

Details of Leadership Team meeting or (in the case of individual Lead Member or Executive Director decisions) by whom and the <u>earliest</u> date the decision will be taken	Leadership Team, 8 December	 THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
Forward Plan ref:	KD05848/21/K/A	
Report title	VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS STRATEGY	
Reporting officer	Sue Harris, Executive Director, Environment and Communities	
Key decision	Yes	
Access to information classification	Public	
Wards	All	

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a fundamental human rights violation, which harms the lives of millions. It is recognised as a worldwide issue of epidemic proportions, but it is something that is happening in Kensington & Chelsea, affecting around one in three women and girls at some point in their lifetime. Ending VAWG is a strategic priority for the Safer K and C Partnership and is overseen by the multi-agency VAWG Strategic Board reporting into the Safer K and C Partnership Board.
- 1.2. The Council published its inaugural Shared Services VAWG Strategy in 2015-2018. This was followed by an addendum strategy covering 2018-2021. This Strategy described the measures the Council and VAWG Partnership will take to respond to and end VAWG.
- 1.3. This Strategy builds upon previous work in this area and sets out the strategic direction of the local Coordinated Community Response¹, where everyone understands the role, they play in ending VAWG.

¹ The Coordinated Community Response is an approach which brings services together to ensure local systems work together to truly keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account, and prevent VAWG.

- 1.4. It has been co-produced with survivors, community voluntary and faith groups, professionals from a range of organisations, and residents who have all contributed and shaped the content. This approach has strengthened the broad and deep stakeholder commitment to the Strategy and the delivery of the CCR model on which the Strategy is based.
- 1.5. The Strategy provides an overview and the local context of VAWG, including data which informs the local picture. It explores each of the four objectives which make up the theory of change with its vision of ending VAWG in the boroughs. Each of the four are discussed in turn and why and how they will make a difference. These are:
 - VAWG is prevented
 - Victims are supported
 - Partnership working to end VAWG; and
 - Abusers are held to account.
- 1.6. Short promotional video clips and quotes from different partners are included throughout the Strategy, along with local case studies demonstrating the Coordinated Community Response to VAWG in action.
- 1.7. The Strategy covers a five-year period and is a bi-borough Strategy with Westminster City Council, outlining the shared approach, whilst acknowledging borough specific need and responses.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Leadership Team approve the bi-borough Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.

3. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 3.1. Violence against Women and Girls is happening in our borough, and it is vital that everyone knows the signs and how to respond. This Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to involving as many agencies and individuals as possible in the local coordinated community response to ending VAWG. Whilst it provides a strategic overview, it also includes practical guidance for individuals, communities, professionals, and wider society on how they can contribute to achieving each of the shared objectives. By engaging a broad audience in this conversation, the Council and its partners can move towards achieving the vision of ending VAWG.
- 3.2. The Council is considered one of the leading London boroughs in responding to VAWG by the Home Office. The theory of change on which this Strategy is built was developed by the strong multi-agency partnership which exists locally. There are many projects focused on improving the response to VAWG in the boroughs; from frontline support to nationally recognised projects and initiatives. A Strategy is required to amalgamate our work into one strategic document that sets out our shared vision for a safer borough and is accessible to all.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 VAWG is a violation of human rights and is recognised as a government, and the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC), priority. It has been a priority for the Council through the establishment of the multi-agency VAWG Partnership and Strategic Board. VAWG includes, but is not limited to, the following types of abuses:

- Domestic abuse (including coercive control)
- Rape and sexual violence
- Female genital mutilation
- Early and Forced marriage
- So called "honour" based violence
- Faith-based abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Stalking
- Trafficking
- Prostitution/Sexual Exploitation

4.2 The difficulty of capturing an accurate statistical picture of VAWG is a nationally recognised concern. These crimes are considered "hidden" and there are multiple reasons why victims are disinclined to report incidents to the police or other organisations; these include but are not limited to: worries about not being believed, concerns about an increase in risk if the abusers finds out, and fears that nothing will change after reporting. This, coupled with inconsistent data collection across partner organisations, makes providing an accurate picture of the nature and extent of these crimes challenging. However, we know that nationally:

- An estimated 2 million adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2018, equating to a prevalence rate of approximately 6 in 100 adults. Women were around twice as likely to have experienced domestic abuse than men (7.9% compared with 4.2%). This equates to an estimated 1.3 million female victims and 695,000 male victims.
- 2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner – 1 woman killed every 3 days.
- More than 1 in 5 women have been subject to stalking or harassment at some point in their lives.
- Approximately over 750,000 children in the UK experience domestic abuse.

4.3 In Kensington and Chelsea, from April 2020-2021, 814 victims were referred into the Angelou Partnership, the main commissioned VAWG service. This is a 25% increase from the previous year. In the same period of 2020-21, 329 victims were identified as at high-risk of immediate risk of harm and referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). Sadly, since 2015, Kensington & Chelsea has had four domestic homicides, which have resulted in independent reviews being undertaken. Police data highlights that there has been a decrease in reports to the police for both domestic abuse and sexual offenses, highlighting a need for multi-agency working and support for victims accessing criminal justice.

4.4 VAWG can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, disability, class, or sexuality. However, we do know that it disproportionately impacts women and girls. Victims with additional vulnerabilities are also disproportionately impacted, such as survivors with mental health or substance use concerns. For example, during the financial year 2020-21, 19% of service users who accessed the Angelou Partnership experienced mental health and/or substance misuse issues. Local commissioned services reported that those presenting to services are doing so with more complex needs and having been locked down with their abusers. In addition, a focus on a number of national high-profile incidents have put the spotlight on VAWG and have seen an increase in referrals to services, especially self-referrals which rose by 4% from the previous year. This Strategy sets out the response to VAWG in light of the increase in this complexity and need.

5. OPTIONS, ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS

	Option	Benefits	Disadvantages
1	Kensington and Chelsea do not publish a VAWG Strategy	We do not have a statutory duty to publish a VAWG Strategy.	<p>We would not have a Strategy which demonstrates our established response in this area.</p> <p>The work of the council would continue but we would not have a Strategy outlining and coordinating our vision and response.</p> <p>The Strategy would still be published by the partners it was co-produced with and Westminster City Council, but the council would not be included. This would pose a reputational impact for the Council.</p>
2	Kensington and Chelsea publish a five-year VAWG Strategy, co-produced with partners and setting out the local coordinated community response	<p>It demonstrates our commitment to tackling VAWG, and therefore our commitment to resident survivors of abuse</p> <p>We ensure our approach is informed by those we aim to serve, and that survivors' voices are at the heart of our strategic response.</p> <p>The council cannot end VAWG alone. The co-produced strategy demonstrates all the work</p>	<p>A partnership strategy requires the Council to work collaboratively with a number of different agencies. This will at times require negotiation whilst working to a wider partnership agenda.</p>

		that is being done in this area, by various partners. By doing so it encourages more partners to support our objectives and work within the coordinated community response to end VAWG.	
3	Kensington and Chelsea publish its own VAWG statement, not co-produced with partners in the coordinated community response, whilst Westminster City Council publishes a Strategy.	<p>It gives the council more autonomy in our approach, whilst still demonstrating our commitment to tackling VAWG.</p> <p>It will enable the council to only include information which Members agree is relevant for the borough, without needing to reflect the views of other agencies so strongly.</p>	<p>The council cannot end VAWG alone. An autonomous Strategy would require us to change our current approach to tackling VAWG, as the CCR is built on partnership working and collaboration.</p> <p>Whilst this Strategy would enable us to highlight the positive work of the council in this area, it does not encourage other agencies to engage in helping to end VAWG, nor does it reflect the strong partnership approach that have been created since the publication of the first Strategy.</p> <p>This approach runs counter to the Council's commitments to co-design and coproduce policy and services with residents, stakeholders, and partners.</p>

Option 2 is recommended by officers.

6. CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 Consultations were held between from March 2021 and September 2021 with the following partners:
- Workshop with VAWG Strategic Board March 2021
 - Survivor consultation: 3 workshops held in April/May 2021 with 19 participants
 - Theory of Change stakeholder workshop: April 2021 with 41 participants
 - Resident's survey: 94 responses from across the borough
 - Discussion at various VAWG operational groups

- A wider Community Safety survey which included over 300 responses. VAWG featured in the top three concerns that residents had.
- 6.2 Respondents shared their thoughts on the four objectives: i) VAWG is prevented ii) Victims are supported iii) Partnership working to end VAWG and iv) Abusers are held to account. Discussions ranged from the need for long-term support for victims who experience multiple disadvantages to raising awareness in schools and with communities in their role in ending VAWG. All respondents shared the view that VAWG is a local priority and more needs to be done in the local response.
- 6.3 Survivors reported that professionals need to be better trained in identifying and responding to VAWG and that there should be greater access to therapeutic support. They highlighted the need for on-going support which moved beyond immediate crisis support and which was need, rather than risk led. Many also emphasised the need to challenge harmful victim-blaming attitudes which do not hold the perpetrator to account.
- 6.4 Residents shared their concerns about feeling safe in the borough, particularly at night with 45% stating they felt fairly to very unsafe. Residents also expressed low levels of confidence in being able to support a friend or family member if they are experiencing abuse, highlighting the need to strengthen awareness and the coordinated community response.
- 6.5 Professionals highlighted that they want to better understand what services are available for survivors and to be supported to work with, and hold to account, perpetrators. They emphasised the need for training and improvements in services supporting survivors who experience multiple disadvantage

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The Domestic Abuse Act was enacted into law in April 2021. This Act has for the first time created a statutory definition of domestic abuse, to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable, and actively challenged, across statutory agencies and in public attitudes. This Act further increases the need for co-operation across public services, particularly when it comes to meeting the new duties placed on the local authority around housing provision and delivery of support to survivors of domestic abuse in accommodation-based services.
- 7.2. The proposed VAWG strategy also complies with several of the Council's key safeguarding duties. The Children Act 1989, confers a duty on the Council to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect and to promote the welfare of all children and young people in their area (sections 17, 20, 31 and 47 of the 1989 Act). Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places duties on a council to ensure its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Section 10 of 2004 Act and Section 27 of the 1989 Act refers to the requirement for local authorities to cooperate with other agencies to promote the well-being of children.

7.3. The provisions of the Care Act 2014 are intended to promote and secure wellbeing of vulnerable adults in the Council's area. Under the definition of wellbeing, it is made clear that protection from abuse and neglect is a fundamental part of that. The specific safeguarding duties on local authorities in England are set out in s.42 of the Care Act 2014. This imposes a duty to promote well-being and the duty of enquiry. Where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and as a result of those needs is unable to protect themselves against abuse or neglect or the risk of it, the local authority must make enquiries. The statutory guidance accompanying Care Act 2014 indicates abuse to encompass physical abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational abuse and neglect, as well as financial abuse.

8. FINANCIAL, PROPERTY, IT AND ANY OTHER RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

8.1. The VAWG Strategy is moving away from a Tri-Borough arrangement to a Bi-Borough one. This will have limited financial implications. The most significant impact relates to the cost sharing arrangement for the VAWG Strategic Lead post. Costs to date have been shared equally between K&C, WCC, and LBHF. However, from April 2022 the costs will be shared equally between just K&C and WCC – an increase of approximately £10,000 each at current costs. The service is aiming to contain this increase within existing budgets.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been produced and accompanies this Key Decision. It reflects a neutral and positive effect on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix A: VAWG Strategy 2021-2026

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS none

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Mandatory clearance requirements for all Key and Executive Decision reports

Cleared by Corporate Finance (officer's initials)

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Cleared by Director of Law (officer's initials)

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