

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>VAWG Strategy Update</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Community & Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 January 2024
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Narinder Brar – Head of Enforcement & Safety
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	David Hare

---

## **OUTCOME/BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The report provides an update on the Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) Strategy, progress against the VAWG Action Plan and the Anti-Abuse Charter. The VAWG Strategy supports the strategic priority of providing safe, strong communities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- 1) Note the VAWG Strategy 2023-2026 that was formally approved by the Executive on the 28 September 2023;
- 2) Offer feedback on the VAWG Action Plan that was approved by the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership on 14 December 2023; and
- 3) Note that an update on the Anti Abuse Charter will be provided as part of the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership annual update.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, approved by the Executive, sets out how the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership, of which Wokingham Borough Council is a key partner, will tackle such violence.

The strategy aligns with the strategic outcomes of the Council Plan 2022 - 'Providing safe strong communities' and the Wokingham Community Safety Strategy 2021-2024.

The Domestic Abuse strategy and Serious Violence & Exploitation strategy sits alongside the VAWG strategy with the key aims of tackling domestic abuse and serious violence which are key pillars of VAWG.

The Wokingham Community Safety Partnership (WCSP) agreed to adopt the VAWG Strategy and the VAWG Action Plan at its meeting on the 14 December 2023.

## **BACKGROUND**

In July 2021, the Government published a 'Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' strategy followed by a National Statement of Expectations in March 2022, to highlight crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls.

The Wokingham VAWG Strategy 2023 - 2026 was developed using the national guidance and National Statement of Expectations as a framework to help develop improved processes for tackling VAWG in partnership with service providers and the community.

The strategy that had been requested by the Executive, in September 2022, was formally approved by the Executive in October 2023. Due to the timing of meetings the strategy was presented to the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board after Executive approval on the basis that any further amendments arising would be delegated to the Director of Place & Growth in consultation with the Lead Member. The Wellbeing Board supported the decision of the Executive to approve the strategy with no amendments.

The Executive also requested that the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership (WCSP) adopt the approved VAWG Strategy and take responsibility for its further development and oversight alongside the VAWG Action Plan. This was agreed by the WCSP at its meeting on the 14 December 2023.

The Year 1 Action Plan (attached) has been developed to include a range of initiatives and activity focussed on the needs and requirements of communities across the Borough.

Whilst Wokingham Borough Council has taken important steps towards improving its response to VAWG, for example through the WBC Anti Abuse Charter, Domestic Abuse Strategy and Serious Violence & Exploitation Strategy, more needs to be done.

A local Wokingham VAWG strategy was therefore considered 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 a drive to reduce prevalence of these crimes.

The Community Safety Partnership's strategic needs assessment is currently being prepared and that will help provide the necessary data to inform the action plan, and this will be particularly important as we develop action plans for years two and three and beyond.

At a previous meeting of this Committee Members stressed the importance of hearing from women and girls that had been victims and survivors of VAWG, for example through focus groups and one-to-one's. The Committee also stressed the importance of having an action plan that contains key performance indicators (KPI's) showing clear targets and achievements year on year. The action plan shown is intended to cover year one and will, subject to discussion with partner organisations and WBC colleagues, be refined to show key, realistic and achievable dates.

In summary, the priorities shown in the VAWG strategy upon which the VAWG action plan is focused on are:-

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.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There will be resource implications for delivering activity in support of the abovementioned priorities, but the financial implications will not be known until such activity has been identified. The Community Safety Team already lead on tackling Domestic Abuse and Serious Violence and Exploitation and key areas of that work is currently funded. However, further funding may be required subject to what the strategic needs assessment tells us.

To achieve successful outcomes, input and support will be required from a broad range of other services across the council. Whilst the strategy has been produced by WBC, successful delivery will be dependent on partnership support including Thames Valley Police, Probation Service, Public Health, NHS, Service Providers and the Voluntary and not for profit sectors.

Partnership work already contributes significantly to tackling VAWG but there is much more to do. The strategy and action plan will help to identify where and how improvements can be made so that we can ensure that women and girls in our communities are safe, feel safe and have equal opportunities alongside men and boys.

## **ANTI ABUSE CHARTER**

The Anti Abuse Charter approved in January 2021 made a commitment to prevent any form of violence or abuse against anyone in the Borough. A lot of activity continues to take place across a range of workstreams as mentioned earlier in the report, including domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, serious violent crime, hate crime, exploitation, and anti-social behaviour .

At the meeting of this committee in July 2023 it was resolved that an update on the Anti-Abuse Charter would be incorporated into the annual Community Safety Partnership update and that will follow later in the year.

This page is intentionally left blank