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Title of meeting:	Health and Wellbeing Board
Subject:	Developing a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy - Update
Date of meeting:	17 th July 2024
Report by:	Caroline Hopper, Corporate Projects Manager, The Executive
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Lee Hunt, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Leisure & Sport
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by Councillor Hunt

2. **Purpose:** To provide members of the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on the development of a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy for Portsmouth.

3. **Summary:** A significant amount of work has been undertaken to consider how best to approach the city's first VAWG strategy. This has included a review of existing intelligence, and research to understand what works to address these complex issues. Consultation has taken place with a range of stakeholders across the private, public, and voluntary sector, and there has also been work undertaken to consult with residents and listen to children and young people. This work has confirmed the need for an overarching set of principles, that affirm the city's commitment and ways of working to address these damaging behaviours, and some focused pillars of work in respect of tackling domestic abuse, responding to abuse, violence and harassment occurring in the community, early intervention and messaging, and organisation change.

4. **Background to this report:** In June 2023 the HWB approved the development of a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy for the city. The aim of this strategy is to bring together existing workstreams, and to ensure that all elements of VAWG are being addressed, in partnership, making best use of the resources available.

5. **What is VAWG:** VAWG can mean different things to different people, and it is common for terms like Domestic abuse and VAWG to be used interchangeably when talking about intimate partner violence. To be clear about what this strategy is seeking to

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address; we have first sought to clarify the reach of the strategy. In keeping with the National VAWG Strategy and National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) definition of VAWG¹ the following will be considered within the scope of the strategy:

- Domestic abuse
- Rape and serious sexual offences.
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation - for female victims aged 10 years and over (in line with the NPCC VAWG definition which incorporates victims aged 10+)
- Modern slavery and human trafficking
- Honour based abuse.
- Stalking and harassment
- Adult sexual exploitation and sex work
- Tech enabled VAWG which includes online harassment.
- VAWG in different space types: public, private and in places of education
- Spiking (with alcohol or any other substances)

6. What about men and boys? The term VAWG has been defined nationally as an umbrella term for the issues listed above, that is used irrespective of the gender of the victim. Men and boys can be victims, and women and girls can be perpetrators. Whilst nationally there has been some debate about the use of the term VAWG in this context, all evidence both nationally and locally indicates that women and girls are disproportionately affected by these issues, and that where the gender of the perpetrator is known, the majority are male, regardless of the gender of the victim. To avoid confusion and ensure inclusion, it may be more appropriate to call this strategy the Portsmouth Sexual Violence, Harassment and Domestic Abuse strategy. However, if we do, then we need to take care not to lose sight of the original drivers for the strategy, and specific issues that underly and exacerbate violence, particularly against women and girls, in terms of inclusion and equity - as one stakeholder put it *'that we even question if the strategy should be called VAWG, speaks to the heart of the issues we need to address'*.

¹ NPCC (2023) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023

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- 6.1** When you look at crime statistics more widely, male perpetration of violence is an issue both locally, and nationally, and there are specific pieces of work such as the Polices 'Walk Away Campaign'², targeting mainly men, aged 18-30, who are most likely to be a victim or suspect of such behaviour.
- 6.2** The mental health of men and boys is also a key issue that needs to be addressed; nationally suicide in men is three times more common than among women, and whilst rates of suicide for both men and women is reducing, there is a gender gap with women's rate of suicide reducing faster than men's.
- 6.3** Structural issues within society that prevent equity for women and girls, also trap men and boys, preventing everyone from being at their best. Therefore, the development of this strategy needs to be seen in the context of the city's wider community safety plan, and intrinsically linked to the overall aims for the Health and Wellbeing Board to improve the health and wellbeing of our whole local population including those who visit and work in the city.

7. Timeline:

- 7.1** The council has a statutory responsibility to produce an assessment and plan in relation to the safe accommodation of those residents who require it because of domestic abuse. To meet our obligations, this plan and assessment, which is intrinsically linked to the existing domestic abuse strategy, is required to be refreshed and ratified in the autumn of 2024.
- 7.2** The current domestic abuse strategy, and associated plan, was due to be refreshed in 2023 but work around this was held in expectation of the development of the VAWG strategy to avoid duplication of effort and support coherent development of the new strategy.
- 7.3** Therefore, a programme for development of the VAWG strategy has been created to align with our statutory requirements. This means that the strategy is expected to be ratified and published in the Autumn 2024, alongside the updated Safe Accommodation needs assessment. This is an ambitious timeline, and consideration was given to a more phased approach. However, whilst this would

² NPCC (2023) We Walk Away: Campaign Toolkit.

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provide more time, it would miss the opportunity to ensure that Domestic Abuse as a key element of VAWG, is considered within the context of the wider agenda.

7.4 Summary timeline

Q2 2023/24	Defining the reach of the strategy Existing data scope
Q3 2023/24	Stakeholder & Frontline worker scoping workshops
Q3/Q4 2023/24	Public Sexual Violence & Domestic Abuse Survey
Q4 2023/24	Plenary stakeholder session reflects upon key themes
Q4 2023/24 Q1/Q2 2024/25	Understanding Need: Additional data and intelligence scoping Gap analysis Analysis of survey responses
Q2 2024/25	HWB Community Safety Sub-Group support the development priorities, goals, and objectives
Q3 2024/25	Consultation on draft strategy Ratification of final strategy

8. Understanding Need:

8.1 Scoping has been undertaken to identify the various sources of intelligence that will help us to determine the causal and correlated factors within this agenda. Reflecting the nature of such a cross cutting agenda, locally several assessments, key reports, and strategies, that have been identified, that collectively reference a good range of VAWG within the scope of the strategy. These include:

- 8.1.1** Safer Portsmouth Partnership Strategic Assessment of Crime, Anti-social Behaviour, Substance Misuse, and Reoffending (2022/23)
- 8.1.2** Safer Portsmouth Partnership Community Safety Survey (2022, 2024)
- 8.1.3** Health and Care Portsmouth Substance Misuse Needs Assessment Portsmouth (2022), and a deep dive focused on women (2024)

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- 8.1.4** Portsmouth City Council Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment (2021)
 - 8.1.5** Portsmouth Health and Wellbeing Board Joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA).
 - 8.1.6** Wave Trust Strategy for implementation of the 2022 Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton Concordat on Prevention of ACEs and Embedding of Trauma-informed Practice.
 - 8.1.7** University of Portsmouth Evaluation of the We Stand Together Safe Space Scheme (2023)
- 8.2** Additionally, the following relevant assessments are due to publish within in the next year:
- 8.2.1** Public Health Inclusion Health Assessment focused on substance misuse, modern slavery, and sex work (due to publish Autumn 2024).
 - 8.2.2** Portsmouth City Council refresh of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment (due to publish Autumn 2024)
 - 8.2.3** Safer Portsmouth Partnership refresh of the Strategic Assessment of Crime, Anti-social Behaviour, Substance Misuse, and Reoffending 2023/24 (due to publish Autumn 2024)
 - 8.2.4** Public Health 1001 Days Needs Assessment (due to publish Summer 2024)
- 8.3** Within all this the following gaps have been identified:
- 8.3.1** A literature review that considers research, systemic reviews, local, national, and international evaluations about what will work to address VAWG and improve outcomes.
 - 8.3.2** Resource mapping across the full range of VAWG that would provide a detailed understanding of service delivery and other resources already in place.
 - 8.3.3** A gendered analysis of key factors that drive inequality (health, education, housing, mobility, income) which would enable targeting of interventions.
 - 8.3.4** Consideration of how children and young people are being responded to as victims, across the spectrum of service delivery, particularly when those children's circumstances do not meet the threshold for TIER 4 or Early Help responses.

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9. Further assessment:

- 9.1** There is already work underway that will help manage some of the gaps identified through the scoping work. For example, the 1001 days needs assessment will capture services and interventions available to pregnant people and families with children under 2 and a half where interventions around healthy relationships and domestic abuse can be applied. Work underway to create a support hub for people experiencing VAWG being funded through the Safer Streets Agenda will produce a pan Hampshire resource map that can be filtered by local authority area. Whilst there has not been a separate analysis for women within the JSNA wherever possible the data is split between male and female so the gendered position can be selected and reflected upon. Literature reviews for some specific topics have been undertaken, for example a literature review in respect of the night-time economy's role in tackling VAWG and the use of Safe Spaces in addressing Gender Based Violence has been undertaken as part of the We Stand Together Safe Spaces evaluation.
- 9.2** Within the timeframes available it will be possible to undertake some additional activities such as completing further research into what works across the key themes identified through the stakeholder workshops, and it is expected that the final strategy will make provision for the need to further knowledge in some areas.

10. Snapshot of VAWG in Portsmouth

10.1 Domestic Abuse:

- 10.1.1** Domestic abuse continues to be the largest driver of violent crime, accounting for 40%³ of all violent crime in 2022/23⁴. Where details about the victims were recorded, 73% (n2,937) victims/survivors of all domestic abuse crimes reported to the police were female, and the peak age groups were 35-44 years (27%, n1,130) and 25-34years (26%, 1,069). Of the 1,950 referrals to Stop Domestic Abuse (SDA) victim service in 2022/23⁴above. Only 9% (n.182) were from professional agencies not including the police⁴. For every

³ This is 40% of assaults and not all violent crime.

⁴ Safer Portsmouth Partnership (2023) Partnership Strategic Assessment of Crime, Anti-social Behaviour, Substance Misuse, and Reoffending: update for 2022/23.

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victim there is an identified someone using abusive behaviours however, Up2U: Creating Healthy Relationships, the service commissioned to support people who use unhealthy relationship behaviours, delivered by SDA received only 62 referrals in 2022/23⁴.

10.1.2 There has been a 49% reduction in maternity cases where domestic abuse is identified⁴. Domestic abuse (DA) remains a key factor in a number of contacts to Portsmouth's children's services multi-agency support Hub (MASH) and a number of those contacts that meet the threshold at Tier 4⁵. In 2022/23 28.7% (n.826/2880) of children allocated to Tier 4 had DA as a factor⁵. Following the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Children affected by domestic abuse should be automatically treated as victims regardless of whether they were present during violent incidents. This presents a challenge for the city in terms of response, as not all children who experience domestic abuse will present in the same way, nor will they all meet a threshold for Teir 4 services.

10.2 Sexual Offences:

10.2.1 During 2022/23, there were 989 sexual offences, which is a 3% (n27) increase from 2021/22 and a continuation of the overall upward trend since 2013/14⁴. 42% (n341) of sexual offences were also domestic violence⁴. Just over a quarter of sexual offences (26%, n259) took place in a public place, and 7% (n.69) took place in designated nighttime economy streets, in public, between 8pm and 5am⁴. Where victim details were recorded (n724), they were much more likely to be women and girls (81%, n585) than men or boys⁴. Victims of sexual offences tend to be younger than for other types of crime with almost 60% of victims aged 24 years or younger. The peak age group for women and girls was 10- 17 years (30%, n178)⁴.

10.2.2 In a survey undertaken by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Hampshire, after the police, friends (49% n.554) and family (43% n.490) were identified as the people most likely to be confided in, if someone had experienced a violent and/or sexual crime⁶.

⁵ Portsmouth City Council (2024) MASH Contacts and Referrals monitoring February 2024

⁶ Hampshire Office Police Crime Commissioner: Report for Public VAWG Survey 2022

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10.3 Child sexual exploitation:

10.3.1 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse where a child or young person is exploited and given things like gifts, drugs, money, status, and affection in exchange for performing sexual activities. There were 95 children and young people flagged as at risk of CSE in 2022/23⁴. The level of identified children at risk of CSE has remained fairly stable over the last five years⁴. National research indicates a considerable proportion of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the context of VAWG is child-on-child, driven by consensual sharing of self-generated indecent images⁷.

10.4 Modern slavery, human trafficking, and honour-based abuse:

10.4.1 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) is a complex crime that covers all forms of slavery, trafficking, and exploitation. The number of referrals from Portsmouth City Council to the National Referral Mechanism (NMR) has fallen since 2021. There was a total of 16 in 2023 compared to 17 in 2022 and 39 in 2021⁸.

10.4.2 Honour based abuse is thought to be substantially under-reported to the police. In 2022/23, 48 people were receiving support in Portsmouth for HBV, which is 30% (n11) more than in 2021/22⁴.

10.4.3 Locally Portsmouth City of Sanctuary in partnership with SPA 61 (Harbour Church) and the Medaille trust co-founded the first female-only drop-in service 'HAVEN' for women living in Portsmouth in 2021. HAVEN has become a safe space for women who have experienced any form of gender violence; supporting survivors of sexual gender-based violence – FGM, forced marriage, domestic violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and women engaged in sex work. Since opening in 2021, it has supported over 150 women. Many of these women are asylum seeking with no recourse to public funds⁹.

⁷ Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2024) Child Sexual Abuse in 2022/23: Trends in official data

⁸ Portsmouth City Council (2024) Cabinet Report: Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement.

⁹ Portsmouth City of Sanctuary, Haven (Female only drop in) accessed June 2024.

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10.5 Stalking and Harassment:

10.5.1 There have been increases in stalking and harassment offences over the last decade, however these are largely driven by increases in reporting and improvements to recording⁴, and there is more work to do explore the types of harassment reported to police.

10.6 Adult sexual exploitation and sex work:

10.6.1 There was no exploitation of sex-work offences reported to the police in 2022/23⁴ but a local needs assessment conducted by Vista identified around 700 people¹⁰, mainly women in Portsmouth affected by the sex industry working in a variety of contexts. This included advertising online for massage parlours ('massage plus'), escort agencies, 'working flats', webcamming and the use of hotel rooms or private rentals. Reasons for involvement in the sex industry included: only way to gain an income after leaving an abusive relationship, childhood abuse leading to issues in adulthood, experience of sexual violence, being groomed, coerced, trafficked, to fund drug use or for survival¹⁰.

10.7 Tech enabled VAWG which includes online harassment:

10.7.1 Whilst it is possible to examine police data in respect of tech enabled VAWG crimes locally, there are some significant limitations as to how useful this is in relation to the development of a localised VAWG strategy; given that the person committing the offence maybe doing so from anywhere in the world. Moving forward, it may be possible to monitor local implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023, through the expectations set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2023 which placed enhanced requirements on schools in respect of online safety.

¹⁰ Vista (2023) Needs Assessment of the Sex Industry in the Local Authority Areas of Gosport, Fareham, Havant, and The Isle of Wight, conducted as part of the Safer Streets 4, With You Project by Vista Portsmouth.

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10.8 VAWG in different space types: public, private and in places of education:

10.8.1 During the 2022 community safety survey, more women felt unsafe in Portsmouth than men (64% compared with 44%) although areas where women feel unsafe were similar to men¹¹. In 2024 when the same question was asked again, females were still more likely to feel unsafe/avoid areas than males (63% and 40% respectively)¹². However, whilst both women and men's fear had reduced, the gap between women and men's fear had increased by 15% (3 percentage points). When it came to being worried about being a victim of crime generally the gap between women's and men's worry increased by 60% (6 percentage points) between 2022 and 2024. Feeling unsafe and fear of being a victim of crime are different things, however both are pervasive and can prevent people accessing opportunities such as travel and work¹³. Women commonly felt that a greater police presence in these areas would help them feel safer, but other solutions were mentioned, including better lighting and CCTV, regeneration, or environmental improvements¹².

10.8.2 Overall, the data available for women's experience of transport is limited. Data that is available, showed that that 60% of women considered public transport to be the most important part of the cities transport strategy, compared with only 47% of men. There were also high levels of satisfaction with street lighting and bus services, which tend to be used by women. Women are underrepresented within Voi scooter and Beryl bike usage, with key barriers identified which included unsafe infrastructure, hostile road environment, actively aggressive drivers, and sense of safety especially when alone and riding in the evening.

10.8.3 There is not a clear picture of the level of sexual violence and sexual harassment occurring between children in Portsmouth schools and colleges and more work is required to understand any specific issues that need to be addressed. Following updates to Keeping Children safe in Education, all schools now have their Health, Relationship & Sex Education school policy

¹¹ Safer Portsmouth Partnership (2022) Portsmouth Community Safety Survey 2022

¹² Safer Portsmouth Partnership (2024) Portsmouth Community Safety Survey 2024

¹³ ONS (2022) Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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available⁴. Home Office Safer Streets funding has enabled targeted interventions. Three Portsmouth secondary schools and colleges have been trained to deliver Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP). MVP is an evidence-based peer intervention programme. Since 2023, 587 student leads from the University of Portsmouth have also received 'Community in Motion' active bystander training¹⁴.

10.8.4 There has been work undertaken to improve the response within key areas of the city, linked to the night-time economy. This has been led by Police licencing and supported by programmes such as Safer Streets. This work has resulted in 30 venues across the city receiving intersectional training focused on responding to sexual violence regardless of the gender of the victim¹⁴.

10.8.5 There is not a clear picture of the levels of sexual violence and harassment occurring within workplaces across the city. Nationally estimates on the experiences and nature of harassment from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), found that a quarter (26%) of those who had experienced sexual harassment said they had experienced harassment at their place of work¹⁵. Several organisations across the city participate in the annual White Ribbon campaign, to address male violence against women and girls. Portsmouth City Council became a White Ribbon accredited organisation in 2023.

10.9 Spiking (with alcohol or any other substances):

10.9.1 There were 54 administering poison offences reported to the police in 2022/23. However, spiking is an issue where there are limitations to the data available and more work is needed to understand the extent of the problem⁴.

11. VAWG and Health:

11.1 VAWG has been recognised as a public health problem impacting on women's mental and physical health. Evidence suggests that victimisation is associated with an increased risk of mental health problems, including suicidal ideation and suicide.

¹⁴ Portsmouth City Council (2024) Safer Streets Monitoring April 2024

¹⁵ ONS (2023) Experiences of harassment in England and Wales: December 2023.

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Between 2019 and 2020 there were 34 deaths due to suicide or undetermined intent in Portsmouth, and death by suicide stood at 10.3 per 100,000. 58% of the suicide cases were amongst men, which was lower than national average (75%) for the same period. Conversely, the data indicated a higher rate of suicide deaths in women in Portsmouth (42%) compared to a national average of 25% in 2018-2019. As a result, the Portsmouth Suicide Prevention Plan 2022-2025 recognises that those at higher risk of suicide locally include young women, those with mental ill-health and those who have experienced domestic abuse or violence and/or sexual violence.

11.2 A critical review of Portsmouth's domestic abuse strategy in 2022 identified that additional complexities, such as health disparities, compound VAWG, and concluded that some groups may be experiencing additional barriers to accessing support and may require a more targeted response than others. However further work is needed to understand the local context, and a mechanism for this work would need to be agreed.

12. Tackling inequalities among women and girls

12.1 Within a national call for evidence to inform the women's health strategy for England¹⁶ responses from organisations and experts highlighted that some groups of women are at higher risk of experiencing certain forms of violence and abuse than others – for example, higher rates of domestic abuse are recorded among women with a disability compared to those who do not have a disability; lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to have experienced abuse than heterosexual women. Local research has also highlighted that women supported for substance misuse and women with experience of sex work also have reported high rates of abuse. It is important that there is a better understanding of the subsections of the local population, their needs and how these needs can be met equitably.

13. How best to address VAWG:

13.1 The Governments 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"¹⁷. This includes an expectation that local strategies and services will:

¹⁶ UK Government (2022) Women's Health Strategy for England.

¹⁷ UK Government (2022) Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls.

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- Put the victim at the centre of service design and delivery.
- Have a clear focus on perpetrators.
- Take a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning and acknowledging the gendered nature of VAWG.
- Be locally led and safeguard individuals at every point.
- Raise awareness, engage, and empower communities to prevent VAWG.

13.2 Following on from the National statement of expectations, the Scottish Government published an independent strategic review of funding and commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services in 2023¹⁸. The rapid evidence review that accompanied this strategic review highlighted that most of the research and evaluation available to consider, relates to domestic abuse and sexual violence¹⁹. In comparison, nationally and internationally limited work has taken place to consider other issues such as stalking and harassment, trafficking, modern slavery, honour-based abuse, and women affected by the sex industry. However, despite these limitations there are consistent messages about what works, and what needs to change to enable VAWG to be effectively addressed.

13.3 In terms of what works, health services were identified as a core universal service with more potential to respond to VAWG than is currently being realised. The review noted the importance of recognising and responding to intersectionality and engaging people with lived experience at all stages within service design and delivery to understand and overcome barriers to engagement. It also highlighted early intervention as vital for addressing VAWG, and the need for a significant shift towards funding of prevention, with work such as the UN Women's RESPECT programme²⁰ identified as providing a blueprint for intervention. This work identified seven interrelated areas that require collective commitment:

- **R**elationships skills strengthened.
- **E**mpowerment of women
- **S**ervices ensured.

¹⁸ Scottish Government (2023) The Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services.

¹⁹ Scottish Government (2022) Funding for services for women and children experiencing gender-based violence: Rapid evidence review.

²⁰ UN Women (2019) RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women.

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- **Poverty reduced.**
- **Environments made safe.**
- **Child and adolescent abuse prevented.**
- **Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms.**

13.4 The Scottish strategic review also put forward recommendations to address structural issues that prevent progress towards eradicating VAWG. These are not issues that can be addressed at a local level, but they do need to be acknowledged, and carefully considered when setting out Portsmouth's aspirations for addressing VAWG:

- Limitations to funding, which is often short term,
- The fragmented nature of commissioning, leading to overlap and duplication of effort.
- Sustainability of any activities, including services commissioned.
- Limitations to data, that make it difficult to create frameworks and evaluate impact.

14. The approach taken by other local authorities.

14.1 Whilst many local authorities have a domestic abuse strategy, few have expanded upon that. Where they have, domestic abuse remains a key focus, reflecting the prominence of healthy relationships within the agenda. Southampton city Council published its first VAWG strategy in 2023, setting out a five-year plan for change (2023-2025), across four key areas: prioritising prevention, support for survivors, building an accountable community and changing perpetrator behaviour and a stronger co-ordinated response²¹.

14.2 Hampshire County Council (HCC) have maintained a domestic abuse strategy, but within this drawn a link to wider VAWG work including the OPCC VAWG Task Force established in 2021. The HCC strategy has a focus on establishing a joint commitment, embedding a whole system approach, creating a co-ordinated response, supporting victims/survivors with protected characteristics, and actively identifying and engaging with perpetrators.

²¹ Southampton City Council (2023) Southampton Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

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14.3 Harringay adopted a VAWG approach in 2016, ambitiously setting out a 10-year strategy for change (2016-2026) that is still in progress²². The overarching vision within this strategy was to develop a co-ordinated community response, have robust prevention and early intervention approaches, ensure tailored and survivor led services and to hold perpetrators to account. Within Harringay's serious violence strategic needs assessment 2023/24, performance overview analysis identified Harringay was consistently outperforming London more widely in respect of previous 12 months and 3 years monitoring in respect of Domestic Abuse offences, violence with injury (domestic abuse) total sexual violence, and rape offences²³.

14.4 Whatever the scope of the strategy, there are some common threads within the approach taken to tackle domestic abuse and other VAWG issues:

- 14.4.1** A gendered approach - only by looking at these issues through a gendered lens can we begin to fully understand and put in place plans to address them that will work.
- 14.4.2** Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR) - these issues are societal and require a multidimensional approach that reaches into and engages with, individuals, communities, institutions, and society more widely to be effective.
- 14.4.3** Effective Partnerships - VAWG is everyone's businesses, agencies need to take ownership, and work together as one community to tackle issues.
- 14.4.4** Intersectionality - individual risk and need, should be considered in a holistic way.
- 14.4.5** Lived experience - when the voices of those who have lived through and been subjected to VAWG are listened too, responses to all victims and survivors improve.
- 14.4.6** Prevention - engaging with and supporting those who use unhealthy behaviours, whilst also using education and other initiatives to promote positive attitudes more generally.

15. Stakeholder Engagement:

- 15.1** There is already a lot of work going on in this space locally and therefore to consider how best to approach the strategy a range of consultation activities have

²² Harringay (2016) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-2026

²³ Harringay (2024) Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment 2023-24

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been undertaken, with the aim of engaging as many people as possible in thinking about what the key issues are and what we need and is within our reach to do to address these.

15.2 Between October 2023 and January 2024, a series of workshops were facilitated throughout the stakeholders from across the agenda including representation from the police, education, specialist providers, health services, children, and adults safeguarding.

15.3 Each of these workshops focused on a specific theme that had been identified as a key factor in addressing VAWG locally: addressing domestic abuse, addressing sexual violence and harassment in the community which impacts upon public confidence, and delivering effective early intervention and prevention messaging for the benefit of all residents. This series of workshops was concluded with a plenary session in February 2024, to bring together and summarise key areas for forward action.

15.4 A consistent theme, identified throughout the stakeholder workshops undertaken as part of developing the VAWG strategy was a need to work together agree and send clear messages through all channels (organisational, educational, social media, marketing, and communications) to all residents, setting out what we aspire towards for Portsmouth, and the behaviours that won't be tolerated in our city.

15.5 Other key messages identified through the stakeholder sessions are summarised below:

15.5.1 Domestic Abuse:

We need to:

- Respond to domestic abuse across a continuum of behaviours, risk and needs.
- Create a culture across the workforce that see people in the whole, with professionals who can work across a range of issues with confidence.
- Increase residents trust in services particularly amongst people who feel they have been let down in the past.

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- Have a universal offer, open to all residents, particularly when referrals for support are declined by either the victim or the person being abusive.
- Create a commissioning culture that ensures responding to domestic abuse is everybody's responsibility.
- Strengthen and manage the refer-on culture within the city, particularly in respect of health services.

15.5.2 Sexual violence and harassment in the community:

We need to:

- Address our city's gateways so that they send a clear message that reassures people about what they can expect in terms of our commitment to safety within the city.
- Be thinking about design and use all levers at our disposal to achieve improved feelings of safety in the public realm, active travel, and public transport.
- Create more opportunities for collaboration and collective ownership of addressing VAWG across the community.
- Be clear about our city vision and find ways to ensure that we create understanding and memory about this within our local population, which can be transient.

15.5.3 Prevention and Early intervention:

We need to:

- Be person centred, trauma informed and inclusive.
- Make connections between strategies to optimise messaging and make every contact count.
- Ensure that early intervention and prevention opportunities and messaging is a continuum, targeted across different life stages and towards specific vulnerabilities.
- Increase individuals' ability to make informed choices, and critically appraise wider messaging in society and popular culture, that can negatively reinforce unhealthy behaviours.

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- Help professionals, parents, and carers to be able to communicate with children about what is healthy and safe.

16. Frontline worker engagement:

16.1 In December 2023 and February 2024 frontline workers, focus groups were facilitated with staff from across the children's and adult's workforce, and health services. The aim of these sessions was to better understand some of barriers and challenges frontline workers in different sectors experience in responding to VAWG, and to consider what can be done to address these moving forward.

16.2 Within these workshops practitioners shared that they felt more confident to discuss the issue of abuse if there had been a disclosure or overt incident. However, there were concerns about risk and consent when working with victims and those being abusive, and a sense that opportunities to ask again were being missed.

16.3 Key messages from frontline worker engagement:

- Confidence is improving but starting the conversation can be hard.
- There is a need to revisit conversations and make every contact count.
- A need to remove barriers to accessing training.
- A need to look at ways to improve continuity, and ensure response is sustainable in a challenging landscape.

17. Partnership engagement:

17.1 Agencies across the city have been working together to address domestic abuse for several years via the domestic abuse strategy. In this time there have been some notable successes including the roll out of the 'Is this love campaign' helping raise awareness of unhealthy relationship behaviours, and the commissioning of integrated domestic abuse services. A review of the current domestic abuse strategy in 2021, identified areas where it could be strengthened further in respect of understanding and responding to the intersectional needs of those who have experienced domestic abuse, and reaching and supporting more people who use unhealthy behaviours.

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- 17.2** Locally, Domestic Homicide reviews (DRH) and Serious Adult Reviews (SAR) have demonstrated that for a small cohort in the city, professionals struggle to respond or know what to do as a workforce. Analysis of the vulnerabilities of people who have died because of a domestically abusive relationship have repeatedly shown issues such as mental health and substance misuse issues. These same issues have been present in those being abusive, with mental health being identified as a more significant issue. Victims and those who use abusive behaviours considered within DHR and SAR were sometimes not known to specialist services but were always known to health services. An overriding message from these reviews is that professionals need to have more confidence to recognise and respond to domestic abuse. Victims' families and friends have also been identified as key people within the wider community who need to be better informed and supported to engage in healthy relationship conversations.
- 17.3** A current challenge for community safety partnerships across Hampshire, including Portsmouth is the limited partnership funding available to commission and deliver DHR's. Demand has increased in recent years, and is expected to continue to increase, in line with new legislation and greater awareness amongst agencies. Portsmouth is working with Community Safety Partnerships across Hampshire and the OPCC to explore how to collectively resolve the challenges faced by Local Authorities.
- 17.4** There have also been targeted discussions with key stakeholders such as the police about how to manage specific gaps in the current structure. For example, how best to address strategic escalation, messaging and learning pathways for MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference). This has included looking at how these issues are managed within other authority areas, such as Southampton, which as well as being within Hampshire, is also a statistical neighbour of Portsmouth, and who's work in this area has been identified by the police as best practice.
- 17.5** Within Hampshire the OPCC have led on work to bring local authorities together to consider how best to engage people with lived experience within service evaluation and development. This has resulted in Portsmouth City Council being part of a whole of Hampshire working group committed to developing ethical, inclusive, and meaningful communication opportunities that support learning and inform future service development.

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17.6 There are several anchor institutions within the city, who collectively have the potential to be great change agents within this agenda: being influential, larger employers of Portsmouth residents, larger estate owners, and/or key service and/or educational providers. These organisations are already connected through structures such as the Health and Wellbeing board and the local estates forum, which provides an opportunity to look at how we work together to address VAWG through organisational change.

18. Public consultation:

18.1 Between December 2023 and the end of February 2024, to further enhance our understanding of VAWG locally, an online public survey was undertaken. The survey consisted of 113 individual questions, which aimed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative (open text answers). The questions focused on what influenced participants beliefs around healthy/unhealthy relationships, identifies those who have experienced unhealthy behaviours (either as a victim, being abusive or both or witnessed unhealthy behaviours), possible motivation behind abusive or unhealthy behaviours, location of incidents, their responses (including if they informed anyone or sought support), effectiveness of support received/remedies available and what could be done to improve their responses and support they received.

18.2 A wide range of campaign tools were used to promote the survey and encourage participation, this included press releases, social media, flagship, and physical posters, flyers and beer mats displayed in public spaces including libraries, Portsmouth university campus and hospitality areas.

18.3 There were 800 eligible participants,²⁴ which is 75% of the aimed number participants (n.1065²⁵). Whilst this was lower than the aimed amount, there was a similar level of participation (n.763) to the sexual needs health assessment in 2022 which used similar campaign tools and was also of a sensitive nature.

²⁴ Eligible participants were those 18 and over. It should also be noted that the participation numbers for each question differs as participants did not answer all questions.

²⁵ Based upon a sample size of 1000, for 95% confidence and 3% margin of error.

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18.4 Where known:

- 79% resided within Portsmouth whilst 18% worked, studied, or visited Portsmouth.
- Participants were predominantly female (80%)
- The majority of participants were aged between 25-34 (21%) and 35-44 (23%)
- 88% were White British whilst 8% were from black and minoritised communities.
- 35% identified as being victims, 5% as perpetrators and 7% as being both.

18.5 Analysis of the results is currently in progress and expected to be completed in July 2024. The report will contain both info-graphs and commentary and qualitative responses will be provided used a thematic analysis²⁶

19. Listening to children

19.1 Consulting with children about issues that affect them is important; however, it can be challenging to find the best way to approach issues such as VAWG which are sensitive in nature, can retraumatise children and ask them to potentially criticise their parents. To date consultation with children and young people has been to seek their views on the service offered as opposed to informing future needs.

19.2 More widely, initiatives like 'Bee Well' are supporting the understanding into key issues that children and young people across the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIPS) region are facing. In 2023, 22,159 students from years 8 and 10 across the HIPS region participated in the Bee Well survey²⁷. 1,255 of these were Portsmouth students, with results split into three 'neighbourhood' areas - Portsmouth North, Portsmouth Central, and Portsmouth South. Where gender was stated (n.1,109), 47% (n.522) of students participating identified as female, 45% (n.503) identified as male, and 8% (n.84) identified as other²⁸.

²⁶ A thematic analysis identifies common themes in open text responses which will then be categorised.

²⁷ Bee Well (2024) #BeeWell Neighbourhood Data Hive (2023 survey)

²⁸ Bee Well (2024) #BeeWell neighbourhood profile (2023)

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19.3 Within the Bee Well survey, discrimination was identified as a driver of wellbeing, and students were asked about how often they felt discriminated against by various factors, including gender. In Portsmouth Central 15% of female (incl. trans female) students said that they had experienced gender discrimination (*often or always, some of the time, and occasionally*), compared to 5% of male (incl. trans male) students. In Portsmouth North the gap was wider, specifically in the Y10 age group where 20% of female (incl. trans female) reported they had experienced gender discrimination, compared to 5% of male students (incl. trans male)²⁹. Portsmouth South showed overall reports of gender discrimination as 15%, however due to lower numbers of students stating their gender, it's not been possible to provide male/female comparisons. Numbers of students stating their gender as 'other' were too low to compare in any of the Portsmouth neighbourhood areas.

19.4 The Bee Well survey also asked about quality of relationships with school staff, family, and friends. Overall, within each of these categories Portsmouth students within North, Central and South neighbourhoods were found to show levels of social support that are not discernibly different from the average, suggesting that they feel as supported by adults at school, their adults at home, and peers as other students across the HIPS region²⁷. When it came to gender, there was little difference between male (incl. trans male) and female (incl. trans female) students when it came to relationships with adults at home. Female students demonstrated better relationships with friends in Portsmouth North (male mean.14.91, female mean.15.48) and South (male mean.15.26, female mean.16.1), whilst male students reported slightly lower levels (male mean.13.67, female mean.13.87) of positive relationships with staff in Portsmouth North neighbourhood area²⁷.

19.5 Asking children and young people about specific VAWG behaviours can be challenging and needs to be done with care. The city's 'You Say' survey did include some specific healthy relationship questions. You Say was last run in Portsmouth in 2018. At that point whilst 90% of year 8 and 10 students thought it was never 'okay to hit a boyfriend/girlfriend', just 45% of those students surveyed thought it was never 'okay to check a boyfriend/girlfriend's social media or phone'³⁰. More recently, nationally SafeLives Verge of Harming work (with 11-25yr olds) has provided an insight into drivers and intersectional complexities that lead

²⁹ Bee Well (2024) Neighbourhood Measures (2023 Survey)

³⁰ Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023 Measures for intervention.

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some young people to use harmful behaviours within their relationships. 30% of young people completing the survey said they had used harmful behaviours in a relationship, and over half (56%) said that they would not seek help if they were worried about their own behaviour, highlighting the need for further work in this area³¹. This position is reinforced by the 2023 Portsmouth 'Is this Love?' survey, in which 49% (n.155) of those who took part said there were times when they felt their relationship was unhealthy, with a further 11% (n.34) identified as currently within an unhealthy relationship and encouraged to seek immediate help.

19.6 In Portsmouth, Unlock is leading work to hear the voices of children and young people through a variety of programmes and projects, including Portsmouth's Youth Cabinet and annual Student Voice Celebration Days. As part of the 2024 event, a group of years 6, 8 and 10 students participated in a session entitled 'What Jars You?'. This activity was taken from the AGENDA toolkit that has been developed in partnership with students from Wales to deliver relationships education that addressed their needs and experiences³².

19.7 The feedback received provided an insight into the everyday experiences of children locally that included mainstream use of sexist derogatory language e.g. 'Oh you're such a girl', 'Man up', a sense of gender separation within society with clear messages about what girls/boys should be like and/or how they should appear which extended to things like participation in sport and what jobs they could do. Experiences also included bullying due to not fitting into the norm in terms of gender stereotypes, feeling judged, and a sense that appearances matter over behaviour and/or personality, and gendered verbal harassment. Racism, homophobia, and transphobia were also issues raised as needing to be addressed.

19.8 When asked to think about how to solve these issues, children felt that more work was needed to educate about the danger of stereotypes, there needed to be more education about how to be respectful within relationships, more awareness about gender based violence, more opportunities to try different things, there needed to be a focus on supporting girls particularly into sports and STEM activities, and boys to do things like dance.

³¹ SafeLives (2023) Verge of Harming, exploring abuse in young people's relationships and support for young people who harm.

³² AGENDA: Supporting children and young people in making positive relationships matter.

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20. Links to other strategy

20.1 The VAWG strategy will not be a standalone piece of work, connectivity to several other strategies has been identified throughout the process of assessment and consultation which includes:

- Portsmouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership (PSCP) Safeguarding Children Strategy (2023-2026)
- Portsmouth Children's Trust Plan (2024-2029)
- Portsmouth Suicide Prevention Plan (2022-2025)
- Portsmouth City Council, Homelessness Strategy (2024-2029)
- Portsmouth Safeguarding Adults Board strategic plan (2023-2028)
- Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioners Police and Crime plan (2021-2024)

21. Analysis and themes for Portsmouth's VAWG strategy

21.1 Many points for action have been identified throughout the scoping and consultation work to date, confirming the need for some overarching principles, and key pillars of work within the strategy.

21.2 Overarching Principles:

- Commitment to a city vision that sees addressing VAWG as everyone's business as the only way to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all residents.
- Agreed ways of working to tackle VAWG in a way that is relational, trauma informed, restorative and systemic.
- Reaching in and working with those who use abusive or unhealthy behaviours to address these as early as possible.
- Working together to maximise the resources available and be sustainable in our choices for the benefit of all residents.
- Listening and learning, from those with lived experience, especially those whose voices are underrepresented or seldom heard.

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21.3 Pillars:

21.3.1 Continue to tackle Domestic Abuse: Domestic abuse remains a priority for the city, and whilst there have been successes over recent years, including increased awareness and take up of opportunities like Right to ask/Right to know, there is more work to be done to ensure curiosity and a positive and proactive response within families, the wider community, and establishments. Whilst numbers of people engaging in work to address unhealthy relationship behaviours is improving, the numbers accessing support are small and there needs to be a focus on normalising safe healthy relationship conversations, with everyone, but especially men, to help shift the city from reactive to proactive when it comes to intimate partner violence (IPV).

21.3.2 Respond to sexual violence, abuse and harassment occurring within the community: Instances of sexual violence occurring outside of relationships are low, however fear of violence, abuse and harassment in the community is an issue that is reducing participation and access. More work is required to recognise and respond to lower-level incidents within the community, and to increase everyone's confidence to step up to prevent situations escalating across community settings, alongside looking for opportunities to make situational improvements.

There are some forms of VAWG occurring in the community such as modern slavery, adult sexual exploitation, and sex work, that are extremely harmful to those affected by them, and associated with wider serious crime. These more hidden issues, require a collective effort to better understand and agree how best to address them locally, at the same time as continuing to grow local capacity to recognise and respond effectively to instances that do occur, across key services, institutions, and the wider community.

21.3.3 Deliver effective prevention and early intervention: There are some good examples of preventative campaigns such as 'Is This Love?' targeted at healthy relationships, and the annual White Ribbon campaign calling for people to promise to never use, excuse, or remain silent about men's violence against women. However, a more focused piece of work is required to ensure we are making the most of the channels available across the city, including health, education, culture, leisure, and the arts, to raise awareness and enable all residents of all ages to have the information they need to be

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able to make their own healthy choices or to support family and friends who are experiencing abuse. There needs to be an offer for all residents, alongside more targeted support, that reflects intersectionality, peoples changing contexts, and reaches into parts of the community where there are additional barriers to seeking help and accessing support.

21.3.4 Encourage organisational change, as a catalyst for wider societal change:

The Governments Domestic Abuse (DA) statutory guidance provides a framework for agencies to support victims of DA³³. Many Portsmouth residents also work within the city, and there are key institutions that collectively employ a reasonable proportion of the city's adult population, as well as delivering services to many more. Working with these organisations and others across the public, private and voluntary sector to have shared and clearly defined values in relation to addressing VAWG through initiatives such as White Ribbon, it not just the right thing to do, but an obvious way to improve the appeal of the city as a place that supports people's overall quality of life.

22. Conclusion

22.1 VAWG is a vast ranging and complex issue. Significant work has been undertaken to understand the main issues within Portsmouth and consider different interrelated and correlating factors that also need to be addressed related to these issues that the forward strategy will need to ensure are connected. Work to understand need, has identified that there are still things that we don't know or fully understand, and the final strategy will need to make provision for some aspects of some workstreams to be evolving. VAWG is not an issue that can be addressed in isolation, its roots are interwoven within the fabric of our society and reach into all aspects of our community. Time has been spent listening to the views of as many stakeholders as possible, through a range of means about the issues they are experiencing within the current system and working with them to consider key priorities for change, and what potential solutions may look like. This work has confirmed the need for some clear principles and focused pillars of work in respect of tackling domestic abuse, responding to abuse, violence and harassment

³³ Home Office (2022) Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance

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occurring in the community, early intervention and messaging, and organisational change.

22.2 Discussions with partners has identified a high level of interest and appetite to progress specific elements of the agenda, which is encouraging, as commitment from all agencies, and strong partnership working will be essential to the success of the future strategy. However, within this there is also a need to manage expectations and be honest about what can be achieved within the current context. The final strategy when it publishes in the Autumn, will need to find a way to work within financial and information constraints, whilst also being ambitious for the changes that we need to see across the city to really address violence against women and girls, and make the shift needed between reactive and proactive work.

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Signed by :

Paddy May

Corporate Strategy Manager

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
NPCC (2023) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023	vawg-stra-public-official.pdf (npcc.police.uk)
NPCC (2023) We Walk Away: Campaign Toolkit	Campaign Toolbox - We Walk Away

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Safer Portsmouth Partnership (2023) Partnership Strategic Assessment of Crime, Anti-social Behaviour, Substance Misuse, and Reoffending: update for 2022/23	Strategic-Assessment-Update-2022-23-Public-version-1.pdf (saferportsmouth.org.uk).
Portsmouth City Council (2024) MASH Contacts and Referrals monitoring February 2024	Children, Families & Education, Portsmouth City Council
Hampshire Office Police Crime Commissioner: Report for Public VAWG Survey 2022	Hampshire Office Police Crime Commissioner
Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2024) Child Sexual Abuse in 2022/23: Trends in official data	https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/research-evidence/scale-nature-of-abuse/trends-in-official-data/
Portsmouth City Council (2024) Cabinet Report: Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement	https://democracy.portsmouth.gov.uk/documents/s52471/Modern%20Slavery%20and%20Human%20Trafficking%20Annual%20Statement.pdf
Portsmouth City of Sanctuary, Haven (Female only drop in)	HAVEN (female only drop-in) - Portsmouth City of Sanctuary
Vista (2023) Needs Assessment of the Sex Industry in the Local Authority Areas of Gosport, Fareham, Havant, and The Isle of Wight.	Executive, Portsmouth City Council
Safer Portsmouth Partnership (2022) Portsmouth Community Safety Survey 2022	Survey (saferportsmouth.org.uk)
Safer Portsmouth Partnership (2024) Portsmouth Community Safety Survey 2024	Survey (saferportsmouth.org.uk)
ONS (2022) Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)	Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics
Portsmouth City Council (2024) Safer Streets Monitoring April 2024	Executive, Portsmouth City Council

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ONS (2023) Experiences of harassment in England and Wales: December 2023	https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/experiencesofharassmentinenglandandwales/december2023
UK Government (2022) Women's Health Strategy for England	Women's Health Strategy for England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
UK Government (2022) Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls	Commissioning services to tackle violence against women and girls - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Scottish Government (2023) The Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services	The Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning (www.gov.scot)
Scottish Government (2022) Funding for services for women and children experiencing gender-based violence: Rapid evidence review	strategic-review-vawg-funding-international-funding-models-rapid-evidence-review-updated-nov-2022.docx (live.com)
UN Women (2019) RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women	https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/05/respect-women-preventing-violence-against-women
Southampton City Council (2023) Southampton Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy	Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls 2023-2028 strategy (southampton.gov.uk)
Haringay (2016) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-2026	vawg_strategy.pdf (haringey.gov.uk)
Haringay (2024) Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment 2023-24	Haringey Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment - January 2024
Bee Well (2024) #BeeWell Neighbourhood Data Hive (2023 survey)	#BeeWell Neighbourhood Data Hive (uomseed.com)
Bee Well (2024) #BeeWell neighbourhood profile (2023)	https://uomseed.com/hips-neighbourhoods/2023/profile/

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Bee Well (2024) Neighbourhood Measures (2023 Survey)	#BeeWell Neighbourhood Data Hive (uomseed.com)
Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023 Measures for intervention	Children, Families & Education, Portsmouth City Council
SafeLives (2023) Verge of Harming, exploring abuse in young people's relationships and support for young people who harm	Verge_of_Harming_Report.pdf (safelives.org.uk)
AGENDA: Supporting children and young people in making positive relationships matter	https://agendaonline.co.uk/welcome/
Home Office (2022) Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance	Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)