

2020 - 2023

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Foreword

I'm delighted to introduce the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy. This strategy is the first of its kind and has been created by partners from the Essex Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership, and brings together learnings from public and voluntary sectors, national research and experiences from victims of crime. I wish to share my gratitude to all those that have helped to develop this strategy and committed to support this key area of work, and who have helped increase our understanding of the current picture across Southend, Essex and Thurrock.

Rape and sexual abuse are heinous crimes which have a significant and long-lasting impact on victims, their families, and the local community. A partnership response to sexual violence and abuse is vital in order to prevent harm, support victims, identify perpetrators and ensure there is clear communication and a joined up criminal justice response.

Within 2019 partners demonstrated what can be achieved when working together with the development of;

- The Essex First Responders project, which ensures victims of crime receive support within 24 hours from when they choose to report the crime
- The rollout of the Drink Aware initiative, which is a preventative programme safeguarding those that are most vulnerable during the night time economy working with local businesses, third sector agencies and Police.

This strategy provides a clear strategic vision and focus for the partnership. It also further establishes the commitment of key strategic partners to protect and keep safe those that have been victims of, or may be vulnerable to sexual violence or abuse across Southend, Essex and Thurrock.

Detective Superintendent Neil Pudney

Crime and Public Protection Command

Chair of the Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership

Definition of sexual violence and abuse

Sexual violence and abuse is any behaviour (physical, verbal, virtual/digital) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitive, harmful or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) without their informed consent or understanding. Sexual violence including but not limited to rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation.

Child Sexual Abuse includes any sexual act with a child perpetrated by an adult or older child. It might include sexual touching, penetration, or encouraging a child to watch or engage in any form of sexual activity

Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group take advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person into sexual activity in exchange for something the victims needs or wants, and or the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.¹

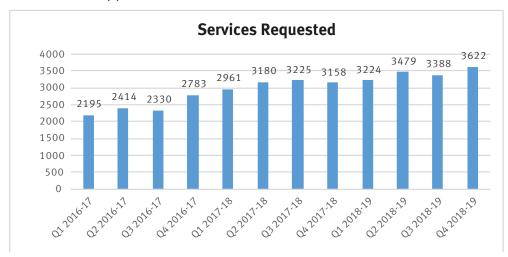
Sexual Violence and abuse can also take place in the community or be carried out online by people who are either acquaintances or stranger to the victim as well as take place within family and partner relationships.

Background

Nationally and locally, there has been an increased focus on sexual violence and abuse in recent years.

There are many sources of information, data and research that has helped inform this strategy. A full list of sources can be found in Appendix B.

In 2015 Essex Police recorded 3034 Sexual Offences and 3768 in 2018 (24% increase). Specifically for offences of rape In October 2015, Essex Police recorded 80 cases. In October 2018, this rose to 143 offences recorded. A significant increase of 79% increase. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex has a responsibility to commission services to support victims of crime, which includes victims of sexual violence and abuse. In Essex the volume of individuals seeking support has grown significantly in recent years; between Q1 2016-17 and Q4 2018-19 demand for support services has increased 65%.²



- 1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf
- 2. Data provided from Synergy Essex, the Essex Rape Crisis Partnership

Jointly, NHS England and the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex commission the Essex Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) at Oakwood Place, Brentwood. SARCs are a safe place for victims of sexual assault to be examined, interviewed, and be referred to further support services. They support victims to understand their options and make an informed choice to decide how they wish to proceed. SARC examinations have seen an increase in demand for their services by 32%.³

The annual Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that 20% of women and 4% of men have experienced some type of sexual assault since the age of 16. Essex has an estimated population age 16+ of 1,200,174.⁴ This suggests that 240,034 female and 48,007 men in Essex have experienced some type of sexual assault. The CSEW showed that around 83% of victims did not report their experiences to the police.

Whilst Police have seen an increase in recorded sexual offences, this does not demonstrate an increase in the prevalence of these offences. The 2017 CSEW⁵ recognised that the overall prevalence of sexual assault experienced by adults ages 16-59 since April 2016 has not changed significantly since the year ending March 2005, although reporting rates over this time has increased as more people seek help and support and disclose abuse to police. In Nov 2014, HMIC published a report⁶ on crime data integrity that recognised failings to record crimes of sexual violence, noting that 'the problem is greatest for victims of violence against the person and sexual offences, where the under-recording rates are 33 percent and 26 percent respectively.

In a report by the Home Office,⁷ it was estimated the average cost of the consequences of those who were a victim of rape is £93,590. This is estimated to be a conservative calculation and underestimates the true extent of the cost.

In May 2015, data was analysed to identify those that accessed adult sites. It identified that one in five under 18s in the UK had visited an adult site and one in ten UK visitors to adult sites were children⁸. 13% of these children were aged 6-14.9 There has been a significant increase in online abuse with the National Crime Agency recently reporting that there has been a 700% since 2012 of child online sexual abuse images.¹⁰ 'Their report found an increase in hidden or encrypted online opportunities for higher risk offending. End-to-end encryption and increased anonymity on the internet are progressively becoming standard. Offenders can use the dark web to groom and harm children on the mainstream internet.'

The NHS England Strategic Direction recognises that support for victims through the forensic and judicial process is available but there may be little emotional and physical support longer-term and over the individual's lifetime¹¹. It can be exceedingly difficult for survivors to navigate the system to receive the right help at the right time.¹² It also references a further lack of coordinated working between commissioned services recognising the value and experience of specialist services with existing statutory service offering. Specialist support services provide a deeper

- 3. SARC quarterly performance reporting Aug 2017; 292 victims Aug 2018; 387
- 4. www.essexinisight.org.uk 2018 population projections by age groups
- $5. \ https://www.ons.gov.uk/people population and community/crime and justice/articles/sexual offences in england and wales/year ending march 2017 \#how-prevalent-are-sexual-assaults$
- 6. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/crime-recording-making-the-victim-count.pdf
- $7.\ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772180/horr107.pdf$
- 8. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522166/VAWG_Strategy_FINAL_PUBLICATION_MASTER_vRB.PDF Comscore 2015
- 9. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541366/AV_ConsultationDCMS_20160216_ Final__4_.pdf
- 10. http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/1458-nca-and-police-arrest-130-suspects-for-child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-in-just-one-week
- $11.\ https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/strategic-direction-sexual-assault-and-abuse-services.pdf$
- 12. https://rapecrisis.org.uk/media/1920/report-on-funding-and-commissioning-of-sv-and-abuse-services-2018.pdf

understanding of the impact of sexual violence and abuse but also bring local knowledge of the needs of victims in Essex. In order to ensure victims receive the right support at the right time commissioned support services need to be led by understanding, listening to, and responding to the needs of victims.

Sexual violence happens both within coercive, intimate relationships and within wider family relationships. Data from Essex Rape Crisis Partnership shows that 23% of victims aged 16 and over had experienced sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. An additional 33% of victims had experienced sexual violence and child sexual abuse within their family, perpetrated by a family member (predominantly father, stepfather, grandfather or brother).

In Essex there is a successful Domestic Abuse Partnership that has established a collaborative partnership response and pathways of support to those at risk of domestic abuse, for example Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), support for victims and interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence. As demonstrated from the data provided by Essex Rape Crisis Partnership sexual violence is happening in domestic settings with intimate partners. It is therefore important domestic violence and sexual violence partners are working together in order to prevent harm and keep safe victims.

We want to ensure everyone has the same level of access to justice and support. We recognise that BAME victims, LGBTQ+ victims and male victims may face additional barriers to reporting sexual violence and child sexual abuse and to accessing support. Data from the CSEW suggests that 16% of victims of sexual violence are male, and following a number of high profile cases involving male victims and the IICSA Truth Project, more adult male victims are now reporting sexual violence, in particular child sexual abuse, to the Police. 12% of victims currently supported by the Essex Rape Crisis Partnership are male and the majority of these are adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

The Home Office Ending Violence Against Women and Girls strategy recognises the need to work with perpetrators stating that 'we cannot simply arrest our way out of domestic and sexual violence.' 'Through supporting interventions that lead to sustainable behaviour change in perpetrators themselves, we will drive an overall reduction in prevalence of VAWG crimes and reduce rates of re-offending.

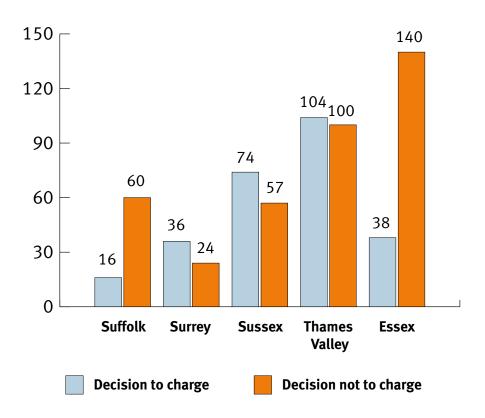
Comparatively Essex is an outlier, according to a recent peer review on the decision to charge those that have been investigated for rape crimes. Data published identified that in 2017/18 the total Essex referrals to CPS was 178 with 38 (21%) the CPS took a decision to charge.¹³

The Crime Survey for England and Wales¹⁴ identified that most recent rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), 38% of victims reported that the offender(s) were under the influence of alcohol. The same proportion of victims (38%) said they were under the influence of alcohol themselves. It is therefore important to work with drug and alcohol messaging to ensure we raise awareness.

^{13.} https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/our-work/article/rape-monitoring-group-digests/

 $^{14. \} https://www.ons.gov.uk/people population and community/crime and justice/articles/sexual of fences in england and wales/year ending march 2017$

Police referrals to CPS and decision to charge



Governance

This strategy has been developed, the Essex Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership board. The board is represented by a range of relevant partners recognising the importance of each organisation's role in supporting victims of Sexual Violence and Abuse and ensuring an effective partnership response to Sexual Violence and Abuse. The Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership Board will utilise the multi-agency framework and ensure it coordinates the approach to innovate and drive change in order to deliver against the strategy. The board will ensure reporting links to the below boards to share and promote a consistent approach across Essex:

- Southend, Essex and Thurrock Health & Wellbeing Boards
- Safer Essex
- Essex Integrated Health and Justice Commissioning group
- Children's Safeguarding partnerships and relevant subgroups
- Adult Safeguarding boards
- Essex Criminal Justice Board
- Essex Domestic Abuse Board
- Essex Reducing Reoffending Board
- Rape Scrutiny Panel

The strategy will also support and direct local commissioning decisions and direction for sexual violence and abuse. In Essex there are a number of projects/programmes and organisations commissioned to support the sexual violence and abuse agenda in order to deliver each organisational outcomes for example;

- Public Health Outcomes Framework includes specific outcomes aligned to Sexual Violence and Abuse
- NHS Strategic Plan includes improving outcomes for Victims of Sexual Violence and Abuse
- Essex Police commitment to improve responses to Sexual Violence and Abuse crimes
- Essex Police Fire and Crime Commissioner ensures Victims are supported from the impact of Sexual Violence and Abuse

It is therefore important that commissioner's work together in order to ensure a joined-up approach and have a shared outcome for Essex victims. Annexe A identifies commissioning responsibilities

Strategic Vision

Strategic Vision	Our vision for sexual violence and abuse is for partners to work together to prevent the volume and impact of sexual violence and abuse in Southend, Essex and Thurrock					
Mission Statement	In order to achieve the vision working with partners we will create a culture and focus across Essex to ensure we prevent, understand, and respond to Sexual Violence and Abuse through five key thematic areas.					
Themes	Prevent	Support for victims	Communication	Perpetrators	Effective criminal justice response	
Objective	Increase education to raise awareness of sexual violence and abuse including consent. Identify areas/ individuals of increased risk to safeguard and prevent harm.	Support is available to victims of crime when and where they need it. Professionals and practitioners provide quality support to victims of crime.	There is a clear and consistent messaging across Essex on our collective response to Sexual violence and Abuse.	Early identification of potential perpetrators to prevent harm. Reduction of Sexual Abuse and Violence reoffending.	Victims feel confident and able to support criminal proceedings. Perpetrators are brought to justice.	

Objectives

Support for victims

Sexual violence and abuse can have a profound impact on an individual but also impacts family and friends. It is important that the immediate and long-term impact of this crime is recognised and support is available to a victim but also to family members in order to make positive steps towards recovery. Appropriate support needs to be easily accessible and available to reduce the impact of the abuse to lessen the effect on the victim, their associated life chances and overall wellbeing.

It is important that professionals provide environments where victims feel that can disclose any incident of sexual violence and abuse. Professionals need to be considerate of the information provided and with victim's consent be aware of how they can refer or signpost to appropriate support. Professionals also need to recognise the importance of the information being disclosed as it could be of evidential importance to a criminal justice process.

Following the disclosure of abuse by a victim of crime, it is important that clear pathways are known and available to ensure victims receive appropriate, timely, specialist support without barriers and without causing re-traumatisation. It is important that across the county there are accessible and consistent pathways for victims and professionals. Where multiple practitioners are supporting a victim, practitioners should consider a collaborative approach to meet the complex needs of victims and their families. Taking a collaborative approach improves a victims journey and reduces the risk of agency priorities overlapping and negatively impacting the victim causing further harm or delaying recovery.

Services need to be available and accessible to all and partner organisations need to be gathering robust, consistent data to enable effective analysis of trends to ensure victims across Essex are effectively accessing justice and support. Partners should engage third sector and community groups to respond to identified need.

Prevent

Prevention is vital to stop the growth of illicit sexual behaviour and to avoid individuals of Essex becoming victims of sexually based crimes. Educating children, young people and adults on sex and healthy relationships is vital to ensure that they understand what constitutes consent, and can recognise factors that represent unhealthy relationships. Education is important to challenge myths and stereotypes, and provide facts to ensure sexual violence and abuse is understood.

The Department of Education notes the complex world that young people are now part of, and has recognised the need to develop statutory guidance and regulations to ensure relationship and sex education is compulsorily taught in schools. This will be enforced from 2020 with the ambition that schools start including this within curriculum from Sept 2019. There is an ambition to ensure that where possible there is a consistency of message being delivered within the curriculum.

Research suggests there are cohorts within Essex that are at increased risk of becoming vulnerable. These include, but are not limited to; young people, young adults (university/college students), disability groups and those associated with the sex industry

Education on the impact of sexual abuse and how to recognise sexually abusive behaviour is not isolated to classrooms. Together Essex Partners will work together to target awareness in the

places/areas of vulnerabilities but also need to proactively disrupt behaviour that is high risk.

Communication

It is important that across Essex Southend and Thurrock there is greater awareness of sexual violence and abuse including:

- What is sexual violence and abuse
- How to report it
- What support is available (whether reported to the Police or not)
- How to access support

It is important that awareness activities are considered and targeted to ensure harder to reach communities and those who are most at risk are engaged. Messaging publicly and through organisations across Southend Essex and Thurrock need to be consistent to prevent confusion and duplication. Organisations should utilise the power of communities to improve engagement in order to identify and provide support to areas of need.

This strategy is inclusive of all aspects of sexual violence and abuse. Across Essex there are a number of strategic boards focusing on individual strands of sexual abuse. Cohesive working across all sexual violence areas needs to be enabled to ensure there are clear promoted pathways and consistent messaging.

Communication should not focus just on prevention and awareness raising. It needs to build confidence in the system and encourage victims to seek the support they need. We believe the recent increase in reporting and victims accessing support against a backdrop of little change of prevalence of crime shows an increase in confidence in the system. We want to continue to encourage victims to feel confident to report and confidence in the support available.

Perpetrators

Whilst reoffending rates for sexual violence and abuse are lower than other offences¹⁶ it is still important to ensure that there are effective perpetrator programmes in place to change behaviour in order to prevent and stop reoffending.

There also needs to be a focus on recognising the risks and early signs of those yet to offend. Partners need to work collaboratively recognising and intervening early to support potential perpetrators to reduce the risk of sexual abuse taking place. This can include but not limited to

- Raising awareness of consent and the impact drugs and alcohol may have on decision making especially in the night time economy
- Supporting vulnerable groups to understand consent and healthy relationship
- Behaviour change programmes for those concerned about their thoughts or behaviour towards young people

Collaboration is also key for partners to identify early those that pose as a risk and ensure appropriate response are available, examples of this can include;

 Ensuring and promoting good safeguarding processes including robust vetting procedures where working with vulnerable people

- Partners utilising data and working together to respond to identified areas of vulnerability
 e.g. online grooming (specifically group messaging sites), shopping centres, bars/
 clubs etc. that might be high-risk areas of concern. Partners should ensure appropriate
 operational responses to prevent abuse from happening in high risk areas.
- Increased understanding amongst partners of the wider impact of very low reporting
 and conviction rates, which mean that the vast majority of sexual offenders are not
 prosecuted. This has wide reaching effects in family courts, social care, schools and
 related agencies and it is crucial that this context is recognised and understood and
 that allegations of sexual violence and child sexual abuse, even if they do not result in a
 conviction, are carefully considered in child protection cases.

Effective criminal justice response

Victims should be at the heart of the criminal justice system. It is important that the voice of the victim is heard within every organisation. Sexual violence and abuse is a complex crime and can have numerous complex impacts. It is therefore important that this is recognised and reflected throughout the criminal justice process. Not only does this ensure that criminal justice agencies have a better understanding of sexual violence and abuse, it also ensures that victims are given and empowered to make an informed choice throughout the process.

The primary aim of the criminal justice process is to bring perpetrators to justice. CPS and Essex Police need to work together to understand the referrals to CPS and the decision making process to charge to ensure perpetrators are being brought to justice. Dame Vera Baird during her role as APCC victim lead commented 'It's a cause of worry that the number of sex offenders referred by police for prosecutions has dropped and the numbers prosecuted has fallen even more. This is all in the face of thousands more serious sexual complaints. This mismatch is capable of robbing any victim of the confidence to report a sexual assault.'

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) are dedicated specialist facilities that provide forensic medical examination, that are carried out by experienced and qualified health practitioners and are crucial for capturing best evidence. As part of the victims pathway, SARCs also provide an access point into further support services.

Victims need to feel supported to make an informed choice to report the crime to Police. Once reported, a victim may wish to not proceed with criminal procedures and decide not to continue to engage with Police. Essex Police should support adult victims who have capacity and respect their wishes however if there is a risk to the public or a risk of the crime, or the victim is a child, the Police may decide to continue to investigate and look to support a prosecution without the support or engagement of the victim.

Each criminal justice agency has a statutory responsibility under the Victim Code of Practice (VCOP) to provide entitlements to ensure victims are appropriately supported through the criminal justice process.

Outcomes framework

Prevent

Increase education to raise awareness of sexual violence and abuse

- Essex has a clear and consistent approach to education awareness activity including
 Essex school relationship and sex education messaging
- Individuals in Essex particularly children, young adults and vulnerable adults have a clear understanding on consent and consequences
- Individuals in Essex particularly children and young people and vulnerable adults are aware how to remain safe online

Identify areas/individuals of increased risk to safeguard and prevent harm

- Those most vulnerable have the skills and awareness to recognise and respond to risk
- Organisations work together effectively to prevent deter and disrupt those who pose a risk to vulnerable people in Essex

Effective Criminal Justice System

Victims feel supported and encouraged to support criminal proceedings

- Victims' voices are heard through the criminal justice process
- Victims feel that they are informed, updated and supported through the criminal justice process
- Victims entitlements are consistently provided by criminal justice agencies

Perpetrators are brought to justice

 There is an increase to the number and rates of perpetrators that are charged and prosecuted

Support for victims

Support is available to victims of crime when they need it

- Victims have access to appropriate support to meet their needs
- Support pathways are clear, consistent and accessible
- Partners will work collaboratively to deliver a coordinated and aligned system of support

Professionals and practitioners will provide quality support to victims of crime

- Professionals and practitioners have the right skills, understanding to support victims when they choose to disclose
- Professionals understand the immediate and long term impact of sexual violence and abuse on victims and their families
- Victims are safeguarded from future harm
- Partners will respond to changing and emerging needs in order to support victims

Communication

There is a clear and consistent messaging across Essex on sexual violence and abuse

- Essex residents and professionals have a clear understanding of sexual violence and abuse across Essex
- Communication activity is considered and targeted to areas of need
- For all strands of sexual violence and abuse there is a consistent, clear and joined up message
- Pathways of support are clearly promoted

Perpetrators

Early identification of potential perpetrators to prevent harm

- Partners work in collaboration to identify and work with potential perpetrators including children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviour
- Data will be used effectively to identify emerging threats in order to prevent harm

Reduction of sexual violence and abuse reoffending

- Reduction of reoffending and prevention of offending due to sustainable behaviour change programme
- Clear opportunities of rehabilitation for perpetrators

Appendix A: Commissioning responsibilities¹⁷

 Promotion of opportunistic testing and treatment for STI Cervical Screening HIV treatment and care (including drug costs for HIV PEPSE) HIV treatment and care Specialist Foetal medicine services Sterilisation Gynaecology Including victims of sexual assault and abuse to cope and recover from the impact of the crime e.g. ISVA NHS England Support and follow up services in SARCS (with PCCS) Ambulance/blue light services Crisis/social workers for Mental Health and IAPT, services for depression 	Sexual Health Prevention and Treatment Services	Disclosure / Criminal Justice	Immediate Support	Long term Support
 Ambulance Local Authorities Authorities Commissioners Specific commissioning responsibilities for victims, including victims of sexual assault and abuse Note other health services maybe Non-sexual health 	 Contraception Promotion of opportunistic testing and treatment for STI Cervical Screening HIV treatment and care Specialist Foetal medicine services CCG Abortion Services Sterilisation Gynaecology Sexual Health service for children and young people Ambulance Local Authorities Specialist sexual health services Comprehensive sexual health services Comprehensive sexual health services STI testing 	 Sexual Assault Referral Centres responsible for forensic medical examine HIV treatment and care (including drug costs for HIV PEPSE) STI treatment Sexual Health Elements of prison and immigration removal centre CCGs Ambulance/blue light services Police and Crime Commissioners Specific commissioning responsibilities for victims, including victims of sexual assault and abuse ISVA Local Authorities 	 Specific commissioning responsibilities for victims including victims of sexual assault and abuse to cope and recover from the impact of the crime e.g. ISVA NHS England Support and follow up services in SARCS (with PCCS) Local Authorities Crisis/social workers for children young people and vulnerable adults Note other health services maybe engaged during 	 Specific commissioning responsibilities for victims including victims of sexual assault and abuse to cope and recover from the impact of the crime e.g. ISVA and Community Services NHS England Child and adolescent mental health services Tier 4 CCGs Mental Health and IAPT, services for depression and PTSD that understand the specific needs of victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse, including the third sector Non-sexual health elements of psychosexual health services

All have responsibility to commission Specialist Voluntary Sector Services to enhance provisions for Victims

17. Commissioning Responsibility sources include NHS Strategic direction for sexual assault and abuse services and Service specification No. 30 Sexual Assault Referral Centres

Appendix B

This strategy acknowledges, and has been informed by the following publications:

- Essex Victim Needs Assessment 2017
- NHS England Strategic Direction for sexual assault and abuse services
- Home Office VAWG strategy
- Southend, Essex & Thurrock Children Sexual Exploitation Strategy
- Essex Police Crime Prevention Strategy
- Essex joint commissioning strategy for domestic abuse
- March 2018 Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey
- December 2016 Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations
- December 2016 Violence Against Women and Girls Services Supporting Local Commissioning
- Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Child Protection Procedures
- Thurrock Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Office for National Statistics Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017
- Rape Monitoring Group digests
- Essex Victims Code of Practice
- Essex Insight 2018 population projections
- HMIC Crime recording making the victim count Nov 2014
- Home Office The economic and social costs of domestic abuse Jan 2019
- Home Office Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography Feb 2016
- All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sexual Violence report into the Funding and Commissioning of Sexual Violence and Abuse Services 2018