

Learning from Domestic Abuse Serious Incident Review (SIR)

Adult 2 – approved by Sheffield agencies June 2013

Domestic Abuse Serious Incident Reviews (SIRs) aim to improve practice and outcomes for people affected by domestic abuse. This learning sheet is designed to highlight the key areas of learning and practice in relation to the Adult 2 SIR. We hope you will reflect on your own practice in light of this information.

Summary of case

Adult 2 was seriously injured as a result of an assault by her estranged husband in autumn 2012. Adult 2X was convicted of causing Grievous Bodily Harm and breaching restraining orders and was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. Adult 2 and her young daughter were known to and receiving support from 14 agencies in the city and her case had been considered by the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference process (MARAC) several times.

Summary of process

A Serious Incident Review (SIR) was coordinated and authored by the Domestic Abuse Coordination Team in the council. The Key findings were:

- It is not possible to conclude with any certainty that any one different action from an agency could have prevented this incident from occurring, however, enough recommendations have been identified to suggest that areas of practice must change, particularly in relation to the main areas identified as an issue throughout this review.
- Despite this, there were several examples of good practice noted from agencies involved with this family, especially from small voluntary sector agencies. There was a commitment from many agencies to support Adult 2 and it is unfortunate that on many occasions being overwhelmed by agency involvement or not fully understanding the offer stopped this from happening.

Lessons to be learnt

- **Case co-ordination** – the high levels of agency involvement (14 agencies involved in the case) did not necessarily lead to the meeting of Adult 2's needs. Agencies need to consider how to decide which agency will co-ordinate support and act on behalf of the individual if they are not engaging or involved with the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (IDVAS). It would be helpful if a more flexible approach to case co-ordination was adopted where many agencies are involved so that an individual could identify their own chosen lead agency who could speak on their behalf when they felt unable to.
- **Information disclosure and access to previous incidents** – It is essential that all decisions made in terms of referral onward or no further action are recorded clearly, both the decision that has been made and the justification for it. Accurate, well recorded, and timely information must be a priority for all agencies as all decisions that are made usually involve an element of history of the case, and if this is to be the case then the information must be of the highest quality possible.
- **Multiple agency involvement with serial non-engagement** – Agencies should not assume that non-engagement is always an informed decision by the client; it can be an indication of inability to cope with the number of professionals seeking time with them, compounded by the stress of the situation. In future, should a case with multiple agency involvement and serial non-engagement come to MARAC, this should be the forum within which this is recognised and addressed as it is the environment most likely to have the highest number of agencies involved around the table.
- **Following due process** – It is essential when working with people at risk that processes are followed; they are put in place to guide the workforce and encourage best practice. Lessons from this review should be disseminated to all staff of these organisations as a reminder of why procedures exist and their duty to follow them.

- **Separation as a risk factor** – should be recognised as part of domestic abuse assessments. National guidance from Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) states: ‘Attempts to end a relationship are strongly linked to intimate partner homicide... It is therefore important that work is carried out to ensure that the victim can leave as safely as possible... This reinforces the importance of offering your client support beyond the point of separation as this is when victims are particularly at risk of further violence/homicide.’ All workforce training applied should include this information and provide guidance for workers carrying out risk assessments.

Recommendations

Key recommendations were as follows:

- That a process is developed for key agencies to discuss repeat referrals into MARAC where there is non-engagement;
- In Children’s Social Care cases where more than one referral has resulted in No Further Action, workforce need to be aware of when it will be necessary to call a meeting about the case in question;
- In Children’s Social Care the child and parent should be seen in person when child protection concerns have been raised before a decision is made to take No Further Action;
- There should be briefings to social care professionals about how case conferences can be used as a positive step in managing domestic abuse cases, and about the purpose of MAPPA and MARAC in managing high risk repeat perpetrators and supporting high risk victims.
- GP surgeries to provide written protocols on domestic abuse for all staff attached to the practice that complement Sheffield’s Safeguarding Children Procedures. It is essential that all staff in GP surgeries are able to respond in a consistent and effective way to disclosures.
- That MAST conducts a workforce audit of its staff’s knowledge and experience of dealing with DA cases and assessing risk. A system needs to be put in place so that either all workers are trained to do this appropriately, or that cases are allocated to those who have the relevant training and experience in Domestic Abuse – this should include DASH training.
- The Family Common Assessment Framework (FCAF) should trigger a DASH risk assessment if domestic abuse is on-going (including post separation) and risk factors are evident.
- Sheffield Housing Services to ensure all new commencements of tenancies for individuals that have been rehoused because of domestic violence are referred immediately on commencement of tenancy to the Sanctuary Scheme or a protocol to be created in order to assess need.
- Allocation of properties should take into account potential security needs of the tenant if domestic abuse or similar issues are the reason for the move e.g. consideration should be given as to whether the property is suitable for the full range of Sanctuary measures available.
- Health Professionals should be informed that a child/family that they are currently involved with is known to MARAC; offered support and advice with any safeguarding aspects of the case and offered safeguarding supervision to the professional involved. (Sheffield Children’s NHSFT)
- CPS and SYP to liaise regarding ensuring that case summary supplied to CPS contain information regarding risk level, history of the case, and involvement in the MARAC process and that this information is communicated appropriately to the courts.
- SYP should review their processes for moving address tags to ensure that these follow vulnerable people when necessary.
- Training needs should be audited among Probation Offender Managers working with Domestic Abuse perpetrators – a specific need may be increased awareness of the importance of effective management of perpetrators in order to reduce risk to victims of domestic abuse including post separation.
- DACT to offer a training session for Magistrates on MARAC and its role in case managing victims who are at high risk of serious harm or homicide, including learning from this case.