

TITLE	Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy and White Ribbon Accreditation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 November 2022
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To provide an overview of the local violence against women & girls strategy 2023-26, including the timeline for development, implementation, and consultation plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers the report and offers comment.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

On the 29th September 2022 the Council's Executive agreed to:

1. The development of a borough wide Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy outlining the Council's commitment to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls.
2. Development of an action plan and all the necessary requirements to become an accredited White Ribbon organisation.

This report outlines the key proposed timeline for the implementation, development and consultation of the local VAWG strategy.

Background

On the 29th of September 2022 the council's executive approved that a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls, be produced. The Executive also approved the Council's commitment to achieving White Ribbon Accreditation including the development of an action plan and all the necessary requirements to become an accredited White Ribbon organisation.

Wokingham Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG)

The public profile and awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) has been raised in recent years by several well publicised murders, especially that of Sarah Everard, who was kidnapped and killed by a serving Metropolitan Police Officer. In addition, statistical evidence indicates that rates of domestic abuse and the number of women requesting support following the COVID-19 pandemic has surged, this has led to widespread calls for change.

Crimes such as rape, female genital mutilation, stalking, harassment, and digital crimes such as cyber-flashing, 'revenge porn' and 'up-skirting' are taking place every day and have a long-lasting impact on victims, including mental and physical health problems, not doing well at school or work, becoming homeless, children being harmed and reduced feelings of personal safety.

VAWG is linked to a combination of drivers operating at different levels of society. These risk factors include household dynamics, community factors such as social norms and levels of poverty, and wider factors such as religious ideologies and gender regimes.

The Government's VAWG Strategy 2021 sets out the actions the Government will take moving forward to increase support for survivors, bring perpetrators to justice, and, ultimately, reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls. It focuses on crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls and sets out a framework to drive changes.

The framework focuses on:

- Increasing support for victims and survivors, through ensuring they have access to quality support appropriate to their needs (as measured through increased funded support services);
- Increasing the number of perpetrators brought to justice. In addition, given the under-reporting of these crimes, increased reporting to the police and increased victim engagement with the police and wider public service response.
- Reducing the prevalence of VAWG in the long term

The VAWG National Statement of Expectations sets out expectations of local strategies and services, for stakeholders including local authorities, and provides a comprehensive list of considerations linked to exploring whether the victim/ survivor is at the centre of service design and delivery.

White Ribbon Accreditation

In parallel to the development of a Wokingham specific VAWG strategy, and in order

to further strengthen our local approach, the Council intends to attain White Ribbon accreditation. This will further strengthen the Council's already adopted 'Anti-Abuse Charter' which makes the intentions of the council in relation to violence against women and girls clear and helps borough residents, including victims and survivors, understand the council's commitment towards fostering a deep-rooted culture and step change on violence and abuse.

As part of the delivery of this accreditation the council will shortly be commencing with the development and implementation of a comprehensive action plan with SMART outcomes. Development will be based on measures of success formulated from local discussions with local victim survivors.

Next steps

Whilst Wokingham Borough Council has taken important steps towards improving its response to VAWG, for example through the Anti-abuse charter and Wokingham

Borough Domestic Abuse Strategy, it is clear that more needs to be done. A local Wokingham VAWG strategy is essential in drawing together data, best practice, and experiences of victims who are affected by crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls, creating a robust response and drive to reduce prevalence of these crimes. This strategy would sit alongside existing workstreams, including the domestic abuse response, which addresses one of the strands within VAWG.

As well as targeting the external response to VAWG, the strategy will also look to outline the Council's internal organisational response to VAWG. It is proposed that there will be a focus on preventing violence and harassment by identifying potential risks within the workplace, a commitment to gender equality and diversity throughout the organisation, protection of employees with supportive policies and procedures, and accountability and monitoring of actions at all levels within the organisation.

Wokingham Borough Council intends to imminently progress with the development of a local VAWG strategy which will enable:

- All partners involved in the reduction and response to VAWG to be clear about the agreed priorities over the next 10 years and embed these within their organisations and strategic plans.
- All residents to understand and feel able to contribute towards making Wokingham a safer and healthier place for all.
- Victims/survivors to feel supported to seek help and empowered to lead safe lives, free from abuse.
- Perpetrators to know that their behaviour will not be tolerated and where they can seek support for abusive behaviour.

The development of the strategy seeks to

- Map VAWG service provision locally.
- Identifying gaps in VAWG services, including for marginalised women and girls;
- Undertake accurate data & analysis.
- Review a broad range of strategies that will help inform the Wokingham VAWG strategy including Domestic Abuse, Serious Violent Crime & Exploitation, Substance Misuse/Harm to Health, Thames Valley Police Violence against

Women and Girls Strategy, The Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and The National VAWG Strategy 2021.

- Understand and draw out lived experiences of women and girls in Wokingham
- Draw on good practice nationally to inform the local strategy and action plan.
- Identify resources to ensure the borough has the required capacity to deliver actions and implementation.
- Make recommendations about Performance & Governance – and identify what good looks like and how to monitor success and actions.
- Establish priorities based on evidence of what is known and perceptions/feelings of safety.
- Develop a SMART Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan.

Proposed Timeline for VAWG Strategy Implementation

- **29 September 2022** - Executive approved that a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls, be produced. The Executive also approved the Council's commitment to achieving White Ribbon Accreditation including the development of an action plan and all the necessary requirements to become an accredited White Ribbon organisation. The in-year supplementary estimate of £600 was requested to fund White Ribbon Accreditation was also approved for the current financial year.
- **3 November 2022** - The Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to receive an update on the draft VAWG Strategy and to consider the key components of the strategy.
- **17 November 2022** – The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership to receive and consider the draft strategic themes.
- **21st November 2022 – 6th January 2023 - Commence** broad wide six-week full public and stakeholder consultation including key partnership boards.
- **29 November 2022** -The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to be invited to consider and provide input into the draft strategy.
- **Date TBC** - Serious Violence & Exploitation Board to be invited to consider and provide input into the draft strategy.
- **January 2023** - The Domestic Abuse Networking Group to be consulted on the draft strategy.
- **23 February 2023** - CSP Performance Management Group review and approve final draft.
- **6 March 2023** - Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider & comment on final draft.
- **30 March 2023** - Executive Committee sign off.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
Violence Against Women and Girls reaches across most council departments and can also impact directly and indirectly on the workforce. Workplace guidance is in place and training on domestic abuse responses are offered to all council departments.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An equalities assessment will be undertaken as part of the Strategy Development.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
A climate impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the strategy development

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
29 th September White Ribbon and VAWG Executive Committee Report.

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