Item 2

6th June 2023

Glasgow City Council

Environment and Liveable Neighbourhoods City Policy Committee

Report by George Gillespie, Executive Director, Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability

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Expansion of ASSIST (Advocacy, Support, Safety, Information Services Together)

Purpose of Report:
To provide the committee with an update on the expansion of ASSIST.

Recommendations:

To note the content of the report.

Ward No(s):	Citywide: ✓
Local member(s) advised: Yes ☐ No✓	consulted: Yes ☐ No ✓

1. Introduction

The Advocacy, Support, Safety, Information Services Together (ASSIST) was established by the Community Safety Partnership in 2004 and transferred to Glasgow City Council in 2006. ASSIST is a specialist domestic abuse advocacy and support service focused on reducing risk to and improving the safety of victims of domestic abuse.

ASSIST supports victims of domestic abuse where a person has been charged or is likely to be charged with a domestic abuse related crime. The abuse might be historical, recent, or ongoing and the perpetrator may be a current or an ex-partner. The length of the relationship does not matter. ASSIST ensures that all referred victims of domestic abuse; women, children and men, are safe, informed and supported throughout their involvement with the criminal justice system.

ASSIST has been funded by the Scottish Government since 2004, originally in Glasgow, rolling out to the legacy Strathclyde area in 2012 incorporating 12 Local Authorities. In 2022 additional funding was received from the Scottish Government's Victim Centred Approach Funding stream (VCAF) to provide the service in Dumfries and Galloway, creating the opportunity to expand the service in the West of Scotland and thereby to 45% of Scotland's population.

2. The Scale of the Challenge

According to Police Scotland[1] recorded data in 2021-22, there were 118 recorded incidents of domestic abuse crimes per 10,000 population in Scotland. Glasgow city had the third highest incident rate of any Scottish local authority, with 147 recorded incidents per 10,000 population, the highest was Dundee City (172), followed by West Dunbartonshire (161).

In Scotland in 2021-22 there were 64,807 incidents [1] of domestic abuse recorded by Police Scotland, a decrease of 1% compared to the previous year. This is the first year this figure has shown a decrease since 2015-16. Where gender was recorded, 81% of incidents involved a female victim and a male accused, while 15% of incidents involved a male victim and a female accused. In the remaining 4% of cases, the victim and accused were the same gender.

In Glasgow in 2021-22, 9,314 domestic abuse incidents were recorded by Police Scotland. There is general acceptance that domestic abuse incidents are underreported to the police. We know that the people who suffer from domestic abuse are usually women and girls, and evidence suggests that they can live with domestic abuse for 2-3 years and experience 50 episodes of abuse before seeking

[1]chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2022/11/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2021 22/documents/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2021-22/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2021-22/govscot%3Adocument/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2021-22.pdf

2. SafeLives (2015), Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14. Bristol: SafeLives - https://safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/about-domestic-abuse/how-long-do-people-live-domestic-abuse-and-when-do-they-get

help.[2] Police Scotland record a report of domestic abuse every 9 minutes across Scotland.

3. The Impact of Covid Pandemic

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 called for robust contingency planning arrangements to be put in place for all services supporting people who experience domestic abuse. Research has shown that the restrictions on movement and increased social isolation during the pandemic led to a significant rise across the UK in Gender-Based violence, and increased risks of harm for domestic abuse survivors.

The impact of COVID on the criminal justice system continues to be felt. Pre-pandemic, ASSIST would have expected to be carrying around 700 open cases at any one time. This figure currently stands at about 1,100, representing an increase of around 57%. This is largely due to the delays in the court system; ASSIST cases are not closed until a court case is concluded. Clients are subsequently more likely to have multiple cases proceeding through court at any one time, meaning that this increase in client numbers doesn't necessarily reflect the total increase in the service's workload.

4. ASSIST Operations

Our activities are linked to our anticipated outcomes as follows:

- **Outcome 1** – victims have improved health and wellbeing.
  Every aspect of our work can be linked, directly or indirectly, to improving the health and wellbeing of victims and their children. Improved safety also improves health and wellbeing by decreasing the risk of physical injury, improving immediate circumstances and addressing the detrimental psychological impact that abuse has on individuals and family functioning. The opportunity to reflect, disclose and engage in dialogue about the abuse also allows for health and wellbeing to improve. We offer a flexible approach which acknowledges the intersectionality of health needs. We advocate, share, and gather information about victims and their children in settings where their health and wellbeing may be compromised, and safety plan around specific actions to address health needs.

- **Outcome 2** – victims feel safer
  Safety is central to every contact, every decision, and the overall structure of the service. We offer every client the opportunity to complete a risk assessment - the DASH RIC, (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist) with an Advocacy Worker skilled in its use. This provides the best chance to assess the risk of further harm/homicide accurately and reliably, and then safety plan to address this risk. We represent high-risk victims and their children at MARAC, (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) giving us the best opportunity to increase feelings of safety and help create a meaningful

safety plan. Our dual focus on court advocacy ensures that the court hears the victim's voice and can make informed decisions with that information around safety and protective measures. We have well-established relationships with all relevant branches of the criminal justice system with whom we work to access available safety measures.

- **Outcome 3 – victims feel better informed**
  One of our core tasks is sharing information with victims. This includes explaining the processes they are involved in and the choices available to them as a result, as well as information specific to them (e.g., court dates, court outcomes, special measures, bail conditions, MARAC outcomes). We also offer victims the chance to understand more about coercive control and how this might manifest in their own relationships.

- **Outcome 4 – victims have an improved experience of the criminal justice system/process**
  ASSIST advocacy workers support clients from the time of reporting until the conclusion of the case and maintain links with the relevant agencies. We also make sure that other agencies are aware of the criminal justice process so resources and assessments can be adjusted to reflect the associated risk. We offer a specialist advocacy service for children who are cited witnesses in domestic abuse cases. The service focusses on bringing the whole family through the criminal justice process in the best way possible, helping to mitigate the well-documented risk of the retraumatising effect of the criminal justice system. We also offer this enhanced service to young victims, recognising that their unique support needs require a more responsive, flexible service.

- **Outcome 5 – Victims can rebuild their lives**
  We aim to work with victims to help them to become independent and safe, and to enable them to regain control over their lives with practical advice and support. We create an exit safety plan with victims where it's agreed that a case is ready to close. Underpinning case closure, is a closure risk assessment, this represents a chance to look at how their experiences can be seen in the context of a positive imagined future. At closure, we look to signpost onto recovery services for victims and children. Working in small local teams mean we have current knowledge of local services available, as well as national resources/ services.

5. Expansion of ASSIST

ASSIST has been developing the service in Dumfries and Galloway service since early summer 2022, fostering new relationships with our strategic statutory and non-statutory partners at a local level. We met with key partners, including Police Scotland; Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal services (COPFs), Health and Social Care Partnership services (HSCP), Scottish Courts and Tribunal Services (SCTS), the Judiciary and partners from front line Violence Against Women Services in the third sector. We also began the recruitment process for the additional staffing group that would be co-located with Police Scotland in their Dumfries & Galloway office. The additional funding allowed us to recruit for 1

Service Manager, 1 Lead Advocacy Worker, 3 Advocacy Workers and one Children & Young Person Advocacy Worker (CYPAW) and an additional Administration Worker.

ASSIST launched the service in Dumfries & Galloway on Monday 6th March 2023 for all victims with criminal domestic abuse cases going through Stranraer Sheriff Court, with a planned roll out of the service on a staged basis across the area as the full team come into post. Two new staff have completed their induction training and the others will be complete by June 2023. This expansion will further contribute to all our anticipated outcomes as we replicate the full service that is provided in the 12 other local authority areas.

6. Institutional Advocacy

ASSIST continue to attend relevant national and local multiagency meetings and strategic forums to advocate institutionally in relation to systemic issues that impact on ASSIST clients and other victims across Scotland. We worked with partners to improve our communications to ensure that agencies over and above the police know that they can make a referral for any victim who has a case in criminal court. This allowed ASSIST to support victims who had not accepted a referral at the time of the incident and this was particularly important during Covid when less support was available and court delays were impacting on safety.

The service has worked with a range of partners to ensure continued improvement to the application of the legislative framework on coercive control in respect of adults and children. We liaise with Scottish Government, the National Prosecutor for Domestic Abuse and Police Scotland, particulally around Non Hassment Orders (NHOs).We have created a process to record the number of NHOs requests that we make and whether these are granted for adult victims and their children. We review this information with our colleagues in COPFs to inform future developments.

7. Impact of ASSIST

One of the best ways to demonstrate how individual clients experienced the service is via the feedback provided to us:

One client told us

> "…staff had gone above and beyond to support me by making sure that I was aware of pending court dates, and by gathering my views prior to those court dates"…having the support made me feel safe, included and able to be part of decision making".

Our practice model recognises the victim as the expert in their situation and that their assessment of risk and their hopes for the future form the basis of the relationship. The independent nature of the role gives victims the confidence that the service is only driven by an interest in their safety and wellbeing, so this feedback offers us reassurance that clients experience the service in this way.

A client told us:

"You were the first person I spoke with about what had been happening and the first person I felt safe to talk to. I'm now in the best place I've been in years."

This comment at closure represents the opportunity to reflect on their journey with ASSIST, identifying all that they have achieved and managed. It also demonstrates the link between victims feeling supported and safe enough to disclose abuse and being in a position to start to rebuild their lives with confidence.

A client explained:

"*I had trust in the criminal justice system, but once the police had taken my statement, I felt the case didn't relate to me anymore, that it had become property of the court. ASSIST demystified that process for me and made me feel included again*."

This comment shows how impactful the support and information provided by ASSIST can be in achieving our anticipated outcomes. Victims cannot rebuild their lives if their experience of services reflects their coercive and controlling relationships, so feeling informed and included is important to evidence.

Another client said

"What a relief, I can hardly believe it! Thank you so much for all your help and for making it possible for me to tell the court that I am looking for ongoing protection from him for myself and my children."

Again, this shows that ASSIST keep the interests and views of clients and their children at the centre of our practice, making a difference to their experience of the criminal justice system.

8. Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

Financial:	No
Legal:	No
Personnel:	NO
Procurement:	
Council Strategic Plan:	Reduce Poverty and inequality in our communities.
Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:	No

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-25? Please specify.	Outcome No. 4
What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?	no significant impact
Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio-economic disadvantage.	Yes The social and economic costs of domestic abuse are significant. There is the physical, emotional, and mental cost to the individual and any of their children; there is an economic cost to services in responding to domestic abuse; there is an impact on communities disrupting community and intra- familial relationships, isolating people from social networks, encouraging negative norms and perpetuating social exclusion.

Climate Impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:	No
What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?	No
Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?	No

Privacy and Data Protection Impacts:

Are there any potential data protection impacts as a result of this report	No

If Yes, please confirm that Yes a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) has been carried out

9 Recommendations

Committee are asked to note the content of the report.