

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 9 September 2020

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) with a focus on Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)

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Recommendations:

- A. For Overview and Scrutiny Commission to note the update on the partnership work to respond to VAWG and DVA and the ongoing focus across all strands of VAWG specifically on Domestic Violence and Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Human Trafficking.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the partnership work undertaken in Merton to respond to VAWG and DVA and provide an outline of the services commissioned to support victims.
- 1.2. Although overseen by Merton's Safer Stronger Executive Board (SSEB) there is a well-established VAWG Board (A sub group of the SSEB) that leads on the delivery of the VAWG Strategic outcomes (2016-2020).
- 1.3. Some key outcomes over the last 12 months, overseen by the VAWG Board include:
- Delivering 16 Days of Activism campaign in November 2019
 - The domestic abuse One Stop Shop dealt with 213 cases between April 2019 to end of March 2020
 - Updated the 2019/2020 domestic violence and sexual violence profiles, providing the partnership with an evidence base to work from
 - Reviewed the outcomes against the VAWG Strategy
 - Marked other days and events as part of our commitment to ending VAWG in Merton.
- 1.4 Merton's current VAWG strategy concluded at the end of financial year 2019/20. The VAWG board discussed how they would like to renew the strategy moving forward and, due to links with the Mayor of London's VAWG strategy (which expires 31 March 2021) the VAWG board agreed to extend the current plan for a further 12 months to March 2021.
- 1.5 Over the next year the VAWG board will continue to work on and support work across all strands of VAWG with a focus on Domestic Violence and Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Human Trafficking.

1.6 The rationale for selecting these three areas for focused work over the next 12 months are:

Domestic Violence and Abuse

- This remains one of the biggest calls for service to Merton Council (LBM). The partnership have invested in a new five year contract with Victim Support which will see us develop step up and step down processes delivering “the right support at the right time” for victims.
- In summer 2019 the partnership were fortunate to be selected to undertake work with the Design Council on service approach. The detail of which is contained within section 2.4 of the report.
- The SSEB, with the VAWG board will be working to implement the new DVA legislation once passed through government.
- We will deliver learnings from two Domestic Homicide Reviews as they draw to their conclusions.

Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence remains a high profile matter at a regional, national and international level with the continued use of the #me-too campaign.
- Victims of sexual violence often find it hard to come forward and report, we want to support them to have the confidence to do this.
- We will develop the full remit of the No More campaign – which Merton was the second London borough to adopt. Our work has focused on DV previously and now we will focus on sexual violence.
- We will refresh our Ask Angela campaign to ensure that all licensed premises are engaged with and asked to support this programme.

Human Trafficking

- Over the last 12 months we have seen an increase in the reports of brothels in the borough. Safer Merton have closed six premises under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and the police have closed a further two brothels under the Sexual Offences Act during this period.
- Increased concerns with cuckooing are emerging. Working with colleagues in adult social care and police we will seek to better understand cuckooing, the approach taken by perpetrators and how best to minimise risk to vulnerable people.
- A new LBM trafficking policy is drawing to a conclusion. The VAWG board will oversee a programme of training to a range of frontline staff to allow them to understand signs and understand where, and how, to report these.
- The updated plan, once complete and ratified by members of the VAWG board will be placed on the council’s website within the Safer Merton webpage.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The SSEB (Community Safety Partnership), guided by the Safer Merton Service, set the strategic priorities each year. Working alongside the Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan there has been a clear focus on VAWG in Merton over recent years
- 2.2. Full reports have previously been provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. This report provides a further update on our partnership response to VAWG in 2019-2020.
 - i. Between April 2019 and March 2020, Merton's DV Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) heard 428 cases.
 - ii. Between April 2020 and August 2020, Merton's DV MARAC heard 204 cases.
 - iii. Repeat MARAC figures between April 2019 and March 2020 were 168 which represents a repeat case rate of 40%. Merton's repeat rate is in line with national guidelines which advises that a successful MARAC should expect to see a repeat case rate of circa 40% as agencies effectively and efficiently identify repeat cases and ensure that victims are re-referred back to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA) with whom they were previously involved.
 - iv. Annual awareness raising events undertaken in 2019 at South Thames College, annual community raising awareness of DV services c/o stickers in toilets, features in every edition of My Merton plus weekly advertising of the Borough One Stop Shop via social media.
 - v. Due to lockdown and COVID all media has been via social media and this year's campaign will be virtual.
 - vi. In July 2019 the new IDVA and Refuge contracts went live. As part of the commissioning process Merton undertook a needs analysis for victims and survivors to inform what services would be delivered. As part of the new contract we have 3 IDVA's, 1 case worker in MASH and the new service also runs the day to day operations of the One Stop Shop. Since 23 March the One Stop Shop has been closed to physical attendance due to Covid19, however, partners have continued to work together to deliver a service where victims can call in and access advise and support. We have continued to promote the service throughout the lockdown to ensure victims are aware that support services are still there to help them.
 - vii. Journey mapping – Partnerships learning and development groups have come together to look at recent DV cases to see how the victims access services across the partnership and the council and how responsive they are to the victim's needs. This practice is now being embedded as part of ongoing learning to ensure that Merton continually reviews and improves how we support victims and further considers how we may work differently.
 - viii. The borough has also been working on two Domestic Homicide Reviews since 2017. Due to their vast complexities the work on both reviews continues. One review is completed in that the final report is with the Home Office and going through their quality assurance process. Once this has

been signed off by the Home Office we can proceed to publish the report. The second review is on pause until other legal processes have completed, specifically the Inquest.

2.3 As a partnership we are committed to planning and delivering work which is innovative and which lends itself, easily, to victim care and access. Our plans for 2020/21 are:

- One Stop Shop 10th anniversary – To celebrate the past 10 years of the One Stop Shop in September. This will happen via Zoom on 14th September.
- Campaigning with a stronger focus on sexual violence – Working more closely with the rape and sexual assault centre to improve how we support victims.
- Developing work with third sector colleagues for longer term sustained support.
- Exploring how we may align some of our campaigns across the South West Police Basic Command Unit (SWBCU) to improve clarity of service for residents in all boroughs.
- Amended working practices for Euro 2020 building on our experiences of Russia 2018. This was put on hold due to COVID.
- Continued collaboration and support across the SWBCU in regard joint bids for funds allowing us to continue our service in hospital c/o our shared complex needs IDVA.
- The Community Safety Partnership is commencing work and planning how we will deliver all requirements as set out in the new DVA legislation

Joint work with the Design Council

2.4 Aside from the “day to day” work associated with DVA the partnership were successful in its bid to the Local Government Association (LGA) to work with the Design Council on DVA. This programme, designed to explore how service delivery can be changed utilising design methodologies, has seen a programme team made up of Police, a Head Teacher, Victim Support and LBM (with representatives from Children’s services, adult social care, business improvement and Community Safety) work together for six months to look at this issue.

2.5 The work with the Design Council has been enlightening in identifying where our service delivery is strong, identifying gaps and also in posing questions as to where, and how, we may seek to change practice.

2.6 The Design Council work concluded in mid-March 2020, with a final presentation to the VAWG Board in July however, the recommendations and next steps in relation to innovation generated from this work will require some time to be further explored and delivered.

2.7 When making our bid the LGA and the Design Council commended our bid for being truly cross council and cross partnership in its impact and for creating one of the most varied project teams. In reality, the nature of DVA means that

our project team could have been multiple times larger than it was with victims, perpetrators, wider family and friends all affected by this crime

Victim Support and the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) Service

- 2.8 Victim Support have worked in Merton since 2006 and, over the last 14 years have formed an extremely strong relationship with our communities, partners and council.
- 2.9 In early 2019 the commissioning of a new IDVA service commenced in conjunction with colleagues in Children's Social Care and Adult Social care. Partners such as police and, most importantly, past victims were also engaged as we scoped the parameters of the expected service outcomes and worked to design a service which would be flexible and meet the needs of all victims regardless of sex.
- 2.10 Summer 2019 saw the award of a new contract to Victim Support delivering IDVAs who work in Wimbledon Police Station, the Safer Merton office and the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- 2.11 Our work and relationship with Victim Support will continue to grow and develop as we look to take the work forward and evolve the response for our victims.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. There are no alternative options as this report is for information and update only

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Not applicable

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. Not applicable

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Funding provided by the council to deliver domestic abuse services are set out in table 1.

Table 1: Funding to support domestic abuse services

	Service	Budget	Commissioning & Budget Lead
1	Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service provided by Victim Support (3 IDVA's)	£76,764 (LCPF) £52,736 (LBM) (Annual figure) £46,112 (LBM) (Annual figures) (Total LBM Funding: £98,848)	Funded by London Crime prevention Fund until March 2021 Safer Merton Children, Schools and Families
2	Refuge and Complex Need Service provided by SPEAR and Refuge	£300k (Grant) Up to 31 st March 2021	4 Borough funding secured from the Ministry of Housing and Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Commissioned and managed by Wandsworth Council
3	Merton Refuge (17 Beds) Provided by Hestia	£80,000 (LBM)	Commissioned and Managed by Housing Support
4	Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence and MARAC Co-ordinator	£42,370 (LBM)	Funded by Safer Merton

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. No specific matters relating to this which members need to be aware of.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Domestic Violence and Abuse can have major implications on community cohesion. With 1 in 20 residents affected by this crime the partnerships work in supporting victims, taking action against perpetrators and ensuring that our communities understand the work we are doing on this subject is vital in achieving our ambitions for more victims to report and for more friends, family and/or neighbours to report matters of concern.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. As Safer Merton oversee the work, as lead service, the team ensure that all crime and disorder concerns are considered within this work

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. As a response to the ongoing concerns re Covid-19 the Safer Merton service and our partners, have evolved our business continuity plans to cope with the challenges which this virus may place us under.

10.2. Victim Support and Safer Merton have shared each other's plans and are working on a daily basis to understand one another's pressures and challenges as we work to ensure that service is delivered to our victims.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

11.1 None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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