

TITLE	Wokingham Anti Abuse Charter Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 July 2023
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- Increased awareness, education and training in relation to violence and abuse including domestic abuse through the commitment of a local Anti-Abuse Charter.
- Increased access to levels of help and support for those experiencing violence and abuse.
- Implementation of a trauma-based approach across the council.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Note and offer comment on the report;
- 2) Consider if the Council's Anti Abuse Charter should form part of the annual Community Safety Partnership Update Report in future, which is also presented to this Committee.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Since the adoption of the Charter in January 2021 lots of activity in separate but connected workstreams has been underway. This includes work in relation to hate crime, domestic abuse, violence against women and girls (VAWG), anti-social behaviour and criminal exploitation as part of the serious violence and exploitation strategy.

Background

In January 2021 Council approved a local Charter for all officers and councillors for adoption. It made the intention of the council to help residents clear, including victims and survivors. Its aim was also to aid the councils understanding of the council's commitment towards fostering a deep-rooted culture and step change on violence and abuse.

It was anticipated that the Charter would assist to champion the councils then, newly formed Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021- 2024 and help embed its approach to raising education, awareness and training of wider forms of abuse.

The Charter

Wokingham Borough Council stands committed to preventing any form of violence or abuse against anyone in the Borough. Officers and councillors pledge to champion a culture of high standards by reporting abuse and supporting victims throughout their recovery journey. This includes being informed on recognising signs of trauma and preventing victim blaming.

Analysis of Issues

Since the adoption of the Charter in January 2021 lots of activity in separate, but connected workstreams has been underway. This includes work in relation to hate crime, domestic abuse, violence against women and girls (VAWG), anti-social behaviour and criminal exploitation as part of the ongoing work on serious violence and exploitation.

Hate Crime

The Community Safety Partnership have been working on developing a Hate Crime Action Plan with the following aims;

Preventing hate crime by challenging beliefs and attitudes

- Supporting educational establishments in educating and protecting young people from hate crime
- Funding specific projects designed to challenge prejudice.
- Wider activity to challenge prejudice.
- Engaging with experts and community stakeholders to ensure our preventative approach is working.

Responding to hate crime within our communities

- Training for the professionals including the wider criminal justice system to improve recognition of and responses to hate crime.
- Providing support to vulnerable communities

Increasing the reporting of hate crime

- Support improvements to reporting and recording processes.
- Address the underreporting of disability hate crime.

Improving support for victims of hate crime

- Supporting victims through the criminal justice system
- Support specific communities we know are particularly vulnerable.

Building our understanding of hate crime

- Monitoring hate crime incidents and responding accordingly.
- Engage with Asian Communities to understand their experience of Hate Crime and reporting and ensure adequate support is available.
- Engage with other ethnic minorities to understand their experience of Hate Crime and reporting and ensure adequate support is available.
- Utilise expert groups.
- Share experience and expertise

Violence Against Women and Girls & DA

Both areas of work have seen several improvements and developments including the development and implementation of a comprehensive Domestic Abuse Strategy and action plan and the draft development of a local Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy that works on longer term issues to help tackle violence and safety with a focus on women. The Community Safety Partnership Draft End of Year Report 2022-23 and the Domestic Abuse End of Year Reports provide more comprehensive information.

In addition to this work, at the September 2022 meeting of the council's Executive Committee, White Ribbon Accreditation programme was granted approval and work has also begun to implement this scheme across the council.

Domestic Abuse

Key Progress

- Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Domestic abuse housing specialist appointed.
- DAHA accreditation process commenced and on track to be completed December 2023.
- Additional Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA) capacity for Cranstoun.
- Comprehensive multi agency communications strategy in place.
- Extensive multi agency training programme in place, including training for WBC staff.
- Wokingham Domestic Abuse Partnership Board recognised as best practice¹

Serious Violence & Exploitation

Key Progress

- Set up Hospital Navigators to provide mentoring and support in the emergency department for young victims of violence.
- Worked with Thames Valley Police on Operation Kosh to produce action plans targeting those carrying weapons.
- Formed an Exploitation Task and Finish Group looking at the Safeguarding Framework and Multi Agency Responses (EMRAC)
- Produced a comprehensive local problem profile of serious violence and exploitation.
- Based on recommendations in the local problem profile commissioned "deep-dive" analysis of peaks in Violence and disorder.
- Work being undertaken in schools to reduce fixed and permanent exclusions.
- Produced a strategy to reduce and prevent serious violence.

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	Nil
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	Nil
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	Nil

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
None

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been given to WBC's duties under the Equality Act.

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
This item has no negative consequences in relation to WBC's Climate Emergency ambitions.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Annual progress report from the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group 2021-22 (published April 2023).

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ⁱ Annual progress report from the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group 2021-22 (published April 2023)