

# Report on Force Control Room Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) Initiative for the Humberside Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner<sup>1</sup>

## Executive Summary

### Executive Summary:

- Force Control Room (FCR) IDVA is a specialist domestic abuse support initiative, which co-locates an independent IDVA service (provided by The Blue Door) with Humberside Police FCR. Where 999 and 101 calls relate to domestic abuse, callers are offered a referral to the FCR IDVA by the initial call handler. If this referral is accepted by the client, details are passed on to FCR IDVA for onward action.
- Between 2019-2022, the FCR IDVA service received 10,449 referrals, with an increased year on year referral rate of 36%. 85% of service users were female.
- Wider studies have highlighted the value of co-locating IDVAs and emphasize the importance of preserving privacy and independence from statutory services. This increases the likelihood that victims will report future instances of domestic abuse, reducing repeat victimisation and increasing awareness of IDVA services in the communities.
- This evaluation used a focus group of IDVA FCR staff, alongside a survey of FCR IDVA service users and routinely collected referral data to examine and explore strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats.
- Developments to FCR IDVA include: 1) creating a script for FCR call handlers to better understand and explain the service on offer (and obtain clear consent from the caller); 2) increased sharing of police data about the FCR calls with the IDVA team; 3) more flexible location working and regular team meetings to share experiences and discuss service improvements and 4) improvement in the direct referral route for IDVAs to victim services accessed via the police.
- Lack of clarity and understanding by some FCR call handlers can undermine victim engagement. In addition, the nature of the work is increasingly complex, not least around vexatious counter-allegations and the increase in call volumes. These issues can be alleviated by paying closer attention to staff wellbeing and working conditions which may help improve staff retention/recruitment.
- Co-location is seen as very effective. Good working relationships facilitate better decision-making and speedier interactions. FCR IDVA can be proactive with police dealings with clients. For example, FCR IDVA speaking to officers on way to a call to relay important information/nuance.

### Operational Recommendations\*:

- FCR IDVA develop and deliver continuous training in response to the large number and turnover of call handlers. Training to include what the service offers (and what it does not). It is not currently always clear that the call handler or clients understand this fully. Clarity from the outset would ensure more informed caller engagement and an improved initial response in the FCR.
- Recruit additional staff – especially around busy points in the week (e.g. Monday / Thursday). Yorkshire and the Humber have the highest recorded rates of domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales, yet only have 42% of the recommended IDVA provision for the area (Safelives, 2021).
- Introduce regular group meetings for FCR IDVA team members – benefits are two-fold – information sharing and service development time. This would also support staff emotional health and well-being.
- Formalise flexible working options to support recruitment by enabling flexibility to work from different locations in the region on some shifts provided regular co-work in the FCR is retained.
- Expedite training in 'Smart contact' to facilitate speedier FCR IDVA staff on-boarding.

\*Based on focus group interviews with staff and survey responses from client group and informed by wider scoping review of existing research and other co-located services.

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### **Service Development Recommendations\*:**

- Between 2019 and 2022 there were 75,172 calls to the FCR related to DA. Approximately 1 in 7 (14%) were referred to FCR IDVAs and about 1 in 5 (20%) of these were then onward referred to community support. This means that 1 in 34 people who call the FCR about DA accessed support in the community.
- The reasons for this attrition are unknown but are likely to include some combination of the following: 1) they decline the offer to speak to a FCR IDVA, 2) they are already accessing appropriate services, 3) they are reluctant to engage with services accessed via a police route, 4) the role of the FCR IDVA is not explained effectively by the control handler.
- The introduction of regular reporting of FCR data on Domestic Abuse to the IDVA team for the purposes of improving the pipeline of contact from FCR to IDVA to community referral – with a particular emphasis on the large population of people calling the FCR who don't engage with the FCR IDVA team.
- FCR IDVA team to create and provide a 'script' for 101 call takers. This would ensure that all clients get the same information and correct message. Additional benefit here of ensuring consent from the caller is fully informed and their decision is respected.
- Introduce service outcome measures with clients rather than providers. For example, a follow up contact with clients who access FCR IDVA for service development.
- There is potential to explore Rapid Video Response (RVR) to provide expedited face-2-face engagement whilst police enroute to response. A report on the effectiveness of RVR is imminent from Kent Constabulary. This could be an opportunity for STAR funding.
- There is currently no perpetrator referral process via the FCR / IDVA FCR. This could be explored as a further avenue to safeguard victims – though care needed to ensure emphasis on victim support / empowerment is not diminished.
- Clarify process for updating community services when a new call is received from an existing client and cross-referencing as appropriate with ISVAs.

**\*Findings from the survey in this report were based a very small number of respondents. This was by necessity to ensure the safeguarding of the respondents but leaves a gap in understanding about what success looks like for clients.**