

## **Specialist Domestic Violence Courts Project – update March 2022**

### Current position

The report on the observations on SDACs carried out by Midland Chase & Midland Arden Regions was due to be published on 8 March 2022, International Women's Day.

However, on Friday 4 March, the decision was made to defer the publishing of the report in the light of the news agenda being focussed, quite rightly, on the Ukraine and the Sarah Everard anniversary. In addition, there was another Government report on Violence Against Women & Girls due to be published on 8 March and ours was likely to get lost in the 'noise'.

### Report

- It contains 18 recommendations, some of which overlap with those in Dame Vera's report in 2018 but some new ones too.
- It will contain a foreword from Dame Vera Baird and Louisa Rolfe, Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police
- Will have the SIGBI and UKPAC logos on the front.
- Some good news in the last few weeks is that another report has been produced! Swindon Soroptimists carried out some observations in 2018 at Swindon and Chippenham courts but the report was never published – they were just told that the information was sensitive so it couldn't be published. One of the Soroptimists who was involved asked again recently and was told that the report had been finished and we now have a copy! Unsurprisingly, probably, some of the recommendations are the same as those in the Northumbrian report and the Midlands report.
- There are five key themes emerging across all three reports:
  - the need for better training to be provided for criminal justice professionals
  - the courts should recognise the important role that Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) play in supporting victims of domestic abuse
  - victims appearing in court should be made fully aware of their options regarding special measures
  - the importance of Victim Personal Statements
  - the improper use of sentencing guidelines and the creation of an appropriate cultural environment for hearings, ensuring they are equitable and impartial for all parties in a timely way.
- We're working on getting some publicity for the Midlands report and will now include the Wiltshire report in that publicity too – notable that the same findings are made in all 3 locations, Northumbria, Midlands and Wiltshire.
- Liz Batten has drafted a press release and has been liaising with the Press Managers for both Dame Vera and Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. She is currently speaking to the Women's Editor at the Independent with the aim of having a piece printed.

### Future observations

Moving forward, we have at least 4 other Regions plus the London collective of Clubs (covers 3 Regions) who have had training. Some have already started the observations and others are at various stages of the planning process.

The aim is to complete the observations by the end of 2022. If all these observations go ahead, we will have covered a significant proportion of the country – should give more weight to the reports and recommendations and hopefully changes will be made.

There will be a report consolidating all the findings – we have a PhD Student to do the analysis and the report on the observations in 2022.

A Support Group has been set up for representatives from all interested Regions – next meeting 2 April 2022, 9am-10am.

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