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Title of meeting: Portsmouth Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board

Subject: Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG); Strategy and Delivery

Date of meeting: 23rd November 2022

Report by: Caroline Hopper, Corporate Projects Manager, The Executive

Wards affected: All

1. Requested by Councillor Fazackarley

2. Purpose -

To update the Board on the local response to this agenda, following the publication of the national strategy.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Summary: VAWG is a topical issue with many stakeholders. In the last year, a national strategy has refreshed the focus on the agenda bringing together the spectrum of offences for the first time. It is noted that locally there are several existing arrangements for responding to VAWG with independent governance structures and that strengthening connectivity between arrangements is an area for further exploration. It is also noted that further consideration will be given about how best to draw in other relevant workstreams to help create the societal step change required.

4. Background to this report: There has been an increased focus nationally on the prevalence of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The term VAWG has come to embody a range of unacceptable and damaging behaviours; including rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, 'honour-based' abuse (including female genital mutilation and forced marriage and 'honour' killings), 'revenge porn' and 'upskirting'. Whilst men can also be victims of these behaviours, women and girls are disproportionately affected, and the term VAWG is used to refer to all victims of these offences regardless of the gender of the victim. The National VAWG strategy, published in July 2021, is overarching, with the ambition of reducing the prevalence of violence against women and girls, and improving the support and response for victims and survivors¹. The strategy recognises that VAWG is a

¹ Tackling violence against women and girls strategy, Home Office, July 2021 [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/102422/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy-2021.pdf)
(www.gov.uk)

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societal issue that can only be addressed through a concerted and multifaceted approach. This Strategy has been followed by a dedicated and complementary national Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan, along with a refreshed National Statement of Expectations to help those responsible for commissioning services do so effectively². Within all of this, there are shared themes:

- Put the victim/survivor at the centre
- Have a clear focus on perpetrators
- Take a systemic approach
- Acknowledge the gendered nature of VAWG
- Raise awareness, engage, and empower communities to prevent VAWG

5. Snapshot of VAWG in Portsmouth:

- There have been increases in sexual offences, since 2019/20, although some of these increases may be driven by improved recording, increased reporting, or police activity³.
- Sexual offences are committed at all times of the day/night, with reports increasing from mid-afternoon through to the early hours of the morning (3pm-2am).
- There are no strong geographical patterns for harassment and stalking, reinforcing that woman and girls are subjected to these types of behaviour when going about daily life. High Streets and areas with hospitality venues showed higher numbers of reports
- Domestic abuse continues to be the largest driver of violent crime, accounting for 44% of assaults recorded by police.
- There is some evidence that some victims/survivors of domestic abuse may be experiencing more and frequent incidents, while there has also been a reduction in charges and domestic abuse cases heard at court, highlighting the need to focus on holding medium and high-risk perpetrators to account.
- Data is showing a positive increase in awareness of unhealthy and abusive relationships, with the continuing success of the campaign 'Is This Love'
- The Community Safety Survey 2022, the best measure of resident's views on levels of ASB and crime in the community, identified a higher proportion of women felt unsafe in certain parts of the city, than men⁴.

² Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, Home Office, March 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan>

³ Community safety plan, strategic assessment, research and analysis programme, performance monitoring. The Strategic Assessment Update September 22

⁴ Violence Against Women and Girls - Findings from the Community Safety Survey 2022, Portsmouth City Council Cabinet paper, September 2022.

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6. Local response: Within the Portsmouth area there are several existing arrangements for responding to VAWG with their own governance structures:

Hampshire Constabulary Portsmouth District, Tactical Plan 2022-2023 sets out the Police's response to VAWG crime following three pillars: Improve Trust and Confidence in Policing, Pursuit of Perpetrators and Safer Spaces. Within this plan there is a focus on learning from and working with partners to establish a strong 'call it out' culture that encourages community upstanding and raises awareness, whilst also being proactive about identifying those who pose risk, monitoring risk and a systemic approach to offender management⁵. This plan is overseen by the Portsmouth District Police Commander.

The Portsmouth domestic abuse strategy aims to ensure that everyone in the city, especially young people, understand what a healthy relationship looks like, know where to get support, for as long as required, and those perpetrating unhealthy or abusive behaviour are held to account and supported to change. The accompanying plan is systemic and multiagency working with health, police and voluntary sector providers, focusing on identification, assessment, reducing risk through intervention and raising awareness. Governance for this strategy is via the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Portsmouth has benefited considerably from Safer Streets funding. Safer Streets links the community safety strategy with regeneration and infrastructure work. It delivers behavioural and situational measures that challenge underlying social norms that create the context for criminal activity and builds local capacity to respond as a key mechanism to improving feelings of safety. Safer Streets 4 in 2022/23 will see the continuation of initiatives including active bystander training, peer mentorship work in schools, and on-going development of a network of safe spaces across the city. This work is being undertaken in partnership with the neighbouring authorities of Gosport, Fareham, Havant and the Isle of Wight. Governance for Safer Streets is via the Hampshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) Executive Board.

Whilst each of the above arrangements are distinctly separate, they are connected operationally through lead officers, and key partners, such as the police and the Council, are represented within each's governance arrangements.

7. Other supporting Activity:

In recognition that no one organisation can tackle VAWG alone, in 2021 the OPCC launched a multi-agency task group to tackle VAWG across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. This task group has membership from the Police, Local Councils, and voluntary sector providers. This group is focused on building a problem profile, increasing confidence to report, expediting legal process, prevention and managing offenders.

The Council, OPCC and some other local organisations have signed up to White Ribbon. This agenda is about long-term culture change in the community and in leading organisations like the Council. It focuses on engaging men and boys, shifting the focus away from women's responsibility to keep themselves safe to men and boys taking responsibility for unhealthy or

⁵ Hampshire Constabulary, VAWG Tactical Plan, July 2022

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violent behaviour. International White Ribbon Day occurs annually on 25th November, whilst the White Ribbon accreditation is an ongoing piece of work.

In 2021, aligned to the National VAWG strategy, Transport Champions were appointed to consider how the transport network in the UK could be improved to better protect women and girls. Transport Champions for tackling VAWG report published by Transport for West Midlands sets out 13 recommendations. These recommendations provide a good steer in respect of designing out crime within business-as-usual activity. An update to the Government's Manual for Streets, which sets out design standards for the road network, is also expected as part of the VAWG strategy.

8. Emerging success:

- From 1st July 2021 a new contract was awarded to Stop Domestic Abuse combining three separate domestic abuse services into one therefore improving response options to victims. One example of this is being able to work with the whole family when safe to do so.
- 16 venues have been trained as 'We Stand Together' venues, and hundreds of people working in the Night-time Economy (NTE) have received active bystander training via Police Licencing and Safer Streets Community in Motion. Across the city, the Police are seeing an increase in premises recognising sexual misconduct as an issue and numerous similar incidents where staff safeguard victims and challenge perpetrators.
- Op Rigging patrol strategy within the NTE has enabled, large number of vulnerable people safeguarded each night, partnership work around street pastors and safe space to protect the vulnerable, and identification of risk individuals to prevent further harm and divert perpetrators away from causing harm. There has also been effective use of Community Protection Notice Warnings since June 2021 to reduce the risk perpetrators pose to the vulnerable people, which are monitored with notices being issued for those who are repeat perpetrators.
- Safer Streets has enabled investment in additional CCTV, lighting, and community art to improve feelings of safety and natural guardianship in some public footpaths including Cosham underpass and Belmont Path. There have been no instances of criminal activity, including VAWG crime reported in these places following improvements.

9. Conclusion:

It is noted that in Portsmouth work in partnership through the Police's Tactical Plan, the Domestic Abuse Strategy, Safer Streets, and other activity such as White Ribbon is addressing some core elements of the agenda. Each element is working well in its own system, and there is some connection through lead officers and governance membership. It is noted that there is potential for a more connected response to coordinate activity and ensure communication with the public is coherent and maximised. Exploring this could be undertaken alongside a review of existing

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plans, as a useful next step. The VAWG task group established by the OPCC has started to join up different pieces of work regionally. VAWG is a broad and complex agenda, which by its nature extends past traditional delivery boundaries of community safety. It is noted that if all avenues within the Government's ambitious VAWG strategy are to be addressed, we will need to find a way to bring in other relevant agendas including education, regeneration, culture, and leisure, as all have an equally pervasive role in creating the step change in cultural norms required.

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 Signed by Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager

Appendices: none

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Community safety plan, strategic assessment, research and analysis programme, performance monitoring. The Strategic Assessment Update September 22	Corporate Strategy
Hampshire Constabulary, VAWG Tactical Plan, July 2022	Corporate Strategy
Tackling violence against women and girls' strategy, Home Office, July 2021	Tackling violence against women and girls strategy - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, Home Office, March 2022	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan
Violence Against Women and Girls - Findings from the Community Safety Survey 2022, Portsmouth City Council Cabinet paper, September 2022	Democratic Services