

Domestic Homicide Review – PCC Funding for Learning Lessons Across the West Midlands

Background

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established on a statutory basis under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). This provision came into force on 13th April 2011; responsibility for undertaking domestic homicide reviews lies with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) within the victim's area of residence. The act states:

DHR means a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by—

(a) a person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or

(b) a member of the same household as himself, held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death.

The recently revised guidance issued in June 2013 has stipulated that where this definition of a domestic homicide is met, then a DHR must be undertaken. No additional resources were made available to CSPs to meet this new statutory requirement.

Incidence of DHRs

The direct costs of undertaking each DHR can vary considerably subject to the scale of the review to be undertaken and the economies of scale variant across CSP areas. The average range has been shown to be between £17,000 to £28,000. Indirect costs for public services include officer time in feeding into the review process through attendance at DHR panels, completion of IMRs and on-going monitoring of recommendations for example.

The following table demonstrates the frequency of DHRs within the West Midlands since April 2011 to present.

CSP Area	Total DHRs commenced since 13.4.11	DHRs completed*
Birmingham	13 ¹	2
Coventry	2	1
Dudley	0	0
Sandwell	4	1
Solihull	1	0
Walsall	4 (+1 suicide and +1 DHR tagged on to a SCR)	1
Wolverhampton	2	1
Total	26	6

¹ Although 13 DHRs have been commenced in Birmingham, the Home Office has agreed to 1 being decommissioned

*DHRs completed and submitted to the Home Office for approval

There is a compelling economic case for the prevention of domestic homicide. The costs to the public purse arising from homicide are well documented with an average cost of over £1million per murder. Separate to the substantial financial cost however, is the loss of life to victims and the immeasurable costs to families devastated by these events.

Rationale for Research

Heads of Community Safety (HOCS) across the 7 Local Authority areas in the West Midlands, agreed on the benefits of commissioning a piece of work which would develop more collaborative practice across agencies to reduce the number of deaths occurring; through learning lessons from the DHRs undertaken since April 2011. West Midlands can take a proactive approach to identifying areas for improvement to cut the number of deaths and substantially reduce the costs involved.

There are now 26 DHRs either concluded or at various stages of completion across the WMPFA which are detailed in the table above. From the DHRs completed, there are a total of 55 recommendations which are currently being taken forward independently of one another; an identification of common themes and clarity on required policy or practice change within an organisation will carry greater weight if the call for change applies across all 7 Local Authority areas, or even if endorsed directly by the PCC.

Work at a national level has not yet been undertaken to collate common themes arising out of DHRs. Whilst there are likely to be clear lessons emanating from this work, once completed, there will be tangible benefits of understanding where these common themes are present across the WMPFA and where a potential change in policy and practice across the region in response, will identify domestic violence victims and reduce their vulnerability. The PCC has stated that there will be an expectation from partners to implement the recommendations that come out of the research.

Wolverhampton as the lead authority is required to oversee commissioning arrangements on behalf of the 7 CSPs within the WMPFA. Anticipated costs for commissioning the initial phase of this work is £20,000. A regional dissemination event of findings will follow completion of the research with local dissemination events to engage key partners.