

6 February 2020		ITEM: 5
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Michelle Cunningham, Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Daren Spring, Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers, Director of Environment and Highways		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the areas of work associated with the Thurrock Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2017-2020 and the proposed priorities for the refreshed strategy commencing March 2020-2023.

We know that the impact of VAWG are far reaching and can be seen across a wide range of council services, including community safety, education, housing, employment and health. This is not a one agency solution, it will require many to help change this trend. Whilst this strategy is focused on the needs of women and girls as a deliberate response to the disproportionate impact of the crimes of domestic and sexual violence and abuse on them, it also fully recognises and responds to the fact that men are victims of these crimes too. Similarly, it recognises that not all perpetrators are men.

The Thurrock Community Safety Partnership is committed to meeting the needs of both women and men by tackling all forms of exploitation and abuse across Thurrock and by delivering protection and legal redress for all

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Agree the vision of the VAWG strategy for 2020-2023 'Making VAWG Everyone's Business - Protecting residents of all genders by working in partnership to prevent and respond to VAWG crimes and associated behaviours'.**

1.2 Request that members champion the VAWG agenda and raise the profile of the services that are available to Thurrock residents.

2. Introduction and Background

National & Local Framework

- 2.1 The role of local authorities in the prevention of crime and disorder became a legal requirement under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. To meet this obligation, Community Safety Partnerships (as they are now known) were created, ensuring that the named 'responsible authorities' worked together on a statutory basis. Locally the VAWG work stream is a priority of Thurrock Community Safety Partnership and is delivered by the Thurrock VAWG Strategic Governance Group.
- 2.2 VAWG has multiple and long lasting impact on victims as well as society as a whole. The latest figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales show little change in the prevalence of domestic abuse in recent years. In the year ending March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse (1.6 million women and 786,000 men). A higher percentage of adults experienced abuse carried out by a partner or ex-partner (4.2%) than by a family member (2.0%).¹
- 2.3 Women aged 20 to 24 years were more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last year than women aged above 25 years. Adults who were separated or divorced were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse compared with those who were married or civil partnered, cohabiting, single or widowed. Adults who lived in urban areas were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year (6.0%) than those who lived in rural areas (4.2%). In 75% of the domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police in the year ending March 2019, the victim was female.²
- 2.4 Around 2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner³. It is estimated that 4.3 million suffer domestic abuse over their lifetime, 1.2 million women suffer domestic abuse each year and 3.4 million women are victims of sexual violence over their lifetime.

¹ Office of National Statistics: Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019
Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019

² Office for national statistics: Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019

³ Office for national statistics (2016) Compendium – Homicide (average taken over 10 years)

- 2.5 Thurrock Council have approved and implemented two VAWG strategies, the first in 2012, and the second in 2017 using the United Nations VAWG definition 'violence that is directed at a woman disproportionately' this includes a wide range of abusive behaviours including physical, sexual, financial, emotional and psychological abuse.⁴ The Thurrock strategy covers the following forms of VAWG: Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, Stalking, Sexual harassment, Modern day slavery and human trafficking, Domestic violence and abuse, Female genital mutilation (FGM), Forced marriage and so called 'Honour' based abuse. Both strategies have been aligned to support the outcomes of countywide partnership agreements such as the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB), the delivery of the Board's "Joint Commissioning Strategy for Domestic Abuse, 2015-20" as well as the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner's (PFCC) Police and Crime Plan 2016-2020 and Essex Police Crime Prevention Strategy 2018-2021.
- 2.6 Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established on a statutory basis through the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). A DHR is a multi-agency 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 person to whom they were related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship, or a member of the same household as themselves. They are also undertaken where a victim took their own life (suicide) and the circumstances give rise to concern, for example it emerges that there was coercive controlling behaviour in the relationship. Section 9 of the Act came into force on 13 April 2011 which requires Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to undertake a DHR following a domestic homicide that meets the criteria set. Within Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) it was agreed that this process would be centralised and coordinated by the SET Domestic Abuse team, commencing July 2017.
- 2.7 The number of people killed as a result of domestic violence in the UK is at its highest level in five years. In 2018, 173 people were killed in domestic violence-related homicides, an increase of 32 deaths on 2017. In England and Wales, between April 2014 and March 2017, around three-quarters of victims of domestic killings by a partner, ex-partner or family member were women, while suspects are predominantly male. Whilst both men and women are killed by domestic violence, the vast majority of victims are women.⁵ Between March 2016 and the year ending March 2018, 74% of victims of domestic homicide were female compared with 13% of victims of non-domestic homicide.⁶ Since the introduction of this legislation, Thurrock have not had to conduct a DHR. However the Community Safety Partnership continue to learn from the reviews that have already been published, nationally and across Essex.

⁴ United Nations (1992) CEDAW General Recommendation No 19

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49459674>

⁶ Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2019

National and local strategies

- 2.8 In 2019 the government refreshed the national Ending Violence Against Women and Girls strategy (2016-2020). The vision of 'no woman should live in fear of violence, and every girl should grow up knowing she is safe, so that she can have the best start in life' remains the same.⁷ The refreshed strategy reaffirmed the government commitment to the specific title of VAWG and the need to continue to respond and recognise the gendered nature of these crimes. Government also recognise that men and boys are victims too and therefore published a Male Victims Position Statement alongside the refresh to clarify and strengthen the response to male victims of these crimes, while still recognising the disproportionate impact on women. The VAWG agenda is supported nationally and locally by a number of significant pieces of legislation which aim to protect victims of these crimes.
- 2.9 The current Thurrock VAWG strategy 2017-2020 is nearing its end. There have been a number of key successes of this strategy and notable progression within other internal services that address and have an impact on the reduction of VAWG related crimes and behaviours.
- Southend Essex Thurrock (SET) wide Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA) contract in place from 1st April 2019
 - Outreach support for domestic abuse victims of all genders through the new Community Liaison Officers, now brought in-house within the Housing Safeguarding Team.
 - Participation and contribution to numerous partnership groups such as Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership, Women's Service Action Team, SET Domestic Abuse Board and the Domestic Abuse Best Practice Implementation plan.
 - J9 Domestic Abuse awareness training delivered each year to professionals.
 - 'Challenging myths, changing attitudes' a new training programme tackling the subject of sexual abuse. First piloted the end of 2018, new training dates planned for 2020
 - New internal domestic abuse policy for staff and managers who are seeking advice and support.
 - Promotion of initiatives such as '16 days of activism', the SET wide stalking awareness campaign, International Women's Day and Ask for Angela.
- 2.10 In 2018 Thurrock Council seconded a Domestic Abuse Advisor based within Thurrock Children's Services for 9 months. The success of this role in undertaking direct work with perpetrators of domestic abuse highlighted a gap in this area. This resulted in the permanent role of a Domestic Abuse Interventions Manager in July 2019.⁸

⁷ HM Government: Ending Violence against Women and Girls 2016 – 2020 Strategy Refresh

⁸ Thurrock Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Report and Development Plan 2019

- 2.11 Thurrock Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) respond to all high risk domestic abuse referrals. The repeat referrals over a two year comparison has seen a large reduction in cases returning to MARAC, from 12% down to 3%. Referrals from agencies other than the police have also increased. Victim feedback is very positive.
- 2.12 Thurrock Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has also seen a large reduction in cases with a domestic abuse component. Observing rolling year to date data, figures show that MASH received 7367 referrals into the service. Of these, a total of 2482 referrals had a domestic abuse component. This equates to 33.7% of all referrals and is a marked improvement from the previous figure of 40%. August 2019 data also showed an increase of transfer rate to the Prevention & Support Service, totalling 14.2%. This is a step change down of risk, rather than an escalation of risk, which is a positive trend.⁹

3. Issues Options and Analysis of Options

VAWG conference, strategy title and content consultation

- 3.1 The Community Safety Partnership hosted a VAWG Conference in September 2019. This was an important way to increase awareness of VAWG with professionals across Thurrock and with our countywide partners. A range of topics were presented including:
- Challenging The Invisibility Of Older Survivors Of Domestic Violence And Abuse
 - The Crime of Stalking
 - Young People, Sexting and healthy relationships
 - Trauma informed practice
 - It could happen to anyone (including representation of male victims)
 - Thurrock Perpetrator Engagement Overview
 - Restorative justice: case study
 - Overview of Thurrock Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Sexual Violence and Abuse
- 3.2 Feedback from the day detailed that the speakers and presentations were engaging. Other views included that the day should have focused on women and girls entirely.
- 3.3 A focal element of the day was the consultation workshop with attendees to seek views on the direction of the new strategy and its title. The agreed title and outcome of the consultation was to stay with current international and national terminology: 'Thurrock Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy'. This is the same as the current VAWG strategy and is commonly used internationally and nationally as a title for other VAWG focussed strategies. The

⁹ K Quantrill Team manager: November 2018-4th Dec 2019

consultation reflected the concern that if the VAWG title wasn't retained Thurrock would lose the specific nature of this area of work.

- 3.4 This reinforces the important commitment to VAWG terminology whilst the vision within the strategy 'Making VAWG Everyone's Business - Protecting residents of all genders by working in partnership to prevent and respond to VAWG crimes and associated behaviours' reflects inclusivity for all victims regardless of gender.
- 3.5 The new strategy will be delivered by five themes with supporting objectives. The strategy will be supported by a robust action plan to achieve the themes and objectives outlined.
- 3.6 Positive Communities. Engage our local communities through training and awareness of VAWG crimes and associated behaviours, enabling them to stand up and say 'no' to these crimes in their community
- 3.7 Prevention. Increased awareness and education of all VAWG crimes within schools and across various professions. Implementing safeguarding and harm prevention activities.
- 3.8 Partnership. Effective multi-agency arrangements exploring VAWG crimes and associated behaviours, sharing of information and good practice.
- 3.9 Provision. Support victims of VAWG crimes with the appropriate service for their need
- 3.10 Protection. Appropriate intervention for all individuals displaying concerning behaviours. Seeking sustainable behaviour change in identified perpetrators. Perpetrators are brought to justice.

The draft VAWG strategy 2020-2023 is appendix 2 to this paper.

- 3.11 A range of developments are expected in 2020 locally and nationally that will have an impact on VAWG progress.
- 3.12 Locally, the roll out of Operation Encompass is expected in early 2020. This is a multi-agency approach to give early notification to schools, academies, colleges and nurseries that a child or young person has been present, witnessed or been involved in a domestic abuse incident. Nominated key adults within local schools will receive information from Essex Police and Thurrock Council Children's Services to afford them the opportunity of assessing the needs of the child during the school day and, should it be deemed appropriate to do so, to provide early support.
- 3.13 Project Goldcrest launched only in Thurrock in late 2019 and is expected to gain momentum in 2020. Designed to help young people who have been identified by professionals (such as doctors, teachers, and social workers) who have concerns for the welfare or safety of the young person being at risk from exploitation. If the individual is a victim of a sexual assault and they do not want to report to the police or self refer to the Sexual Abuse Referral

Centre, this project enables them to provide evidence of their experiences, without involving the Police. The samples are kept (anonymously) for 25 years or until the young person is ready to talk to the police about what happened.

- 3.14 A key area of work in helping us with our understanding of sexual violence is the recently completed 'Sexual Violence and Abuse: A Thurrock Joint Strategic Needs Assessment' (JSNA). The needs assessment led by Thurrock Public Health sought to further our understanding of the nature, prevalence and types of sexual violence and abuse occurring locally in Thurrock. This assessment is a unique piece of work, engaging with local survivors and professionals. It is believed to be the first JSNA nationally to solely focus in this depth on sexual violence and abuse. The JSNA made a number of recommendations which are going through a governance process. Once agreed these will impact on the local delivery of sexual violence support and provision pathways.
- 3.15 Nationally, the Domestic Abuse Bill aimed at supporting victims and their families and pursuing offenders will continue its progress through parliament and is expected to receive royal assent in 2020. It will introduce the first ever statutory government definition of domestic abuse to specifically include economic abuse and controlling and manipulative non-physical abuse. The appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner is expected to drive the response to domestic abuse issues. Thurrock are already meeting many of the duties and responsibilities that will be required of Local Authorities.
- 3.16 The Department for Education is introducing compulsory Relationships Education for primary pupils and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for secondary pupils from September 2020. The statutory guidance states that 'pupils should know the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, and how these can affect current and future relationships and Grooming, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, should also be addressed sensitively and clearly.
- 3.17 Partnership working will continue to be vital to ensuring the successful delivery of the new VAWG strategy 2020-2023. This will be achieved through collaborative working alongside some of our key stakeholders and contributors. These include the VAWG Strategy Group, local providers such as South Essex Rape Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC), Changing Pathways and many internal departments such as the Housing Safeguarding Team. Essex wide there are close working relationships with the PFCC and the SETDAB.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 The VAWG Equality Impact Assessment has highlighted:

- There is a gender imbalance in relation to reported crime. Nationally, the majority of victims were female, and the majority of perpetrators are male
- Sexual exploitation adversely impacts young people
- Elder abuse is acknowledged as under reported and is being highlighted for action
- The scope of the 2020-2023 strategy now recognises gender reassignment
- Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse
- National research highlights that BAME, LGBT and disabled individuals face significant barriers when reaching out to seek help.
- The established religions do not condone the abuse highlighted within this strategy
- Domestic abuse affects all communities, certain wards have higher reporting levels.

4.2 The Thurrock Community Safety Partnership is committed to meeting the needs of all residents by tackling all forms of exploitation and abuse across Thurrock and by delivering preventative measures, protection, and legal redress for all.

5. Summary

5.1 VAWG remains widespread and has a devastating impact on victims and families. Thurrock Community Safety Partnership remains committed, through its members and partnership to develop and implement innovative programmes to tackle these crimes.

5.2 Our multi-agency groups, both locally and Essex wide are established to tackle operational and strategic issues that impact the VAWG agenda. Working collaboratively in partnership will strengthen processes to help victims of these crimes. Every victim matters.

5.3 The appointment of a VAWG coordinator in 2018 demonstrates the Council commitment to raising awareness of VAWG and delivery of the strategy.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

6.1 This report is to provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to review the performance of the current VAWG strategy, and to agree the content of the new VAWG strategy 2020-2023.

7. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

7.1 VAWG conference attendees, VAWG strategic group and Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Board

7.2 Annual reporting to the Cleaner, Greener, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

8.1 The VAWG strategy is central to delivering Thurrock Council's priority of:

- **People** - a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay. All elements of this priority are relevant to VAWG
- **Prosperity** - a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations. In particular 'vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all.' which provides victims with access further opportunities to help them rebuild their lives.

8.2 The VAWG action plan links closely to and supports delivery of the SETDAB Joint Commissioning Strategy, the vision 'Everyone in Essex lives a life free from Domestic Abuse' and the PFCC Police and Crime Plan 2016-2020 including the priority 'Breaking the cycle of domestic abuse'.

9. Implications

9.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Management Accountant

There are no financial implications arising from this report

9.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications arising from this report

9.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead – Community Development

As outlined in the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and which are reflected and recognised with the action plan

9.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder

This report will help the Council and its Partners ensure that they are delivering on its commitments to Section 17.

10. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Public Health England
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/480942/Disability_and_domestic_abuse_topic_overview_FINAL.pdf
- ONS Domestic abuse victim characteristics 2019. Office of National Statistics: Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenlandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>
- Thurrock Public Health: JSNA sexual violence and abuse
- Housing Safeguarding Report 2018/19
- Office for national statistics (2016) Compendium – Homicide (average taken over 10 years)
- United Nations (1992) CEDAW General Recommendation No 19
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49459674>
- HM Government: Ending Violence against Women and Girls 2016 – 2020 Strategy Refresh
- Thurrock Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Report and Development Plan 2019

11. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 - Draft Thurrock Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2020-2023

Appendix 2 - Community and Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 - Thurrock Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2017-20, including VAWG terminology and definitions; can be found from the link below: www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/strategy-vawg-2017-v02.pdf

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