

Agenda Item 20.

TITLE	Draft Wokingham Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2023-26
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 July 2023
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framalocco

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Violence Against Women and Girls strategy (2023-26) has been written to help tackle and reduce violence, in all its forms, across the borough of Wokingham. The outcome is to ensure that we make Wokingham an even safer place to live in, to work in, to visit and to identify a range of measures and activity to achieve that.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider the draft Wokingham VAWG strategy and recommend any changes prior to referral to the Executive for adoption.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report is a follow up to the briefing given to this committee in November 2022 and provides background and progress to the development of the draft VAWG strategy.

1 Background

- 1.1 The council's Executive resolved at their meeting in September 2022 that a Wokingham Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy be produced and that the Council seek White Ribbon Accreditation.
- 1.2 A report was presented to this committee in November 2022 setting out what is meant by VAWG and the impact it can have on women and girls and particularly on their feelings of vulnerability and safety. At the meeting members requested that a draft VAWG strategy and an update on progress be presented to a future meeting of this committee.
- 1.3 Members were informed that the public profile and awareness of VAWG had 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.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership has taken important steps towards improving its response to tackling and ending VAWG. This includes workstreams and strategies covering Domestic Abuse, Serious Violence and Exploitation and Radicalisation that sits within the PREVENT agenda. Whilst these are all key in helping to tackle violence against women and girls, a local Wokingham VAWG strategy is essential in coordinating a robust approach to tackling crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls.
- 1.6 There is also growing concern around the influence that the internet and social media has, particularly on younger males that are being exposed to 'influencers' promoting misogyny, incel and other aspects of radicalisation that are known to fuel violence, prejudice and hatred toward women and girls.
- 1.7 Alongside the strategy the council is in the process of seeking White Ribbon Accreditation that will help with the internal organisational response to VAWG. This will help identify potential risks, provide a solid commitment to gender equality and diversity, protection of employees through supportive policies and procedures, and accountability and monitoring of actions at all levels within the organisation.

2 Progress to date

- 2.1 The draft strategy is nearing completion having been considered by the Wokingham CSP, Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Networking Group, Serious Violence and Exploitation Board, the VAWG Equality Forum Subgroup, and the Voluntary & Community Sector Steering Group.

2.2 The following priorities, included in the draft strategy, reflect those set out in the National VAWG Strategy, and the strategy produced by Thames Valley Police and the priorities of the Police and Crime Commissioner:

- 1) Putting the victim/survivor at the centre of service design and delivery;
- 2) Taking a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning;
- 3) Having a clear focus on perpetrators and holding them to account;
- 4) Safeguarding and supporting individuals and victims at every point with a strong emphasis on early identification and help;
- 5) Raising local awareness of the issues and involve, engage, and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions.
- 6) Changing inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of men and boys.

2.3 As part of the Community Safety Survey (April 2023) residents and organisations across the borough were invited to comment on the draft priorities of which 88% (n163) agreed with the priorities and 12% (n23) did not. There were several comments about making the environment safer including improved street lighting, providing safe spaces and more police patrols. Several respondents made reference that violence also affected men and boys and was not just violence against women and girls.

2.4 The draft VAWG Action Plan currently shows a broad and comprehensive range of activity that has been taken from the Home Office document 'Violence Against Women and Girls - National Statement of Expectations'. The range of actions will need to be refined and focussed on the needs and priorities of the Wokingham Community and it is proposed that this work be undertaken by a yet to be established working group that would include key partners.

2.5 To ensure delivery against the draft priorities, key areas of work will include:-

- Collecting accurate data & analysis;
- Mapping VAWG service provision locally;
- Identifying gaps in VAWG services, including those for marginalised women and girls;
- Drawing out and understanding the lived experiences of women and girls in Wokingham;
- Identifying resources to ensure the borough has the required capacity to deliver actions and implementation.

3 Timeline for Implementation

- 3.1 The revised timeline for implementation of the strategy is Autumn 2023 with the Executive being invited to consider and approve the final draft as soon after the summer recess as possible.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no immediate financial implications. Funding requirements will become apparent as the action plan evolves and the implications of any activity and improvements are known. These will be put forward for consideration as part of the annual budget setting process.

Cross-Council Implications

There will be implications for other council services including those responsible for ensuring a safe environment is provided in which women and girls in particular can feel safe walking to and from work, school/college, and social/leisure activities.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard of the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken into account and the very nature of the report supports and promotes equality.

Climate Emergency – 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

Click or tap here to enter text. The strategy and associated actions could lead to a culture change whereby women in the borough feel safer and therefore are more likely to walk, rather than drive or take a cab. In turn, this may lead to a reduction in carbon emissions

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not applicable

List of Background Papers
Draft Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (2023-26)

Contact Narinder Brar	Service Place
Telephone No 0118 974 6000	Email narinder.brar@wokingham.gov.uk

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