

**Committee:** Council

**Date:** 21 April 2021

Wards: All

**Subject:** The Local Response to Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Lead officer: Cathryn James, Assistant Director, Public Protection

Lead member: Councillor Agatha Akyigyina OBE, Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime

Contact officer: Michael Batty, Interim Head of Safer Merton

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**Recommendations:**

A. For Council to consider and note the content of this report

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**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to respond to a request for a report on "The local response to violence against women and girls, focusing on understanding how men's behaviour needs to change".
- 1.2. The report outlines the relevant activities in which the Council and its partners are involved, and goes on to outline emerging activity and thinking to date on the broader agenda of safety for women and girls.
- 1.3. The council and its partners provide direct services and interventions to victims of DA and VAWG, safeguard children affected and ensure the council and its partners intervene early to prevent escalation of risk and further incidents. There is also a clear focus on holding perpetrators of DA and VAWG to account. This can be through the criminal justice process, using civil powers or through interventions that encourage behaviour change.

**2 DETAILS**

**2.1. CURRENT ACTIVITIES**

- 2.1.1 The Council undertakes a range of activities as a single agency, and together with partners, in response to VAWG.
- 2.1.2 The Merton VAWG Board works to the United Nations definition of violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".
- 2.1.3 The Board's Terms of Reference include Domestic Violence, Rape and Sexual Violence, Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Crimes in the name of 'honour'/so-called Honour Based Violence (HBV), Sexual

Harassment, Stalking, Trafficking, Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation, and Children at risk of Sexual Exploitation. Its work is guided by the Mayor's VAWG Strategy and protocols agreed by the London Safeguarding Children Board.

2.1.4 The Board is co-chaired by senior officers from the Council and Police and has a membership drawn from relevant organisations in the Public and Third Sectors. It is a sub-group of the Safer & Stronger Executive Board and also provides updates to the Children's Trust, Safeguarding Children Board, Safer & Stronger Strategy Group, Health & Wellbeing Board, Mental Health Trust and Adult Safeguarding Board. A VAWG Practitioners Group reports to the VAWG Board. Its Terms of Reference note that it does support male victims of violence and abuse, within an understanding that the majority of victims are female. Men and women can become victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse. The majority of victims in Merton are female but there are 25-30% male victims, which is a higher than proportion than most London Boroughs. This is due to 99% of Merton services supporting both male and female victims and survivors.

2.1.5 The range of other partnerships to which the VAWG Board reports reflects the fact that VAWG issues are connected with many other agendas.

A published version of the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan is available on the MOPAC website. The aim of the plan is to explain how the police and community safety partners and other criminal justice agencies will work together to reduce crime..

Current Priorities include:

- (i) Neighbourhood policing.
- (ii) Keeping children and young people safe
- (iii) Tackling violence against women and girls
- (iv) The criminal justice system that works for London
- (v) Standing together against hate, extremism and terror in all its forms

2.1.6 The Safer & Stronger Executive Board functions as the statutory Community Safety Partnership for the Borough (as set out in Part I of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 and owns the high level annual community safety priorities for the Borough, which for 2021/22 will include Tackling Violence against Women and Girls, identified as a priority both by the Mayor, for the whole of London, and locally.

2.1.7 Delivery of the VAWG strategy includes the following elements:

- (i) Continuation of the monthly Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), which consider the higher risk cases of domestic abuse and put in place action plans to reduce risk. These and have continued to meet throughout the pandemic, being cited by the Home Office as an example of best practice.
- (ii) Continued provision of refuge accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. The Merton Refuge is operated by Hestia and has 17 places; we also have access to a Refuge for

women with complex needs, shared with Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth, which is operated by Spear.

- (iii) Continued provision, via Victim Support, of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), who support victims of domestic abuse through criminal justice processes and in making changes to their lives.
- (iv) Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) services, working with people who have experienced rape and serious sexual assault, provided by South London Rape Crisis.
- (v) The One Stop Shop confidential weekly drop-in service for people experiencing domestic abuse (which has been operating on a virtual basis during the pandemic).
- (vi) 'Clare's Law', the domestic violence disclosure scheme for background checks on partners, operated by the police.
- (vii) 16 Days, an international campaign against gender-based violence, which runs from 25 November to 16 December every year.
- (viii) The 'Ask for Angela' scheme for seeking urgent help in pubs and bars, which enables customers to seek immediate assistance by asking staff members to let them 'speak to Angela' (Merton was the first London Borough to implement this, in 2016). Prior to lockdown 90% of Licensed premises and their door staff were signed up to this scheme.
- (ix) A broadly similar scheme called 'Safe Spaces', run by Hestia and UK Says NO MORE, promoting the use of consultation rooms in pharmacies as safe spaces for victims of domestic abuse.
- (x) Display of posters about Domestic Abuse in Covid test centres, vaccination centres, and other primary care settings, in recognition of the fact that not everybody uses the internet and social media.

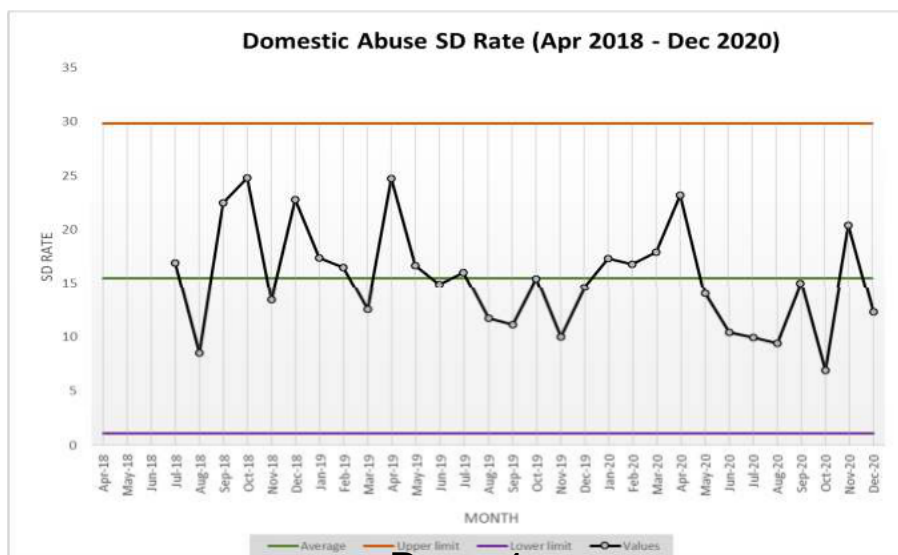
2.1.8 Safer Merton and partners continue to actively promote the service offered to ensure victims are aware that they can still access advice, support and help during Covid and the lockdown. Safer Merton has worked with Merton Communications team to produce a poster that can go up in test centres and pharmacies.

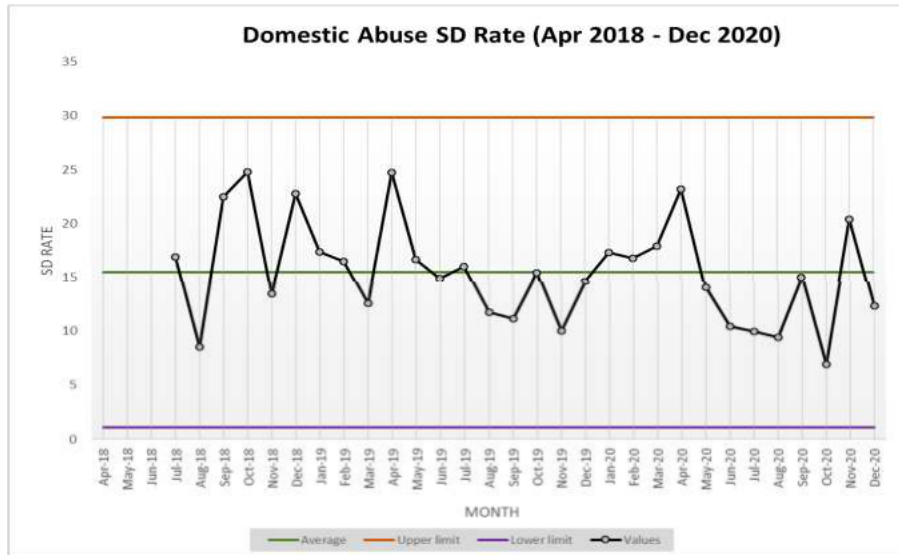
- (i) We have also continued to send out messages weekly via social media and reviewed the information on the council web pages.
- (ii) Partners across the South West BCU also worked together to deliver the 16 Days against Violence and Abuse campaign. Although we were unable to physically engage with the community a number of virtual events, including live streaming were delivered between 25 November and 3 December.

2.1.9 Merton remains one of the safest Boroughs in London. On the latest figures reported to the Safer & Stronger Executive Board in February 2021, covering the 12 months to October 2020, Merton had the sixth lowest overall crime rate of the 32 Boroughs.

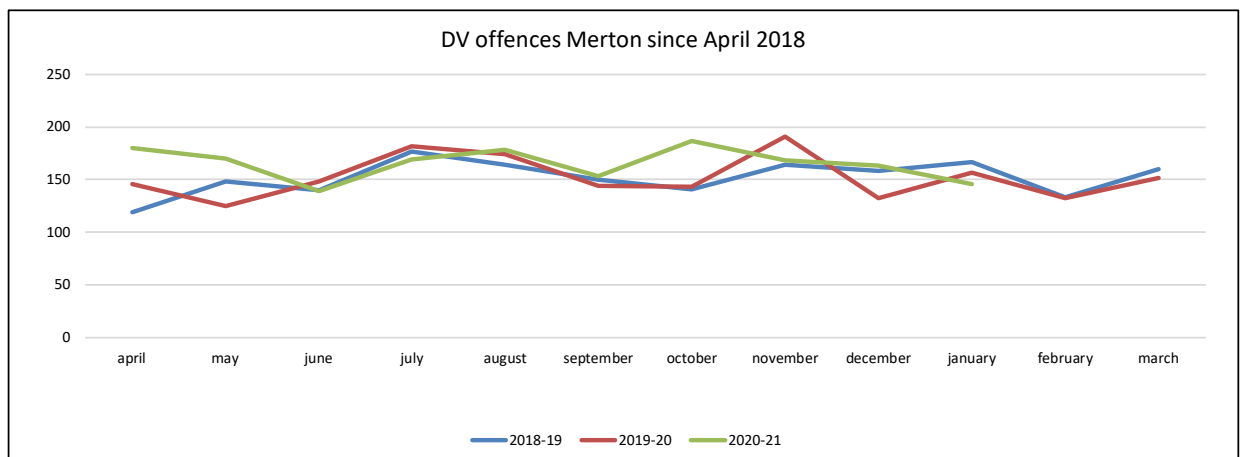
- (i) Over the year April 2020 to March 2021 the latest provisional figures available from Police systems show that 3,164 incidents of domestic abuse (DA) were reported to the police in Merton, an increase of 8% on the previous year.
- (ii) The number of crimes recorded and flagged as involving domestic abuse was 1,962, an increase of 5% on the previous year (some incidents involve crimes, but in other cases, when investigated, there is not enough evidence to substantiate that a crime has taken place).
- (iii) There is no specific crime of 'domestic abuse', but crimes of any type where the parties have familial or intimate relations can be 'flagged' as being related to DA.
- (iv) About 80% of the DA flagged crime is within the category 'violence against the person', which includes everything from homicide through non-injury assaults, and all points between, and includes harassment and malicious communications.
- (v) Less than 4% of DA flagged crime involves a moderate or serious injury. Most of the remaining 20% is either criminal damage, public order or sexual offences.
- (vi) Nationally there have been reports of increased levels of domestic abuse, including a 10% increase for the year to September 2020, compared to the previous 12 months. Some of this will be associated with other national reports of increased alcohol consumption (although some of the worst cases of coercive control do not involve alcohol).
- (vii) The total number of cases considered at MARACs in 2021/22 was 576, compared to 428 in the previous 12 months, an increase of 35%. The total number of people supported by IDVAs in calendar year 2020 was 828, compared to 628 in the previous year, an increase of 32%.

2.1.10 Q3 Update 2020/21: Offence levels have fluctuated just below or above the average. Since June 2020 DV offences have followed the previous year's seasonal pattern. In total, there were 519 offences over the quarter. Sanction detections (SD) were the highest they had been in April 2020, however they have fallen back below the average in Q3





2.1.11 There was a surge in reported cases at the start of the first lockdown in April and May but it then reverted to the seasonal trend through the summer. There was a second uplift in October in the run up to the three tier system being introduced. Figures for the last three months are within anticipated levels. Merton had the fifth lowest total of DV offences in 2020 of all the London Boroughs (behind Richmond, Kingston, Kensington & Chelsea, and Hammersmith & Fulham).



2.1.12 The duty on Local Authorities and their community safety partners to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) was introduced in 2011. In the intervening 10 years there have been three DHRs in Merton, which is very close to the national average rate. Prior to the statutory duty the Council and partners commissioned a Domestic Homicide Review in 2006, and the experience gained was shared with the Home Office and helped to shape the guidance for the statutory duty.

2.1.13 The police have enhanced their response to DA and VAWG during Covid, with an increased focus on bringing perpetrators to justice, this has included:

- (i) Use Body Worn Video (BWV) on attending a DA incident and using the footage to support further investigation including when interviewing perpetrators.

- (ii) Maximising opportunities to arrest at scene or within the first 24 hours of the reported incident.
  - (iii) Proactive supervision of the investigation
  - (iv) Increasing the use of Domestic Violence Protection Notices, Domestic Violence Protection Orders
  - (v) Targeting police activity against the Highest Harm offenders and those Wanted on Warrant
  - (vi) Continued monitoring of high risk repeat victims via IDVAs
  - (vii) Continued monitoring of high harm offenders via Operation Dauntless
- 2.1.14 The Neighbourhood Policing Teams Inspector for Merton is keen to encourage reporting of any gender-based crimes or incidents, either direct to Police or via other routes such as Crimestoppers. Police colleagues are implementing an engagement plan developed in response to the death of Sarah Everard.
- 2.1.15 The South West Basic Command Unit (SW BCU) has enhanced its approach to DV during lockdown, and this has been very much welcomed by partners. The key themes of this approach are: Prevention, Intervention and Enforcement. We are also pleased to see the increase in the police Sanction detection rates for DV offences, rising from 12.8% to 16.5%. This has been achieved through a number of measures the police have put in place.

<b>Prevention:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease prevalence of DA whilst increasing reporting</li> <li>• Increase Clare’s Law right to ask and right to know disclosures</li> <li>• Prevent domestic abuse by challenging attitudes and behaviours</li> <li>• Work with partner agencies to implement public awareness campaigns</li> <li>• Use social media to engage and educate the community</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase use of Body Worn Video (BWV) at incidents and during interviews</li> <li>• Increase Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) / Domestic Violence Protection orders (DVPO) applications</li> <li>• Effective use of MARAC in our four boroughs</li> <li>• Targeting high harm risk victims through MARAC process</li> <li>• Dedicated DVPN officer for victim protection</li> <li>• Mapping of places and offenders to target resources effectively</li> </ul>

<b>Enforcement:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase sanctioned detection rate</li> <li>• Target high harm offenders through Op Dauntless</li> <li>• Daily grip and supervision of DA crimes</li> <li>• Daily grip and supervision of DA suspects in custody</li> <li>• Diligent enquiries to trace and locate wanted DA suspects</li> </ul>
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2.1.16 The following update was provided by Police colleagues in response to a query from the Scrutiny process in September 2020: "We are aware that other forces have embedded misogyny and other forms of prejudice in their hate crime definition and we are not currently considering extending our definition of hate crime to capture forms of prejudice and hostility that are not already included within existing hate crime legislation.

*We are confident that our Violence against Women and Girls strategy and practice adequately address these issues and we have communicated this to the NPCC Hate Crime lead ACC Mark Hamilton.*

*In October 2018 the Home Office announced a review of hate crime by the Law Commission to consider whether to add additional protected characteristics such as misogyny and age. The MPS records hate crime in accordance with current statutory definitions".*

This position is likely to change as a result of a Government commitment made in March, as outlined at paragraph 2.5.5 below.

2.1.17 Offender Management is currently split between the remaining National Probation Service (NPS), managing offenders assessed as representing a high risk, and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), managing medium and low risk offenders, following the decision made by the Government to split the NPS in 2015, awarding contracts to operate the CRCs. With effect from 26 June the NPS and CRCs will be reunited, with Merton being covered by a 'Probation Delivery Unit' (PDU). The London CRC currently manages 304 service users in Merton.

Of this 304

- (i) 62 cases are registered as having a domestic abuse history
- (ii) 38 are showing as having a current index offence of violence relating to DA (this can be all offence types from common assault to more serious violence)

2.1.18 The CRC operates a nationally accredited programme of work to change the behaviour of perpetrators of DA, known as BBR (Building Better Relationships). The pandemic has significantly impacted on the delivery of group work interventions although BBR has continued to be delivered, albeit on a much smaller scale, prioritising those assessed as the highest risk. Invariably this means that NPS service users subject to this requirement take priority. Programme delivery is one of the priority strands of recovery from the pandemic, with BBR and Resolve (a violence reduction programme) being the first to be uplifted. These programmes are usually imposed as part of a court sentences for an offence of DA, and these

programmes are described as 'court mandated'. In some parts of the country there are also 'voluntary' programmes, not imposed by the courts, working with perpetrators of DA who have recognised the need to change their behaviour. There is no such programme currently available in Merton, but it is proposed to explore the interest in establishing such a programme with our neighbours in Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth.

2.1.19 The four Boroughs in the South West BCU have met previously to apply for MOPAC funding to support perpetrator work. Boroughs.

(i) As part of the funding bid Boroughs were required to provide a broad evidence base across the four Boroughs. This has now been developed and will be in place should any further cross borough funding opportunities arise. This exercise has provided useful insight into the cohort of DV perpetrators.

(ii) The police are proposing to establish a 'MATAC' (Multi Agency Threat Assessment Conference) across the four Boroughs, this multi-agency forum will run in a similar way to the DV MARAC but focus specifically on the perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse, to ensure agencies are sharing information and managing the risk of offending.

2.1.20 CRC engagement with MARAC has continued throughout the pandemic.

Women being managed by the CRC or NPS will continue to be covered by a commissioned service, provided by Advance Minerva, post-unification and there should not be any reduction in this service. Experience elsewhere is that women offenders experience a disproportionately high level of domestic abuse, compared to women in general.

2.1.21 A specific query raised during the preparation of this report related to work being done to change male attitudes. All schools are now required to teach the new statutory Relationships and Sex Education curriculum. This includes a focus on Respectful Relationships (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-secondary>), and in particular on 'the characteristics of positive and healthy friendships, in all contexts including online, such as trust, respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict'. This is for all schools: Local Authority maintained, academies, and independent schools.

## 2.2. **MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

2.2.1 A range of work is in place, both pre-COVID and in response to the pandemic, to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people

(i) **Trailblazers** - Mental Health Support is now available in 22 Merton schools, linked to specialist teams, with plans to expand to all schools. Support has been adapted to online provision for families, through on-line interactive workshops. The Trailblazers have had a



positive impact on self-reported wellbeing and plans are underway to develop further schools-based services in the east of the Borough.

- (ii) **Catch 22 Risk and Resilience service** - Merton Catch 22 increases young people's engagement in diversionary activities that support reduction in the use of substances, and promote sexual health and positive health choices for young people aged up to 24-years-old. In response to COVID-19 the service extended its mental health and wellbeing interventions, widening Merton's school-based counselling for vulnerable children and young people; helping 22 students suffering with depression and anxiety, providing online counselling sessions throughout and sign-posting to relevant counselling support services. The service also provided outreach in partnership with Merton RESET, supporting 450 young people.

2.2.2 In response to COVID-19 and lockdown, a further on-line resource for parents, carers and young people was established across the South West London region as a one stop shop for emotional health and wellbeing. Merton also has two active counselling support offers:

- (i) **Off the Record** - provides individual counselling and self-harm support to young people aged 11 to 25. In response to COVID-19 support included: extended on-line provision; weekly virtual walk-in emotional support sessions; webinars on topical issues related to the impact of COVID-19; and support when exam results were due.
- (ii) **Kooth** – providing online counselling provision for 11 to 22 year olds, including support for bereavement, the impact of lockdown, anxiety and impact on LGBT+ and BAME communities.

2.2.3 **CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)** - have extended their crisis helpline to 24 hours, linked to NHS 111, and there are proposals to continue this approach that has been piloted across South West London. In addition, the local Merton CAMHS team crisis line is available during working hours.

2.2.4 **Emotional health and wellbeing schools' recovery programme** – the Department for Education national programme is being rolled out, giving all Merton schools access to training on supporting wellbeing for children and young people in school. School staff have also been trained in Mental Health First Aid.

2.2.5 A specific query was raised during the preparation of this report about child protection training. Colleagues in Children, Schools & Families have advised that, whilst the Council remains the biggest contributor to the partnership, the council's financial contributions to the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) have reduced in recent years. As a consequence, the MSCP no longer employs a dedicated Training Officer.

- (i) The reduction in overall partnership funding has not resulted in a reduction in the training offer. The MSCP continues to deliver a varied and high-quality training programme which is accessible for all staff working with children in Merton. This training complements single-agency safeguarding training programmes.

2.2.6 Further details about the MSCP's training programme can be found here: <https://training.safeguardinginmerton.org.uk/>

2.2.7 On 12 April, as this report was being finalised, a letter was received from Claire Waxman, the Victims Commissioner for London, containing a list of useful suggestions and contacts, which will be used as appropriate.

### 2.3. ADULT MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

2.3.1 As well as physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing are central to healthy living. This has particularly been the case through the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of work include:

- (i) **Merton Uplift** - Merton Uplift is the local integrated primary care mental health service including access to psychological therapies, provided by South West London St George's Hospital. It has adapted quickly to COVID-19, expanding use of digital services, enabling it to continue to support residents, including in small groups and individually. During lockdown referrals initially reduced, but began rising in May and have continued to rise back to normal levels.
  - a) The service designed a Psychological First Aid (PFA) guided support to help people during and in the immediate aftermath of a disaster like the current pandemic. PFA helps people to feel calm, foster their coping abilities and resilience-building, and to stay closely connected with others in their social network.
  - b) Bereavement Counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy for traumatic bereavement has allowed those bereaved to share their feelings with a therapist, who can provide comfort and relief as the person starts accepting their loss and gradually moves forward.
  - c) Demand for Employment Specialist Advice has increased and the service has provided priority support to NHS frontline, social care and care home staff and, in partnership with Carers Support Merton, a wellbeing group for carers.
- (ii) **Suicide Prevention** - Merton Council, with partners, has developed a Suicide Prevention Framework. Work to date includes promotion of Mental Health First Aid Training and commissioning bespoke suicide awareness training with Imagine Independence. Merton is also working on partnership projects aimed at reducing suicide in lower income middle aged men, developing suicide awareness champions, and supporting people bereaved by suicide.
  - a) Merton's Suicide Prevention framework can be accessed [here](#). Free on-line training on suicide awareness and prevention that anyone can access (and complete in around 30 minutes) is available at the Zero Suicide Alliance website, at <https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/training>. Information from Papyrus, the charity raising awareness and prevention of suicide for young people is available at <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>. Information on the work being carried out at South West

London level can be found at  
<https://www.swlondon.nhs.uk/ourwork/suicide-prevention/>

2.3.2 The Council has a range of relevant Human Resources policies relating to women in its workforce, including:

- (i) Flexible working
- (ii) Maternity
- (iii) Menopause
- (iv) Special leave
- (v) Paternity
- (vi) Domestic Violence
- (vii) Opportunities around Learning and Development
- (viii) Apprenticeships (which are open to anyone, not just young people)

These policies, and the Council's Employee Assistance Programme, help to create a safe and supportive working environment.

#### 2.4. **CREATING A SAFE PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT**

2.4.1 During 2018 and 2019 the Council invested approximately £2 million in converting street lighting to new LED (light emitting diode) lanterns, such that 80% of the Borough is now lit to a very good standard. During 2021/22 the Council will be installing new LED lanterns and lighting columns in Wimbledon Town Centre and on High Street, Wimbledon Village.

It is important to note that lighting itself will not necessarily reduce the risk of crime taking place. For example, a well lit alleyway or open space may provide a false sense of security or even encourage criminal activity such as drug use or nuisance and anti-social behaviour. It is for this reason the council will work closely and consult with the police on lighting.

2.4.2 The Council will be continuing its Healthy Walks Programme, which takes place weekly. An average of 80 people, mainly women, attend, led by trained Walk Leaders in risk assessed parks and open spaces. It will also be continuing its group and individual cycling sessions with DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) checked instructors, including sessions for women only when required.

2.4.3 It is hoped to continue, with Transport for London, the Safer Travel Programme for SEND (those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities) and vulnerable Year 6 pupils, showing them how to travel safely. In the past mainly girls have attended these sessions, which cover stranger danger, personal travel, street awareness and safer journey planning for all forms of public transport. Close working with British Transport Police also continues.

2.4.4 A Scrutiny Review of town centres/High Streets is taking place, including a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of each town centre, and safety issues are included. Any relevant findings or proposed actions will be fed in to the work programmes for the service areas

concerned. For regeneration and larger development projects the council continues to work with the Metropolitan Police Design Out Crime Team.

- 2.4.5 The Council operates a 24/7 CCTV system, extending to approximately 200 public space cameras (excluding those deployed primarily for traffic enforcement purposes), which will be enhanced by an upgrade over the next two years, costing approximately £1.2 million. The service engages well with the police where there are live incidents taking place in view of the cameras and share information and footage post incidents resulting in the prosecution of offenders. An example of this is where an individual who committed a rape was identified using our CCTV service images and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment.
- 2.4.6 The Parks Service advises that the Council's parks officially close at dusk (although they cannot all be physically secured, nor are they), and that there is a longstanding policy not to provide lighting in parks so as not to provide a false sense of security and encourage people to enter them after dark.
- 2.4.7 Officers from Environmental Health service, Licensing and Trading Standards, in carrying out checks on premises, have received training on identifying signs of modern slavery, and remain alert for these when visiting premises.

## 2.5. **EMERGING ACTIVITY AND THINKING**

- 2.5.1 New thinking has been prompted, both nationally and locally, by the suspected abduction and murder of Sarah Everard, the establishment of the 'Everyone's invited' online platform for testimonies of sexual harassment, abuse and misogyny in schools, and the recent Scrutiny Report on VAWG (see paragraph 2.5.9 below).
- 2.5.2 The School Improvement Team have plans to
- (i) Refresh the model Safeguarding and Child Protection policy for schools, to ensure there is strong enough reference to peer on peer abuse. This is a policy schools must have.
  - (ii) Provide a model Peer on Peer Abuse Policy for schools to use if they wish, in addition to the general safeguarding policy referred to above. This policy is not one schools must have, but could be helpful to focus practice at this particular point in time.
  - (iii) Offer training to schools next term on peer on peer abuse: to Designated Safeguarding Leads, secondary school staff more generally, governors, and inclusion leads, and briefings for head teachers.
  - (iv) Consider how we to offer contextual safeguarding reviews for more secondary schools (Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse).

- (v) Refresh our annual safeguarding audit for schools (carried out every autumn term) to ensure that the focus on peer on peer abuse is sufficient. The Team is liaising with Directors of Children's Services across London to ensure that they are approaching this similarly and can learn from each other's experience.
- 2.5.3 A national approach is also emerging from the Government review and the establishment of a national helpline. The Team will be working in line with recommendations from those processes.
- 2.5.4 In addition, the Performance, Policy & Partnerships team are planning, together with the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership, to further strengthen existing processes to assess safeguarding approaches in schools, and in particular, independent schools.
- 2.5.5 Planning is taking place for the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Bill, which includes important new provisions on making non-fatal strangulation a criminal offence, and new housing duties for Local Authorities. Following an amendment accepted by the Government in the House of Lords on 10 March, police forces across England & Wales will be asked to start recording misogyny as a hate crime from 'autumn 2021'. This change will also be reflected in the Merton Hate Crime Strategy which will be updated in the near future.
- 2.5.6 Other ideas under consideration include the establishment of a time limited Task Group on Safety for Women and Girls in Public Spaces, over the next 6-12 months, led by the Safer Merton Team, reporting to the VAWG Board and including representatives from Parks, Highways, CCTV, Safer Transport, the Police lead on Designing Out Crime, Children, Schools & Families, Licensing representatives from both the Police and Council, and Communications.
- 2.5.7 Further recent thinking includes formal adoption of the Women's Night Safety Charter developed by the Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime (MOPAC), and a potential bid to Round 3 of the Home Office Safer Streets Fund.
- 2.5.8 It is considered essential that these proposed approaches are informed by listening to women and girls with lived experience. Four levels of consultation are being considered, including:
- (i) Placing appropriate questions in the forthcoming Your Merton consultation programme, including the use of the Common Place platform;
  - (ii) Supporting that through the annual Community Safety consultation;
  - (iii) Consideration of commissioning an organisation used to working with women, and with good local knowledge, to carry out more targeted work; and
  - (iv) More systematic exploration of the views of Elected Members, and women in the Council's workforce.

Ideally this range of consultation exercises would take account of a number of intersectionalities, including the perspectives and experiences of women and girls in ethnic minority groups; lesbians and bisexual women; women

with disabilities, including learning disabilities; transgender women; older women; women involved in sex work; and women from identifiable faith groups. The more detailed the work becomes, the more resource intensive it gets, so there may be issues of what can be afforded. An important part of this work will be exploring the drivers of fear for women and girls, and what can be done to reduce their fears, as fear of adverse consequences is often a greater constraint than actual events. The approach to this work will be based on the principles of encouragement to speak out, and all testimonies being taken seriously.

- 2.5.9 Since the last update to Council on this strategic theme in February 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission has had a further two meetings with a focus on crime and community safety issues.

The BCU Commander and the Head of Safer Merton provided reports to the Commission's meetings in September 2020 and March 2021. The BCU Commander provided the latest crime statistics and answered members' questions on a wide range of issues including stop and search, women's safety, resourcing levels and policing during the lockdown.

Safer Merton's updates provided details, as requested, of the work on domestic violence, hate crimes and anti-social behaviour.

The Commission will continue to scrutinise the work surrounding crime and community safety in the next municipal year.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1. Since the purpose of this report is simply to provide a briefing, no alternative options have been identified.

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1. See paragraph 2.5.8 above.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

Not applicable

### **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. Safety for women and girls is a broader category of work than VAWG. Attempting to tackle it with the same staffing resource would inevitably lead to spreading resources more thinly. The current key officer post for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence is heavily committed to supporting the three weekly programme of MARACs. A part-time MARAC Administrator is currently being recruited, on a 12-month contract, using the London Crime Prevention Fund, but the work would be put on a more stable footing if a longer term commitment could be made. The detail and granularity of the consultation programme proposed at paragraph 2.5.8 will be dependent on the funding available. The introduction of a voluntary perpetrator programme

would require additional resources. Every opportunity of external funding for these purposes will be pursued.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The Council has a duty to formulate and implement a strategy for reducing crime and disorder in its area under section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and this includes strategies to reduce domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. This report is largely concerned with issues of human rights, specifically the rights of women and girls to enjoy the same freedoms and facilities enjoyed by men and boys, and therefore the creation of more cohesive communities. It should do so in partnership with other key agencies, including the police and health services.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. This report is largely concerned with issues of crime and disorder, including fear of crime and disorder, which are dealt with in the body of the report.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. In respect of the Council workforce there are no new Risk Management or Health & Safety implications arising from this report. In respect of the public, the whole of the report is concerned with identification and management of risks, and with measures to improve safety.

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

- Appendix 1A – Safer Stronger Executive Board Priorities & Governance
-

## Appendix 1B– VAWG Board Structure

### **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1. Safer & Stronger Executive Board agenda papers – these are not public
- 12.2. VAWG Board agenda papers



## Additional Emerging Priorities for partnership Consideration

No.	Priority	Description
1	<b>Reduce re-offending</b>	Through the integrated offender management scheme, deliver a partnership approach to reduce re-offending of the most prolific and persistent offenders.

For noting

Statutory changes to Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) – April 2010

- The instruction issued by Ministry of Justice in 2010 notified probation of the statutory changes to Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) under the Policing and Crime Act 2009, which come into effect on 1 April 2010.
- Following consultation through the Policing Green Paper published in July 2008, the statutory changes to CSPs were implemented in the Policing and Crime Act 2009, which received Royal Assent on 12 November 2009. Section 108 of the Act makes three substantive changes to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998:
  1. Probation becoming a responsible authority of CSPs, having previously been a cooperating body. The other responsible authorities are the Police, Police Authorities, Local Authorities, Fire and Rescue Services and Primary Care Trusts
  2. It requires CSPs to formulate and implement a strategy “to reduce reoffending”
  3. It amends section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act to add a duty for certain defined authorities to consider reducing reoffending in the exercise of all their duties.

These new changes came into force on 1 April 2010

To support the statutory changes to CSPs the following guide was produced: *‘Reducing Reoffending, Cutting Crime, Changing Lives’*

## Safer and Stronger Executive Board – Governance (February 2021)

Merton Partnership Executive Board  
Chair: Leader of the Council  
Aim: Set the strategic direction of the Merton Partnership, manage delivery of the Community Plan.

Thematic Sub Group 1:  
Children's Trust  
Aim: Deliver outcomes set out in Merton's Children & Young People Plan 2019-2023

Thematic Sub Group 2:  
Health & Wellbeing Board  
Aim: Provide strategic local leadership to improve health outcomes and commissioning health and social care services in Merton  
Priorities set out in the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024

Thematic Sub Group 3:  
Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership  
Aim: To create a more sustainable borough, balancing the different social, economic and environmental components of the community to meet the needs of existing and future generations. (employment, housing, transport)

Thematic Sub Group 4:  
Safer and Stronger Executive Board  
**(Statutory Community Safety Partnership)**  
Aim: Overseeing strategic direction for community safety and community cohesion

Appendix 1B



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