of the lockdown, the partnership felt it was necessary to advertise the continued availability of support services to the public, to challenge any assumption that restrictions might mean support was not available. A communications campaign was developed across the county including information sent out with shielding packs and national/local helplines were advertised at supermarkets, pharmacies and A&E settings. The Bright Sky app and Silent Solutions process as well as helplines were also advertised via social media across the partnership. Safe spaces also needed to be promoted so victims would be aware of where they might be able to access a telephone and ask for help.

The Surrey wide Domestic Abuse helpline and online chat service operated by Your Sanctuary extended their operating hours. East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services, in partnership with Surrey Police, established an out of hours outreach service to ensure that they could offer support and advice to survivors whilst perpetrators were still in custody. Most services needed to move partly or completely to remote working models, with the associated challenges and service modifications. Additional refuge capacity was developed utilising an existing Surrey property to ensure that survivors were able to access this vital support service.

A Domestic Abuse worker was embedded within the Surrey C-SPA to provide risk assessment and specialist advice on referrals. Surrey's specialist DA services provided additional training to staff in the C-SPA to ensure that 'every contact counts'. Webinars were set up internally for Surrey County Council managers to support staff and a series of webinars have been developed with school staff to support them in recognising and responding to Domestic Abuse.

d. Setting up a new refuge

Demand for refuge space was high even before lockdown. In 2016/17, 60% of referrals to the refuge services responding to the [Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017](#) were declined. One in five were declined due to lack of space in the refuge.

It is difficult to assess quantitative changes in demand on refuges since the beginning of the lockdown, given that refuges only receive requests for accommodation when they advertise a free space. However, while it is difficult to assess the exact change in demand for refuge spaces, Surrey refuges report having experienced an increase in demand at the same time as survivors being unable to move out of refuges due to the pandemic.

So effectively, you will have got across the country **women locked in refuges because they couldn't move on**. So where you would normally have, you know, a lot of churn where women are moving out. - that wasn't happening.

We certainly know that **every time we opened up a space, we were flooded with calls**.

As soon as we opened up a space, we were getting calls immediately for that space. So, **we did notice an increase in the number of women desperate for that space**.

Given the emerging need, the Surrey DA partnership identified resources to set up a new Surrey refuge with funding for 12 months, which was opened in July 2020. The additional refuge is currently supporting seven families with the initial spaces filled immediately upon becoming available. Domestic Abuse advocates offer both practical support to women in the refuge, counselling services and play therapy for children. Sustainability of the project is currently being considered.

if you said to us at the beginning of the year "you're going to set up a refuge in six weeks", **I'd have said "there's no way, no way possible"**.

So, we've started a new refuge that's potentially for twelve months. But actually, I don't think domestic abuse and those needing refuges is going to go down anytime soon. So I think **we need to look at how we're going to sustain those extra bed spaces and if possible, increase those bed spaces** for the survivors to go to.

We obviously opened a refuge during lockdown, which is pretty remarkable. And, you know, I don't think there are many. Well, I know that actually there aren't any apart from other I know of a couple of other organizations that opened up emergency spaces, but they weren't refuges.

5. Impact of covid19/lockdown on victims of DA

Whilst at this stage we have not spoken with survivors of domestic abuse who have lived with abuse during the outbreak and lockdown, it is our intention to do this later in the year. Meanwhile, our stakeholders have pointed to a series of interconnected factors that are deemed to have impacted on victim's wellbeing and safety during lockdown:

- **more intense/severe abuse**: increased opportunities to isolate the victim from friends and family, greater control of the victim's communications and finances and less fear of signs of abuse being spotted by third parties

I would say it definitely [lockdown] **increased the seriousness of the crimes and the level of the crimes.** These guys were thinking they could get away with it all the more, you know.

You know the lockdown was an absolute joy to them, because they had to keep their victim in the house. **No one was seeing the broken bones and the black eyes and you know, so, absolutely perfect for perpetrator of domestic abuse to have a lockdown.**

I was talking to someone at the refuge last week when I went to visit who said that actually they had to get out during lockdown. It was getting too intense. **Whilst there wasn't any physical abuse, the mental torture had got even worse since** they'd just been in the house together.

- **reduced access to (in-person) support:** fewer opportunities to contact helplines/outreach services, fewer points of contact in the system where abuse might be spotted, school closure reducing chances of external contact and of abuse being spotted on dependants, court closures and telephone processes reducing chances of obtaining enforceable non-molestation orders

The situation has just been exacerbated by being together with no other means of support. So, whereas before people maybe would have been able to access friends or relatives, that just hasn't been the case over the last few months and that **they really are isolated away from any support.**

what we are getting from survivors is that actually they do miss the face to face, the relational kind of contact [...]. And women who are in abusive relationships, **it's reduced their space of contact because they would be going out to school, maybe the only time that they get to walk away from the perpetrator,** or those contacts and support.

- **new instances of abuse related directly to the pandemic:** the pandemic and the lockdown in some cases lent themselves to creating new forms of abuse, or new ways for perpetrators to either reinstate themselves into the family home or anyway gain a level of control over the previous home environment that would not have possible before the outbreak.

A lot of perpetrators use the lockdown. I've had a situation where, quite early on, where one perpetrator, the wife went out for a run and he had the two children in the home. **He locked all the doors and windows. And when she got back from her run told her she couldn't come in the house because he thought she had covid, and he was keeping the children safe.** She called the police. She was hysterical, her children were hanging out the window crying and screaming.

They've kind of used lockdown as a way to muscle back in. **They use the vulnerability again, you know, if the women in part time jobs have been furloughed or didn't have the money.** And then, you know, he's saying, "well, I'll come back in a I'll pay the mortgage for a couple of months".

Perpetrators have been misusing the pandemic to push for different contact arrangements and to want to do video calls in the home, which then means that they have kind of visual sight of the home environment and that can feel really intrusive for survivors.

- **lack of clarity from agencies in managing challenges posed by lockdown and new ways of working:** especially early on in the lockdown, managing new situations and ways of working has been difficult for agencies. In some cases, this has had a negative impact on victims.

So. I know some of my colleagues have had really problems with getting a really enforceable restraining order, and it seems to be just part of this kind of "over the telephone" process. [...] **So she's got screaming kids in the background, the judge can't hear her properly, and the judge is saying "can't you keep your children quiet?"**. And, meanwhile, he's on the other end of the phone being all charming, and "you know, she's such a terrible mother" or whatever, you know, it's just not showing a true picture. We've had a few of those sorts of scenarios. **It's not been really an appropriate way to give a restraining order, or for the victim's voice to be heard.**

He had parental responsibility for the children and he was using covid, and remember this is very early on, so **all of us didn't really know what the law or the legislation was**. He was saying "she's been out of the house. I think she's got covid. I'm not letting her in this house and risking my children", which you know, of course she would only be running the street. She hasn't come in contact with anyone or anything, but how could she prove that? **And the police sort of went along with him even though the children were screaming and crying out the windows. You know, I felt for the police officers as well. You could say no one really knew what was right and what was wrong at that moment in time.**

If you have someone who has a diagnosed mental health issue but may be struggling to access support around that [because of lockdown], that doesn't present a good picture potentially [compared] to your charming perpetrator who's saying all the right things and doing all the right things.

A lot of our work is getting non-molestation orders, sort of restraining orders against the perpetrators to keep them away from the women. [...] **They started doing it by telephone. [...] And often [...] we found that a lot of them are much more wishy washy.** And sort of, just not easily enforceable. I have one where the perpetrator was allowed not more than 18 yards to her house. [...] And then he was allowed to go and use the shower if he needed to and things like that, it was really silly.

Possibly as a result of the multiple factors described above, Surrey outreach services point to cases having become more complex/of higher severity during lockdown. More survivors have been coming forward with mental health, drug and alcohol issues and getting access to these specialist services has been challenging.

All the stuff we were getting all through lockdown is the stuff that's basically the most serious, high-risk stuff that's coming to police attention, we were getting a lot more police referrals because they were getting called out to sort of harsh situations.

Children and young people deserve a separate mention. Due to school closures, they have been unable to leave the home as often and attend to their normal education. Professionals know one of the safest places for young people exposed to DA is in school, where they can be sheltered from their home environment, disclose their situation to teachers, talk to trusted adults and receive support. While young people could use technology and they were supported this way by specialist services during lockdown, professionals were not always sure this was safe for them. As no in-person support could be delivered during lockdown, **professionals are now concerned about the impact further**

exposure to abuse will have had on children and young people, and how this might manifest itself in social contexts on their return to school, potentially causing a wave of reporting.

The kind of stuff that gets reported into schools, and when people see their doctors, and when people have regular appointments, you know, that stuff isn't getting reported and still isn't really, 'cause people aren't really mixing yet properly. ***So there's a lot of stuff we are aware of that's been going on under the under the surface for the last few months that is coming. We will get that wave of people disclosing, but it's not here yet.***

Holidays is a huge time for a child to be in a bad situation. And we would look at, what, 14 weeks [of lockdown]? Can you imagine that, then followed by summer holidays? ***I mean, the kids out there traumatized for years. I think probably is a lot of intervention is needed with kids, you know, following this.***

Surrey has worked as a Partnership to ensure leadership across the area and try and assist survivors of domestic abuse with various measures that were put in place to lessen the impact of lockdown. These included daily information sharing to support daily Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) to ensure high risk survivors were seen as a priority and better use of technology across the system – using Facebook and Twitter when safe to do so, extension of phone line and on-line chat tool times.

6. Future preparedness

Stakeholders largely agreed that the partnership came together effectively around the pandemic and that networks and trust have been developed further because of this. In order to be prepared for a potential second wave, we need to build on this relational capital to implement learning from the challenges that we have previously faced.

Improvement in agency and inter-agency practice

- Partnership dialogue arrangements emerging from covid19 should be cemented into standard practice
- Data sharing arrangements and covid19 modelling should be consolidated and expanded to include further indicators, which will enable the partnership to better understand and make decisions about the multifaceted reality of domestic abuse in Surrey
- As third party reporting is key to identifying people requiring support during a lockdown, targeted awareness raising exercises need to continue to equip the general population to recognising and reporting incidents on behalf of victims as necessary
- New direct arrangements between the police and outreach services should be consolidated, and possibly extended to other system partners so that victims in lockdown can receive support despite reduced opportunities to engage with services
- The new daily information process feeding into a daily Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) is highly valued in the partnership and has made a difference for adult services. Current arrangements, in place since the first lockdown, should be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and as effective as possible
- Further work should be carried out with survivors who have left their homes or sought support during lockdown to understand their experience of lockdown, so that the information can be used strategically to elaborate a lockdown-specific response

Changes requiring additional resources or new systems

- Work should continue at pace to address the challenges identified pre-lockdown, to ensure resilience in the Surrey DA response system. The work will need to take into account the new responsibilities detailed in the new Domestic Abuse Bill, expected in April 2021
- Remote procedures (e.g. remote hearings) have been widely adopted since the beginning of the lockdown to enable agencies to continue operating. The urgency of the transition meant many agencies have not had an opportunity to consistently train their staff in dealing sensitively with remote working, so that the new procedures do not impact negatively on victims. Training in this area will ensure preparedness for future lockdowns, where remote procedures are applied because of public health reasons, but it will also ensure Surrey agencies are ready and able to offer digital remote procedures with confidence when required for the safety and wellbeing of victims regardless of the public health context
- Opportunities for silent/digital reporting should be increased, so that victims can call on services to help even when opportunities to talk are limited. This might require the addition of new services or the expansion of previously available solutions.
- An in-depth analysis of need, coverage and sustainability is needed for all Surrey refuges, so that detailed recommendations can be made about developmental and funding models for this aspect of the Surrey DA response system
- Further ways of ensuring contact with known victims is maintained in case of new lockdowns should be investigated, particularly for victims who are at greater risk of social isolation (e.g. due to a shielding order)
- Training should be made available so that agencies interacting in person with the public during lockdown conditions are aware of how perpetrators have previously exploited lockdown conditions to the detriment of victims, and can react appropriately to similar situations
- Training should be consistently rolled out to school staff to help them identify signs of exposure to domestic abuse in children's appearance and behaviour. While the training already exists, it will be important for the Surrey DA partnership to ensure it achieves sufficient coverage and school staff are trained to deal with the matter sensitively and refer appropriately

While there are several points to be considered in reinforcing and improving Surrey's response, it is also to be noted that the county has set an example of best practice with the opening of the new refuge.

I think as far as I'm aware, we are the only local authority area in the UK that opened a new refuge during lockdown. ***So in terms of what lessons did we learn actually, I think we, it was quite the opposite - what lessons could people learn from us?***

7. Lines of further inquiry

While the report outlines important findings from the Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership, with significant and insightful contributions from all stakeholders, it is important to consider that the voice of victims and survivors has not been included in this report, as it was deemed unsafe for Surrey County Council to engage with them given their very recent traumatic experience. With support from outreach services and refuges, Surrey County Council intends to investigate in greater depth the perspective of victims and survivor in autumn 2020, and produce an integrative appendix to this original report including their voice.

We will be particularly interested in investigating any changes the outbreak and the lockdown made to the life of victims, with specific reference to any circumstances that contributed to their decision to access help (or third parties' decision to refer them) at such a challenging time. We will also want to discuss what could have been done to intervene earlier, better and with more positive outcomes. Their experience of accessing services during lockdown and any difficulties they might have encountered, with special consideration given to any new/digital forms of help and procedures, will also be pivotal to inform the development of our response as a partnership and our preparedness to support victims and survivors of DA in the future.