

5 July 2011		ITEM 6
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
STRATEGY TO COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS		
Report of: Jo Olsson, Corporate Director of Children, Education and Families		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No	
Accountable Head of Service: Barbara Foster, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Jo Olsson, Corporate Director of Children, Education and Families		
This report is public		
Purpose of Report: To inform members of the National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls and the aims of local work		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The members of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the National Action Plan and the aims of local work.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

2.1.1 In March the Government published a National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls, available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/vawg. This has introduced the abbreviation VAWG, which is used in this report.

2.1.2 Overall, the strategy is aiming to change the attitudes, behaviour and occurrence of VAWG through awareness raising, tackling the root causes, emphasising the unacceptability and ensuring that all staff working with vulnerable children are aware of the tools and systems available to them. The report is presented here in précis.

2.1.3 “Changing attitudes, behaviours and practices” has the following actions:

- (1) Deliver a cross-government VAWG Communications Strategy
- (2) Launch a youth prevention campaign to tackle teenage relationship violence
- (3) Develop education and awareness-raising campaigns on rape and sexual assault
- (4) Improve understanding of the incidence and reporting of false allegations of rape
- (5) Improve the reporting on the number of successful rape prosecutions in the UK
- (6) Take action to protect children from excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation
- (7) Hold a forum between the VAWG inter-ministerial group and representatives from the media and music industries
- (8) Work with the National Union of Journalists to produce guidance for journalists relating to VAWG
- (9) Explore the prevalence and effects of VAWG on vulnerable groups, including BME communities, and work to raise awareness of VAWG both within these groups and with frontline practitioners and local decision makers
- (10) Raise awareness of forced marriage and challenge attitudes which condone this practice through media activities, training events and community engagement
- (11) Support community engagement work to tackle female genital mutilation (FGM)
- (12) Raise awareness of VAWG within the Armed Forces
- (13) Update the British Crime Survey (BCS) to improve understanding of attitudes towards VAWG
- (14) Meet with the major supermarkets and relevant business organisations to discuss how to promote personal safety for lone workers
- (15) Work with the EHRC to promote the new Equality Duty and produce guidance covering issues in relation to gender equality for local areas

2.1.4 “Early intervention” has the following actions:

- (16) Establish an independent VAWG Advisory Group to advise the Department for Education
- (17) Run a national campaign to support and help turn around the lives of families with multiple problems
- (18) Develop training for health visitors to provide support to families when they suspect violence against women or children may be a factor

- (19) Implement findings from the independent Munro Review to improve child protection
- (20) Encourage the teaching of sexual consent within the curriculum
- (21) Reduce sexual and sexist bullying in schools
- (22) Reduce access of children to harmful material on the internet
- (23) Establish a working group of the Home Secretary's Guns, Gangs and Knives Roundtable to develop proposals to address VAWG and female involvement in gangs

2.1.5 "Getting the first response right" has the following actions:

- (24) Evaluate the police specialist unit approach to investigating rape
- (25) Identify ways to improve communication with victims of sexual violence
- (26) Learn from how the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FATC) operates to see how its methods of investigation of stalking cases could be applied to mainstream policing
- (27) Work with Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Crown Prosecution Service and specialist organisations to ensure that best practice guidance on the investigation and prosecution of stalking cases is disseminated through a series of regional events
- (28) Coordinate a National Stalking Strategy Group to support the ACPO Stalking Working Group
- (29) Learn from how police forces in other countries respond to VAWG and work with our police partners to consider how effective approaches might be applied in England and Wales
- (30) Work with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to produce public health guidance on preventing domestic violence
- (31) Share with partners and local areas best practice in the use of integrated offender management (IOM) to tackle domestic violence related offending
- (32) Introduce VAWG training for health professionals who carry out Work Capability Assessments
- (33) Introduce an automatic 13 week deferral period for victims of domestic violence who claim Jobseeker's Allowance
- (34) Work on the development of learning programmes for the Police on sexual and domestic violence, including FGM, forced marriage and honour-based violence (HBV)
- (35) Ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) review of victim support commitments includes consideration of communication with, and support of, victims of VAW

2.1.6 "Provision of services". This part of the report has the guiding principle of providing adequate levels of support where violence occurs and the following actions relate to frontline services, funding and sustainability of the sector:

- (36) Allocate £28 million of Home Office funding over four years for specialist services and consider mechanisms to devolve VAWG monies in the next Spending Review

- (37) Provide Home Office funding over the Spending Review period for continued training and quality assurance for Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)
- (38) Allocate £900,000 for national helplines for each year of the Spending Review period
- (39) Use proceeds from the victim surcharge to give existing rape crisis centres stable, long-term funding, and to establish new centres where there are gaps in provision
- (39a) Allocate three-year funding to existing rape crisis centres by means of a centrally-run grants scheme
- (39b) Address gaps in service provision by developing new rape crisis centres
- (40) Develop an effective and sustainable funding solution for victims of domestic violence with no recourse to public funds (the Sojourner Project)
- (41) Consider the findings of a study examining the impact of transferring commissioning and budgetary responsibility for forensic sexual assault work from the Police to the health service
- (42) Build capacity amongst Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to establish local initiatives and services to raise awareness of and tackle forced marriage
- (43) Explore options for providing longer term support to victims of forced marriage once they have been repatriated to the UK
- (44) Support local authorities and specialist organisations, in partnership with the Local Government Association, to work together to provide local support for women and girls affected by abuse
- (45) Work to ensure that the asylum system is as gender-sensitive as possible

2.1.7 “Effective practice and training” has the following action points:

- (46) Fund the development of a Diploma in the Forensic and Clinical Aspects of Sexual Assault
- (47) Build on the training available to Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) to ensure a minimum quality standard for ISVA support, and provide a framework for qualification of ISVAs
- (48) Review and update guidance on the operation of Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- (49) Launch e-learning training for GPs on violence against women and children (VAWC)
- (50) Review forced marriage e-learning tool for frontline practitioners
- (51) Review use and effectiveness of multi-agency guidelines for dealing with forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- (52) Review the findings from the Honour Based Violence (HBV) local mapping exercise and identify models of effective practice to share with local areas, particularly those where awareness and activity to tackle forms of HBV is low
- (53) Support information sharing and effective practice in the criminal justice system through a network of Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) specialist co-ordinators with responsibility for implementing Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) policy locally
- (54) Continue to deliver training for specialist and dedicated prosecutors in VAW
- (55) Produce a universal academic module (six days duration) for frontline professionals on VAWG

(56) Carry out further research on the health aspects of violence against women and children (VAWC)

2.1.8 “Partnership working” is introduced with the guiding principle to work in partnership to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families. “Through working in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families, we will:

- improve outcomes for victims of VAWG locally by supporting community and voluntary groups to take a stand against violence and helping them understand how to do this effectively;
- strengthen the role of the community in tackling VAWG by encouraging people to help themselves and each other using community-based initiatives such as community coaching; and
- improve the life chances of victims of VAWG overseas by working with our European and international partners to tackle it on a collaborative basis.”

2.1.9 “Working with sector organisations and communities” has the following action points:

- (57) Help local areas understand the overall benefit of investing in VAWG services
- (58) Develop a needs assessment toolkit on sexual violence to provide a local dataset that can inform local statutory assessments such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- (59) Work with eight local areas on a project exploring how tackling VAWG can be supported by community projects
- (59a) Make the effective practice coming out of the participatory budgeting and community coaching pilots available to local areas so they can decide whether these approaches would work for them or could be adapted to their local circumstance

2.1.10 “International work” is recommended to:

- (60) Continue to strongly support the ratification and lobby for the full implementation of the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol
- (60a) Continue to promote the domestic implementation of CEDAW
- (61) Take action to tackle VAWG in conflict and post conflict countries through the implementation of the UK National Action Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, in partnership with the Department for International Development (DfID) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD)
- (62) Address VAWG through the Government’s forthcoming Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS)
- (63) Ensure that the UK’s humanitarian action, including both assistance and protection, prevents and responds to VAWG

- (64) Work with UN Women to ensure it focuses on key priorities including VAWG and the delivery of the Millennium Development Goals and delivers real progress for women and girls worldwide
- (65) Continue to support the role and contribution of the Council of Europe (CoE) in preventing and responding to VAWG
- (66) Continue to support the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015
- (67) Scale up our activity to tackle VAWG in at least 15 of the poorest countries (includes countries in the UK 1325 National Action Plan)
- (68) Enhance the UK's international leadership on tackling VAWG overseas
- (69) Enable our staff to develop their expertise to support and develop our work on tackling VAWG and to transfer their knowledge across country programmes and sectors
- (70) Work with partners to improve and communicate the evidence base on VAWG and understanding of effective interventions
- (71) Improve the international, including EU response, to forced marriage
- (72) Review results of EU Fundamental Rights Agency's survey on VAW across EU member states and consider any recommendations

2.1.11 "Justice outcomes and risk reduction" has the guiding principle to take action to reduce the risk to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Through this work we will:

- increase the numbers of women and girls who have the confidence to access the criminal justice system by seeking continued improvement in the effectiveness of its response to them;
- strengthen the framework to protect victims by ensuring the application of current legislative powers and risk management processes are both understood and effective; and
- increase the number of offenders breaking out of a cycle of offending by ensuring the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes.

2.1.12 "Legislation and justice outcomes" has the action points to:

- (73) Conduct a 12 month pilot of Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs)
- (74) Consider the case for implementing section 60 of the Family Law Act 1996
- (75) Implement section 9 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act (2004), putting in place statutory domestic violence homicide reviews
- (76) Support women affected by domestic violence through the courts system
- (77) Consult on a revised definition of domestic violence to take into account younger victims
- (78) Address issues relating to prosecution, domestic violence and ethnicity
- (79) Produce guidelines for prosecutors dealing with potential cases of FGM
- (80) Review impact of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- (81) Address the issue of cyberstalking by ensuring that the links are made between the different agencies that are working on stalking, e-crime and communications data

- (82) Take steps to validate how VAW prosecutions are conducted
- (83) Widen the notification requirements for registered sex offenders

2.1.13 “Reducing the risk for victims and rehabilitating offenders” has the action points to:

- (84) Ensure that local areas are fully equipped to continue to operate MARACs as part of their wider response to tackling domestic violence. (MARAC is Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)
- (85) Consider whether MARACs could be used to identify and support high-risk victims of rape and sexual assault
- (86) Support the continued development of effective community-based alternatives to custody for women offenders and women at risk of offending
- (87) Provide information on services to support women offenders and women at risk of offending who have been affected by abuse or violence
- (88) Deliver the Women Awareness Staff Programme (WASP) to voluntary and community sector partners working with women offenders and women at risk of offending in the community

2.1.14 The National Action Plan is to be reviewed every six months. “The next steps with this strategy will be:

- to engage with local areas and key partners and explore what this strategy means for them;
- to enable local areas and key partners to work up their plans for implementation and delivery of the prevention, provision, and partnership approaches set out in the strategy;
- to encourage local areas to work together in the joint design and commissioning of services; and
- to continue to develop and publish the evidence base on what works.”

2.1.15 This initiative has been welcomed across the statutory social care and voluntary services network. Where criticisms have been made, they have included that the emphasis is disproportionately on domestic abuse rather than on all forms of violence and exploitation, where women and girls are victims. This includes trafficking, prostitution, all violence associated with ‘honour’, forced pregnancy and abortion. For example, government research has shown that 75% of women in prostitution describe becoming involved before the age of eighteen years when they were therefore victims of child abuse and 45% of women in prostitution report being the victims of child abuse earlier in their childhoods. (*Home Office, A Co-ordinated Prostitution Strategy and Summary of Responses to ‘Paying the Price’ 2006*). Another criticism is the Violence Against Women Action Plan uses statistics based on the proportion of rape cases which are taken to Court rather than initial reports.

3. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS

3.1 Local Strategy

3.1.1 The work to combat violence against women is on the agenda of the Thurrock Children & Young People's Plan and the Service Plan for Children's Social Care with the aim of developing our service provision. At present, our work is based upon the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Procedures which cover all aspects of child abuse whether to girls or boys. This is widely understood to include the physical, emotional, sexual abuse of children. However, girls are the more vulnerable in terms of the following forms of abuse:

- Child victims of trafficking, i.e. 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat, or use of force or other forms of coercion for the purpose of sexual or commercial exploitation or domestic servitude' (AFRUCA – Africans United Against Child Abuse and NSPCC definition used in Southend, Essex and Thurrock Procedures)
- Female Genital Mutilation - 'a collective term for illegal procedures which include the removal of part of or all external female genitalia for cultural or non therapeutic reasons. The practice is not required by any religion and is medically unnecessary, painful and has serious health consequences at the time it is carried out and in later life '(Southend, Essex and Thurrock Procedures). It is a very specific offence to undertake, assist or condone this form of child abuse under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003.
- Forced Marriage – 'is a marriage without the valid consent of both parties, where duress is a factor' ('A Choice by Right' 2000 quoted in Southend, Essex and Thurrock Procedures). The Forced Marriage (Child Protection) Act of 2007 protects both adults and children at risk of forced marriage and offers protection for those who have already been forced into marriage. It is known that this can involve prosecution for threatening behaviour, assault, kidnap, theft of Passport), threats to kill, imprisonment or murder. Sexual intercourse without consent is rape, regardless of whether this occurs within marriage or not'. (Southend, Essex and Thurrock Procedures).
- Honour Based Abuse – 'Violence or abuse in the name of honour covers a variety of behaviours (including crimes), mainly but not exclusively against women where the person being punished by their family and/or community for a perceived transgression against the 'honour' of the family or community..... a child could be the victim of violence/abuse in the name of honour for what an outside person may perceive to be a 'minor' issue. (Southend, Essex and Thurrock Procedures)

- Women and children in Thurrock can use all local authority services in addition to the excellent services of Women’s Aid and SERICC (South Essex Rape & Incest Crisis Centre). The Council has also received a grant from the Eastern Region Safeguarding Project (a combined group of all councils in the eastern region) which is being used to create groups run by social workers for victims of domestic abuse, including children, teenagers and adults of both gender, especially in families where there is a history of domestic abuse but the family remain together. The summary sheet of children subject to child protection services in June 2011 is attached.
- The Children’s Social Care Teams are committed to maintaining and improving high standards in all aspects of service delivery, including (as set out in the Service Plan) identifying the prevalence of female genital mutilation in Thurrock and continuing the joint training with the police and schools on forced marriage and trafficking.
- Assistance elsewhere within the Council exists in the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group which is co-ordinated by colleagues in Community Safety and, together with them; we have commissioned Professor Liz Kelly CBE, who is Professor of Sexualised Violence at London Metropolitan University where she is also Director of the Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit. Professor Kelly will assist us in drawing up a local strategy to combat violence against women and girls.

4. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

4.1 None

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

5.1 None

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: Funké Nana
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There are no financial implications within this report.

6.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: Lindsey Marks
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The National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls requires Local Authorities and key partners to prepare and have plans for the implementation and delivery of the prevention, provision and partnership approaches set out in the strategy. Local areas are encouraged to work together with the joint designing and commissioning of services

6.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: Samson DeAlyn
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The Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity. A key aspect of equality legislation is the requirement to promote gender equality. As this report is 'to note', there are no specific diversity implications to highlight.

6.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 Members are asked to note the National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls and the aims of local work.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Child Protection Profile June 2011

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