

Title of meeting: Health and Wellbeing Board

Date of meeting: 28th June 2023

Subject: Developing a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

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

Wards affected: All

Key decision: Yes/No

Full Council decision: Yes/No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To Update the Health and Wellbeing Board on work to review existing plans in respect of VAWG and request that the HWB approve the development of a VAWG Strategy, building upon work to date, focusing on strengthening existing arrangements, closing gaps, and maximising impact.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 For members of the Health and Wellbeing Board to approve the development of a city-wide Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 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'¹. 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.
- 3.2 In November 2022 the Health and Wellbeing Board was updated on the local response to the VAWG agenda. The update identified several local workstreams already in progress, including Hampshire Constabulary VAWG tactical plan, Domestic abuse strategy, Safer Streets programme the Office of

¹ Tackling violence against women and girls' strategy, Home Office, July 2021 Tackling violence against women and girls strategy - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

the Police and Crime Commissioner's (OPCC) VAWG task group and White Ribbon. The report concluded that there was potential for a more connected response to coordinate activity and ensure communication with the public is coherent and maximised across the VAWG agenda. The update also identified a need to bring in other relevant workstreams to create the societal step change required.

3.3 The Government's [National Statement of Expectations](#) details how local areas should commission effective services to ensure their whole system response to VAWG is "collaborative, robust and effective as possible"². This includes an expectation that local strategies and services will:

- 3.3.1 put the victim at the centre of service design and delivery.
- 3.3.2 have a clear focus on perpetrators.
- 3.3.3 take a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning and acknowledging the gendered nature of VAWG.
- 3.3.4 be locally led and safeguard individuals at every point.
- 3.3.5 raise awareness, engage, and empower communities to prevent VAWG.

3.4 In May 2023 Portsmouth City Council became a White Ribbon accredited organisation. The accreditation necessitates that as part of the Council's white ribbon action plan, 'in collaboration with key local partners, there is a joint strategic approach, to ending men's violence against women'. This is aligned with the national direction of travel in respect of VAWG.

4 Local Context:

4.1 Victims/survivors of domestic abuse and sexual offences are overwhelmingly women and girls (69% for domestic abuse and 80% for sexual offences)³.

4.2 Domestic abuse continues to be the largest driver of violent crime in Portsmouth, accounting for 44% of assaults recorded by police. The proportion of assaults driven by domestic abuse has increased, driven by a 20%(n236) increase in violence against family members. Despite the increase in DA incidents, crimes and repeat perpetrators, the number of charges and cases heard at court have dropped considerably over the last few years.

4.3 There have been increases in police recorded sexual offences, since 2012/13, although some of these increases may be driven by improved recording,

² Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls, March 2022 [Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³ Community safety plan, strategic assessment, research and analysis programme, performance monitoring. The Strategic Assessment Update September 22, [For-website-Strategic-Assessment-Update-2021-22-18.10.22.pdf \(saferportsmouth.org.uk\)](#)

increased reporting, or police activity. Sexual offences are known to be under reported, so a genuine increase cannot be ruled out. High Streets and areas with hospitality venues showed a higher number of reports³.

- 4.4 There has been a significant increase in police recorded crime observed in 2021/22 against 2019/20 for stalking and harassment (74%, n1,593), although stalking and harassment offences have been increasing since 2013/14. This increase is likely to be driven by a combination of improvements in recording, the addition of new stalking offences in 2012 and an increase in reporting³.
- 4.5 The Community Safety Survey 2022, the best measure of residents' 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.
- 4.6 A brief overview of key VAWG trends can be found in the Strategic Assessment of Crime, Anti-social Behaviour, Substance Misuse and Reoffending, but there has not been a VAWG (or domestic abuse) needs assessment. This means that there is no detailed assessment of the local picture for some elements of VAWG including: imaged based abuse, revenge porn, upskirting, and abuse within the sex industry.

5. Creating a step change - things to consider

- 5.1 Everyday normalised behaviours including gender inequality, sexism, objectification, micro aggressions, promotion of unhealthy relationships and victim blaming, both online and in the real world, when left unchecked, create a platform for more serious violence to occur. A city-wide strategy to address VAWG would need to seek to address these behaviours wherever they occur within educational settings, workplaces, business, public spaces, and on-line.
- 5.2 Further work is needed to understand the local VAWG context, and a mechanism for this would need to be agreed. There will also need to be some consideration to how additional complexities, such as health disparities, compound VAWG. Some groups may be experiencing additional barriers to accessing support and may require a more targeted response.

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

- 5.3 The pervasive nature of VAWG, makes it a societal issue that requires a strategic response that everyone owns. Individual agencies will have their own plans to address VAWG, some based upon statutory requirements, but no one agency (The Police, Council, Health, Education or specialist services in the Charity and Voluntary sector) can be wholly responsible for the cities response to VAWG.
- 5.4 In considering how best to address VAWG coherently it is important to recognise the responsibilities of key agencies and ensure accountability is appropriately retained (for example the local authority's responsibility to provide safe accommodation, or the criminal justice system's responsibility to victims and perpetrators), to support a coordinated community response.
- 5.5 VAWG cuts across socio-economic factors. Any strategy to address it, will need to find a way to draw in other relevant agendas including education, regeneration, transport, culture, and leisure, in a sustainable way. It must ensure that universal as well as specialist services are equipped to respond. Place-making structures need to proactively design out crime, as well as retrospectively responding to crime and improving functioning.
- 5.6 VAWG is a topical issue with many stakeholders. It is important that any strategy developed is inclusive, clear about what the local offer is, manages expectation, and ultimately focuses on actions which are likely to have the greatest impact. It will need to ensure everyone's needs are represented regardless of sex or gender, whilst also keeping a focus on women's and girls' experiences in line with the national VAWG strategy.

6. Proposal

- 6.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) is asked to approve the recommendation to develop a VAWG strategy for Portsmouth in partnership with key stakeholders.
- 6.2 A task and finish group will be established to develop the VAWG strategy, drawing upon local expertise from existing workstreams. The task and finish group will undertake a logical process, framed around a continuum of understand, prevent, and respond, in alignment with the national statement of expectations to develop a robust structure that will deliver priority outcomes.
- 6.3 Alongside the task and finish group, and in addition to local evidence already available, a multiagency workshop will be held to understand stakeholder views



about the existing response, and how learning from this can be used to strengthen the strategy.

6.4 The VAWG strategy would remain within the governance and oversight of the HWB with existing workstreams such as the domestic abuse strategy sitting within the new structure. Other pillars of work including organisational change, early intervention, messaging, designing out crime and sexual crime will also be included.

6.5 There is already a lot of work being delivered by a multitude of partners across the city, which creates a strong foundation for the development of a VAWG strategy. The new strategy is not seeking to replace or duplicate existing work, its focus will be on strengthening existing arrangements, closing gaps, and maximising impact. Organisations will retain their statutory responsibilities.

7. Reasons for recommendations

7.1 Within the Portsmouth area there are several existing arrangements for responding to VAWG with their own governance structures. Whilst each of these arrangements is distinctly separate, they are connected operationally through lead officers. Key partners, such as the police and the Council, are represented within each's governance arrangements. The development of a VAWG strategy would improve connectivity between these workstreams, reduce duplication and maximise effect.

7.2 The national VAWG strategy and associated statement of expectations make it clear that VAWG cannot be addressed by any single agency. Statutory services, voluntary organisations and communities need to work collaboratively to increase opportunities for victims, survivors, and perpetrators to seek and access support, and that effort needs to be sustained.

7.3 This proposal aligns well with and builds upon work to date to address some elements of VAWG such as domestic abuse through the multiagency Domestic Abuse strategy group.

8. Integrated impact assessment

8.1 An integrated impact assessment (ref IA524328056) has been undertaken in consultation with several key stakeholders including Public Health, Transport,



Economic Development, Community Safety, and Equalities, Diversity, and inclusion.

8. Legal implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposed recommendations. The report seeks to request a move to set a process in train and at this stage is purely information based, as such should active engagement occur in the future a reconsideration of this advice would be appropriate.

9. Director of Finance's comments

9.1 At this time there are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendation contained within this report.

9.2 In the event that work undertaken as a result of recommendation 2.1 identifies a financial commitment by the Council may be necessary, a further report including options for financing will be brought forward at that time.

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Signed by:

Appendices:

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
Tackling violence against women and girls' strategy, Home Office, July 2021 Tackling violence against women and girls' strategy	- GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls, March 2022	Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Community safety plan, strategic assessment, research and analysis programme, performance monitoring. The Strategic Assessment Update September 22	For-website-Strategic-Assessment-Update-2021-22-18.10.22.pdf (saferportsmouth.org.uk)



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

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by: