

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16th February 2022

Wards: All

Subject: The safety of women and girls in Merton

Lead officer: Peter Clifton, Interim Head of Community Safety

Lead member: Councillor Agatha Akyigyina

Contact officer: Zoe Gallan, Zoe Gallen, DA & VAWG Lead

Recommendations:

- A. That the committee note the work undertaken and to be undertaken to help improve the safety of women and girls in Merton
 - B. That the committee endorse a recommendation to Cabinet that Merton Council sign up to the Mayor's Night Safety Charter
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Safety of Women and Girls officer Task Group (referred to as the Task Group within this report) which was set up to identify what additional steps the council could take to improve the safety of women and girls.
- 1.2. This report provides an overview of the existing partnership response to Violence against Women and Girls; the outcomes and activities which have taken place in connection with the work of the Task Group; plans for specific additional interventions aimed at improving the safety of women and girls (in particular in public spaces) and details of the funding which has been secured to enable the delivery of those interventions.
- 1.3. On the basis of the range of work taking place the report recommends that Merton Council sign up to the Mayor's Night Safety Charter (as a statement of the Council's commitment to improving the safety of women and girls) and seeks the committee's support and endorsement for this recommendation.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Background context

2.2. April 2021 Merton Council motion

2.3. Members raised a council motion following the murder of Sarah Everard at the April 2021 full council meeting. The motion was resolved as follows:

‘That the council consider and note the content of the report, recognising that misogyny is systemic, and acknowledging the hurt and anger expressed more recently by women and girls in response to the murder of Sarah Everard, which was in part calling for their lived experience to be listened to and real action taken to address their concerns. Council calls on Cabinet to:

- a) *Develop safe and confidential opportunities for women and girls to share their experiences with the Council and other appropriate authorities to inform their work in changing male behaviour to reduce VAWG; and*
- b) *Explore how restorative justice processes might be utilised to provide victims with an additional form of support and means of reducing VAWG.’*

2.4. Analysis of crime data and consultations

2.4.1 Overall Merton remains one of London’s safest boroughs. During 2021 there were **12,876** total crimes reported, equating to a rate of **61.1** per 1000 population (the **3rd** lowest crime rate out of 32 London boroughs). During the same period there were 4188 Violence against the Person offences, equating to a rate of **19.9** per 1000 population (the **4th** lowest rate out of the 32 boroughs).

2.4.2 We know that for certain crime types a disproportionate number of the victims are women or girls, in particular Sexual offences (**85%** of victims) and Domestic Abuse offences (**72%** of victims). In response to which a comprehensive partnership response is in place which aims to prevent Domestic Abuse through early intervention as well as support victims, survivors and their children. We are also aware that, in London, people from ethnic minorities face a disproportionately high risk of become a victim of violent crime; and also aware of the findings and recommendations from the ‘*Invisible survivors – The long wait for justice*’¹ report by HMICFRS which highlights the importance of ensuring that all women are listened to² and of working to ensure that victims of violent crime who are women from ethnic minorities do not face additional barriers when seeking help and support.

2.4.3 Recent events, including the tragic murders of Sarah Everard in Clapham in March 2021, of Sabina Nessa in Greenwich in September 2021, and of Wafah Yasmin Chkaifi in Maida Vale in January 2022, have led to an increased focus on the safety

¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963007/Invisible_survivors___The_long_wait_for_justice.pdf

² One step we will be taking her towards this will be through launching a Safety of Women and Girls at night survey (see section 2.36 for details).

of women and girls in public spaces. Locally, residents' responses to the Safer Merton Community Safety Survey reveal:

- An increase in the proportion of female respondents reporting feeling unsafe outside at night (**45%** in the 2021 survey compared to **38%** in the 2019 survey).
- Female respondents were almost **1.5** times more likely to report feeling unsafe outside at night than male respondents.
- Substantial difference between perception of safety between the daytime and the night time (**38%** of females reported feeling unsafe outside after dark, compared to only **5%** feeling unsafe in the daytime).

2.4.4 The importance residents place on the safety in public spaces was also reflected in some of the themes to emerge from the Your Merton Survey (conducted during spring and summer 2021) including that:

- Residents wanted the borough to be accessible, safe and clean. Residents didn't always feel safe in public spaces at night
- Residents consider it important that parks are maintained to be safe, clean and accessible shared spaces.

2.5. **What we have been doing**

2.6. Existing partnership response to VAWG

2.7. Safer Merton continues to co-ordinate the partnership approach to respond to VAWG as part of its core business. VAWG also remains a strategic priority for the Safer and Stronger Executive Board (SSEB), the statutory community safety partnership for Merton. Interventions and activities include:

- The management of the VAWG Strategic Board (Quarterly meetings).
- Developing a new VAWG strategy (the new Strategy is due to be launched during September 2022). The Merton VAWG board is looking at adding a specific priority partnership objective within the VAWG strategy to 'improve the safety of women and girls'
- Developing and delivering the annual VAWG action plan (in line with the Strategy, the new plan is due to be launched during September 2022)
- Holding the three-weekly DV MARAC meetings.
- Continuing to raise awareness of Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) and VAWG across the council, partnership and community.
- Ensuring we meet the policy and statutory requirements, specifically conducting Domestic Homicide Reviews.

2.8. Commissioning and managing the delivery of front line services for victims of Domestic Abuse:

- The Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (IDVA).
- Running virtual weekly One Stop Shop drop in surgeries.
- Joint Commissioning of the complex needs IDVA service and refuge with Wandsworth, Kingston and Richmond.
- Refuge provision – 17 beds provided through Hestia.

2.9. Public realm works to improve safety in outdoor spaces

2.10. The Council is increasing its focus on safety in public spaces across the borough with a view to assessing options for crime prevention and improved safety at locations residents have raised concerns about. A recent example of this is the work currently underway in relation to Wandle Park (see 2.11 below).

2.11. In response to concerns raised by residents, the Council, working together with the Police, is conducting a review of crime prevention and safety measures in and around Wandle Park. The review is looking into how to design out crime in the park and is being supported by the Met's *Designing out Crime Team*.

2.12. The Council is also receiving a number of requests from residents to review lighting standards at various locations and we will do this as part of our work to help ensure safety.

2.13. Metropolitan Police

2.14. In November 2021, the Metropolitan Police launched the Met action plan to tackle violence against women and girls. The plan brings together all the Met's work to prevent violence against women and girls in public spaces, domestic settings and online. It also outlines an internal focus to raise professional standards of officers and staff and root out those who display unacceptable behaviour towards women.

2.15. The Met are also stepping up police activity to prevent night-time violence, piloting Project Vigilant, an operation to tackle predatory offending around the night-time economy where teams of plain clothed and uniform officers are deployed together to identify and prevent predatory offending around busy night time spots.

2.16. The Met VAWG plan³ sets out to:

- Increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice for violence against women and girls;
- Improve the processes and victim care across the criminal justice system to improve outcomes;
- Reduce the likelihood of women and girls becoming repeat victims;
- Increase women's confidence in the police and, in doing so, improve the reporting of crimes, which disproportionately affects women and girls in London;

³ Commissioner launches Met action plan to tackle violence against women and girls | Metropolitan Police

- See an increase in reporting to the police, but a decrease in prevalence;
 - Intensify work to tackle sexual misconduct and domestic violence by officers and staff;
- 2.17. Officers will also continue to work with licensing venues, delivering the refreshed safety campaign *Ask for Angela*⁴ and providing vulnerability training to staff.
- 2.18. '*Ask for Angela*' is a safety initiative which is being rolled out to bars, clubs and other licensed businesses across London. People who feel unsafe, vulnerable or threatened can discreetly seek help by approaching venue staff (at the participating venues) and asking them for 'Angela'. This code-phrase will indicate to staff that they require help with their situation and a trained member of staff will then look to support and assist them.
- 2.19. The Met has also now rolled out the Walk and Talk initiative across London, with women joining officers on patrol so that Met officers can hear first-hand what needs to change.
- 2.20. Streetsafe⁵ is an online interactive survey launched by the Met for anyone to anonymously tell the police about public places where they felt or feel unsafe, because of environmental issues, for example street lighting, abandoned buildings or vandalism and/or because some behaviours, e.g. being followed or verbally abused. Safer Merton will continue to liaise with the police to ensure that information provided relating to Merton is shared with the council to further inform our local approach to locations. More broadly the Safer Merton team will explore ways to make it easier for residents to make us aware of locations where they feel unsafe (including looking at good practice and innovative approaches being used elsewhere⁶)
- 2.21. Lone plain clothed officers, including those reacting to incidents whilst off-duty, will proactively provide verification of their identity and purpose to any lone woman they need to engage with using a video call to a uniformed supervisor in one of their police operation rooms. This is in addition to showing their warrant card.

⁴ <https://www.met.police.uk/AskforAngela>

⁵ www.police.uk/streetsafe

⁶ For example the Women's Safety in Public Places in Hackney Project
<https://hackneywomenssafety.commonplace.is/>

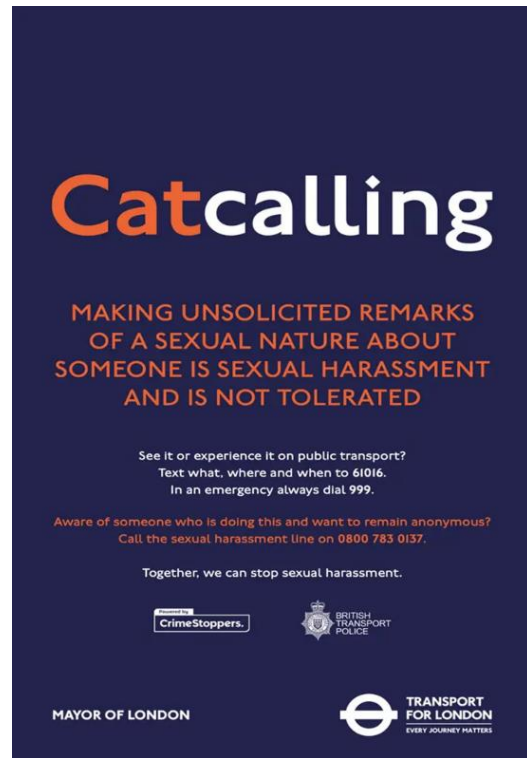
Transport for London

TFL also delivered a full publicity campaign⁷ with explicit explanations of what sexual harassment actually is and that it must stop. TFL also implemented a shared taxi for the popular night time bus routes to take the 'last mile home' from the bus to home.

TFL have, within their campaign, been clear on their zero tolerance approach to any form of unwanted sexual behaviour.

Victims and bystanders are encouraged to report incidents so that action can be taken against offenders.

Between 2019 and 2020, the latest data available from TFL, 1,884 sexual offences were reported on London's transport network, the vast majority of which occurred on the Tube.



However, TfL have continues to stress that harassment goes largely unreported, with a YouGov survey from 2020 suggesting that up to 90% of offences are not reported.

2.22. SOLACE Women's Aid

2.23. Solace Women's Aid launched a campaign targeting men and the need to change behaviour and participate in helping women and girls feel safe. The 'Good Guy Guide'⁸ highlights that 'you are a good guy, but the woman walking alone on the street doesn't know that' and suggests a set of simple actions men can take to help women and girls feel safer.

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-59056619>
<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/london-underground-sexual-harassment-crackdown-tfl-tube-met-police-b962637.html>

⁸ <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/news/solace-works-mc-saatchi-and-token-man-launch-good-guys-guide>

2.25. **Additional focus on improving the safety of women and girls**

2.26. In order to respond to the April 2021 Council motion (as detailed in this report in section 2.2) and to identify more broadly, what else, the council can do to improve the safety of women and girls in Merton, officers established a task group with the first meeting held in June 2021. The Task Group has focussed on:

- i. Capturing the activities of the council and its partners that supported the safety of women and girls.
- ii. Considering the wider policy and good practice on responding to the safety of women and girls.
- iii. Identifying how we can engage with and capture the experience of women and girls in Merton.
- iv. Identifying further interventions and approach that could enhance our response and resource implications

2.27. A range of activities have been carried out by or in connection with the partnership organisations supporting the work of the Task Group, these include:

- **Conducting Focus group sessions:**

- Councillors Focus Group on Safety of Women and Girls – The Safer Merton team held this session on the 29th November. At the session an outline of the work of the Task Group was provided as well as discussion exploring questions around policy, good practice, and the work of the wider partnership. The session also provided an opportunity for key points emerging from the work of the Task Group to be shared and for input and feedback to be sought from members.
- Licencing focus session: Led by the Councils Licensing Team, this session focused on exploring the opportunities for engagement with licensed premises on the borough to a) raise awareness of and increase participation in the ‘Ask for Angela’⁹ campaign and b) provide training to licensed premises which explore what vulnerability is, how to identify it and appropriate interventions.

- **Delivering training and awareness raising:**

- License premises across the borough have been contacted¹⁰ to raise their awareness of the ‘Ask for Angela’ Campaign and to encourage them to participate in the WAVE training¹¹ program which is focused on helping ensure that staff ensure staff are trained and confident to

⁹ <https://www.met.police.uk/AskforAngela>

¹⁰ During November and December 2021

¹¹ <https://www.safersounds.org.uk/news/safer-sounds-met-police-and-mayor-of-london-launch-refreshed-wave-programme>

actively assist customers in trouble and thus help prevent and reduce violent and sexual offences from taking place.

- The WAVE Programme is an initiative which has been launched by the Safer Sounds partnership working together with Safer Sounds are working with the Metropolitan Police Service and the Mayor of London. The Programme aims to help keep people safe while enjoying a night out. There are two strands to the WAVE Programme a) the Ask for Angela initiative and b) WAVE Training. WAVE Training is a training session which aims to increase the skills, knowledge and confidence of those working in licensed premises focusing on identifying vulnerability and making appropriate interventions.
 - The Police have allocated a number of officers in the SWBCU to help deliver the WAVE training and Ask for Angela campaign to licensed premises across the borough.
 - The WAVE training explores what vulnerability is, how to identify it and appropriate interventions.
- **Develop proposals for new or enhanced interventions and seek to secure funding for those interventions:**
 - In July 2021 the Task Group developed and submitted a bid to the Home Office Safer Streets Fund 'Protection Public Spaces 2021/22' for funding towards interventions to improve the safety of women and girls in public places across the borough.
 - Merton also bid for funding from the Home Office's SWaN (Safety of Women at Night) fund as part of a joint bid with Kingston, Richmond, and Wandsworth.
 - Whilst both these bids were unsuccessful, the ideas that were developed formed the basis of subsequent proposals as a result of which **£38,000** has been secured to deliver a range of interventions across Merton to improve the safety of women and girls in public spaces.
 - The £38,000 is comprised of £15,000 approved by Cabinet as part of the Merton 2030 implementation and £23,328 by MOPAC under the LCPF funding. As a result of this funding a range of enhanced interventions to improve the safety of women and girls will be delivered across the borough and details of these are provided in the 'Enhanced interventions' section below.

- 2.29. **Enhanced interventions to improve the safety of women and girls**
- 2.30. Taking into consideration feedback from the consultation activities as well as analysis of crime data the Task Group has developed plans for a set of interventions aimed at improving the safety of women and girls in public spaces across the borough.
- 2.31. Thanks to the funding provided by Cabinet as part of the Merton 2030 implementation and the MOPAC LCPF funding the following interventions will be delivered:
- 2.32. Investing in extra capacity for street pastors
- 2.33. The funding will enable an additional 20 street pastors to be trained and deployed to busy night time economy locations – focusing on the areas where women have raised concerns about safety at night. This expansion of the already well regarded Merton street pastor scheme by this will make a real difference increasing the presence and safety at the key locations. (Funding in place: £26,000).
- 2.34. Targeted Training and support for NTE staff
- 2.35. The Council’s Licensing team will deploy a dedicate roving Welfare Licensing Officers to check premises are promoting welfare and safety inside their premises and checking that vulnerable customers are safe e.g. are looked after in safe haven areas within the premises, SIA door staff are not ejecting drunken customers and leaving them outside the premises in a vulnerable state. These officers will mainly be deployed being between 7pm and 4am, Friday and Saturdays. The funding will enable two officers to be deployed across eight weekends during 2022. (Funding in place: £12,328)
- 2.36. Safety of Women and Girls at night survey
- 2.37. The survey will be delivered, carried out and analysed by Crimestoppers and will seek to address the intelligence gap in relation to the safety of women and girls within the night time economy as well as considering a number of other linked issues such as exploitation and modern day slavery. The survey will be a key means of intelligence gathering around concerns that are not routinely reported to police and partners. It will offer both an anonymised response and the facility to add details for further consultation. (Funding in place £1000)
- 2.38. The survey results (and the engagment activity undertaken in the carrying out of the survey) will assist in:
- Identify potentially vulnerable locations and risk factors in the evening and night time economy.
 - Consider the level of understanding that staff and management at night time economy venues have around there role and responsibilities re reducing the potential for harm in the night time economy.
 - Help identify strategies to manage/deal with the different vulnerabilities, including non-threatening communication techniques.

- Inform the development of tools to ensure the night time economy venues are prepared and equipped to identify and manage potential vulnerability in the night time economy.
- Provide a greater understanding and insight into the disproportionate impacts of violent crime on different ethnic minorities and help us understand how we can best ensure that victims of violent crime who are women from ethnic minorities do not face additional barriers when seeking help and support.
- Help inform decisions as where to focus efforts on upskilling night time economy venues with good practice as how to identify and spot the signs and deal with vulnerability and exploitation.

2.39. **Communications**

Alongside the roll out of the above interventions the Safer Merton team and Merton Council's Communications Team will be developing and delivering a communications campaign focused on raise awareness around the safety of women and girls in the borough. The campaign will include coverage of a number of themes (linked together under the broader subject of Violence against Women and Girls), namely:

- The Safety of women and girls in public places
- Sexual Violence
- Sexual Harassment
- Modern day slavery, and
- Domestic Abuse.

2.40. **Next steps**

2.41. Mayor's Night Safety Charter

2.42. The Women's Night Safety Charter was introduced by the Mayor of London and is part of Mayors Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy and London's commitment to the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces global initiative.

2.43. To support the Women's Night Safety Charter, organisations that operate at night are asked to sign up to some simple pledges. Organisations that have signed up are published on the Mayors website. As well as business organisations, 20 London Boroughs has also signed up. The pledges are as follows:

- Nominate a champion in your organisation who actively promotes women's night safety.
- Demonstrate to staff and customers that your organisation takes women's safety at night seriously, for example through a communications campaign.

- Remind customers and staff that London is safe, but tell them what to do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling.
- Encourage reporting by victims and bystanders as part of your communications campaign.
- Train staff to ensure that all women who report are believed.
- Train staff to ensure that all reports are recorded and responded to.
- Design your public spaces and work places to make them safer for women at night.

2.44. The Safety of Women and Girls Task Group

2.45. Officers will take steps to implement the enhanced interventions (as detailed in section 2.29 of this report) and will provide updates as to the outcomes of those interventions. In addition during 2022/23 the Task Group will re-convene to look at the following themes:

- a) Focusing on Perpetrators,
- b) Focusing on Victims
- c) Focusing on understanding and addressing disproportionality
- d) Focusing on Schools
- e) Communications
- f) Older victims
- g) Transport

2.46. **Recommendation**

2.47. That the committee note the work undertaken and to be undertaken to help improve the safety of women and girls in Merton.

2.48. That the committee endorse a recommendation to Cabinet that Merton Council sign up to the Mayor's Night Safety Charter (as a statement of the Councils commitment to improving the safety of women and girls and in light of the range of measures being implemented).

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. That the committee does not endorse the recommendation that Merton sign up to the Mayor's Night Safety Charter (this alternative option is not recommended)

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. The safety of women and girls Task Group has taken into consideration results from The 2021 Safer Merton Community Survey, the Annual Residents Survey and the Your Merton Survey (conducted during spring and summer 2021).

6 TIMETABLE

Action	Date
<i>Overview & Scrutiny Committee</i>	16 th February 2022
<i>Leaders Strategy Group</i>	7 th March 2022
<i>Cabinet</i>	21 st March 2022

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

8 There are no financial implications associated with the decision recommend in this report (i.e. to sign up to the Mayor’s Night Safety Charter). There are no financial impacts associated with the enhanced intervention activities detailed as specific funding has been secured to enable their delivery (as detailed above in 2.24)

9 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None for the purposes of this report.

10 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

Violence against Women and Girls can have major implications on community. The partnerships work in supporting victims, taking action against perpetrators, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults 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.

CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

11 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report. Safer Merton in partnership with all council departments, continue to ensure that the council remains compliant with our duties under the Crime and Disorder Act.

12 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1. None for the purpose of this report.

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

None for the purposes of this report.

14 BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1. MOPAC Draft Police and Crime Plan 2021-25

<https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/police-and-crime-plan-2021-25>