

## **Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

**Date: 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

Wards: All

**Subject: Update on the work of Safer Merton and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Safety of Women and Girls, including street lighting.**

Lead Director: Dan Jones

Lead Member: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Lead for Civic Pride

Lead Officers: Zoe Gallen (VAWG Lead), Katy Saunders (Community Safety Team Manager), Megan Hatton (Head of Safer Merton, CCTV and Resilience)

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### **Recommendations:**

- A. For the Committee to note the update on the work of VAWG and Safety of Women and Girls agenda.
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on the work of Safer Merton in delivering Merton's VAWG Strategy 2022-25 and an update on the work being done around the Safety of Women and Girls in Merton, including street lighting. This works links to Civic Pride and ensuring the borough is a safe space to live, work and visit.

## **2 DETAILS**

2.1. Safer Merton continues to co-ordinate the partnership approach to respond to VAWG.

2.2. This includes:

- Management of the VAWG Strategic Board (quarterly meetings).
- Promoting the VAWG strategy.
- Delivering the VAWG action plan.
- Running the three weekly domestic violence MARAC<sup>1</sup> meetings.
- Continuing to raise awareness of all forms of VAWG across the Council, partnership, and community, this includes domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence and abuse, Honour based violence and harmful practices and modern slavery.

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<sup>1</sup> Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference for high risk domestic abuse cases.

<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/MARAC%20FAQs%20General%20FINAL.pdf>

- Responding to the Member's motion on the Safety of Women and Girls following the murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021. Safer Merton has continued to coordinate the cross-council Safety of Women and Girls task group to inform our work on reducing VAWG and addressing male behaviour.
- Promoting Merton's Safer Streets work, including the launch of the Safe Zones and Ask for Angela, supporting business to ensure women feel safe on our streets and in our night time economy.
- Ensuring we meet policy and statutory requirements, specifically conducting Domestic Homicide Reviews (one active at present) and co-ordinating the work of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Commissioning and managing the delivery of front-line services for victims of domestic abuse. This includes -

The Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (IDVAs) – currently 3x IDVAs, 1x IDVA in Adult Social Care and 1x Caseworker in Children's Schools and Families, provided by Victim Support.

Running the weekly One Stop Shop drop-in advice surgeries.

Joint commissioning of the Complex Needs IDVA Service with Wandsworth, Kingston, and Richmond.

Refuge provision –17 beds for women fleeing domestic abuse.

Coordinating referrals to the PAC (prevent and Change) programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse, alongside six other boroughs that are part of the project. This project was a joint venture funded by the Home Office for two years. As of Q3 2023/24 five Merton referrals have been submitted for the perpetrator and two victims/ survivors are being supported.

From January 2024 finance has also been secured for GLA DASA (Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation) funding to provide a Housing IDVA to provide support to domestic abuse victims under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

- 2.3. We have successfully bid for funding from the VRU (Violence Reduction Unit) for the IRIS project which provides workers within GP surgeries across Merton, upskilling staff on how to support VAWG victims, as well as ensuring referrals are sent to the correct organisations so that victims get a better support network. The VRU are funding the first 12 months and the ICB (Integrated Care Board) the second 12 months.
- 2.4. We have also successfully bid for funding from the VRU for interventions addressing child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA) which allows for two specialist posts working alongside social workers to support families where they are experiencing this form of abuse. This work is currently being developed in partnership with Children's Social Care.
- 2.5. **Update of key pieces of work on Women and Girls safety**
- 2.6. **Safer Streets Round 4 Funding:** Safer Merton was successful in its joint bid with Wandsworth, Kingston, and Richmond for Round 4 of the Home Office's Safer Streets funding. The bid focused on supporting interventions aimed at preventing violence against women and girls in public places and on engaging with men to change attitudes and behaviours.



- 2.7. This work includes **Bystander training** provided to professionals and the community with three sessions taking place during 2023. This helps people to feel empowered to support someone that may be experiencing harassment or misogyny in a public space by intervening safely. We have also recruited internal and external bystander ‘train the trainers’ to help roll out this training further in 2024 to the wider community and professionals.
- 2.8. In September a Bystander session was held with Merton and Richmond **Youth Parliament** so young people could discuss their role in helping to keep young women and girls safe. Actions from this include having young person’s representatives (both female and male) on the Safety of Women and Girls Tasking Group.



Drawn by: [www.sandrahowgate.com](http://www.sandrahowgate.com)

- 2.9. We worked with businesses to promote the **Ask for Angela** scheme and roll out **Business Tool Kits** on how to keep women safe at night. This

includes training for staff on how to recognise and deal with vulnerability and harassment. There is a currently a high take up of Ask for Angela in Wimbledon town centre, the aim is to refresh this and roll out the scheme to the other town centres on borough. We are also working with colleagues in the Council's Licensing department on how these resources can be incorporated into businesses future licensing applications.

- 2.10. In addition, Merton has signed up to the **Mayor of London's Night Safety Charter**<sup>2</sup>. The charter has been created to make London a city where all women feel confident and welcome at night and is part of the Mayor's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and London's commitment to the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces global initiative.



- 2.11. Also funded by Safer Streets was a **Women's Night Time Safety Audit** carried out in 2023. The findings of this work is being fed into Merton's Night Time Economy Strategy to ensure women feel safe in our night time economy. This work will be progressed in 2024.
- 2.12. Launch of **Safe Zones** in Wimbledon and Mitcham run by Merton Street Pastors. Wimbledon takes place on the first Friday of the month and Mitcham on the last Friday of the month.
- 2.13. At the most recent Safe Zones, Wimbledon Safe Zone engaged with 13 people, handed out water bottles to 18 people, flip flops given out to 2 people and 3 homeless people were engaged with.
- 2.14. At the most recent Mitcham Safe Zone, 12 people were engaged with, 20 water bottles were given out and given out alongside 1 pair of flip flops.
- 2.15. This work is possible due to a combination of Safer Streets and VRU funding, which has allowed us to invest in extra capacity for Street Pastors to

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/arts-and-culture/24-hour-london/womens-night-safety-charter#acc-i-57686>

be trained and deployed to busy night-time economy locations and the purchase of Safe Zone equipment.



- 2.16. There is now a dedicated **Merton Safer Streets web page** detailing the work that has been done so far:
- 2.17. <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/vawg/safer-streets>
- 2.18. Safer Merton have secured **Home Office Young Women and Girls funding 2022-25** for **St Giles Trust** to work with young women in Merton schools at risk of violence and exploitation via mentorship and group work. Mentors have lived experience of the issues discussed. 10 mentees were worked with in the last quarter in two Merton schools via this funding. The work includes professional sessions to upskill teachers on recognising those at risk.
- 2.19. *“I really enjoy it. When I speak to them (Mentor) about things they understand me – situations that I’m in they can relate to” - Mentee*
- 2.20. *Actual lived experiences made the training useful in developing awareness, understanding and empathy” - Professional*
- 2.21. We have held several **Women’s Walk and Talks** in partnership with local Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams, with four taking place at locations across the borough in the past six months. These sessions have been on a Saturday or weekday evening, where Council and Police officers meet in the community and walk with women whilst discussing issues around safety and crime. The walk and talks have given us feedback on how women feel in the borough and suggestions on how we can all work together so women feel safer. We have also promoted the Police Street Safe<sup>3</sup> initiative where women can feedback intelligence on locations where they do not feel safe.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.met.police.uk/notices/street-safe/street-safe/>



- 2.22. **White Ribbon Accreditation:** White Ribbon UK is a charity focused on engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and girls and is part of our work to develop a strategic approach to ensuring male accountability for ending violence against women and girls. The White Ribbon Steering Group led the work to ensure Merton became White Ribbon accredited. This was achieved in September 2023, and we have several Champions and Ambassadors within the Council promoting the safety of women and girls and challenging misogynistic behaviour and language. We continue to develop our White Ribbon action plan and this year we will be asking our partners and residents to make the White Ribbon promise and become Champions and Ambassadors.



- 2.23. We recognise importance of working with men to shape wider behavioural change. We commissioned a male survey to hear the views of men and how they can support this work, and we will be developing a male allyship campaign, starting with a specific **male allyship session** for staff and partners in February 2024.
- 2.24. We are currently working with the **Borough of Sport** team on initiatives on how we can use physical exercise and activities to help make girls and women feel safer, especially during the darker months.
- 2.25. **Continued regular communications** via the Council's publicity channels to raise awareness of VAWG and promote the services available to victims in Merton. This includes working in partnership with Police and other partners on the annual **16 Days Against Domestic Violence and Abuse Campaign** which includes awareness raising, training and events to shine a spotlight on the different forms of VAWG and signpost to organisations which can provide support to victims.

### **3 SAFETY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AND LIGHTING IN MERTON**

- 3.1. All roads/ footways/ footpaths that are maintained by the London Borough of Merton that have associated street lighting are lit to the required standards as outlined in BS5489-1:2020. The lighting class that Merton currently lights to within this British Standard when the lanterns are fully operational is P3. A description of the type of road and users that lighting class P3 is recommended is for roads with a speed of 30mph or less and has moderate night-time usage of vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists.
- 3.2. Since 2014, Merton Council have converted over 94% of its lanterns (12,250 out 13,000) on the network to LED lanterns. To save further energy consumption, all LED lanterns that have been installed since 2014 within the borough have a dimming regime programmed (reduced by 25% between 20.00 to 23.00 and reduced by 50% between 23.00 to dawn). Therefore, once the dimming of the lanterns is operational from 23.00 to dusk (50% dimming) this is reducing the lighting class to P4. Within the British Standard BS5489-1:2020, lighting class P4 is described as minor night-time use by pedal cyclists or pedestrians solely associated with adjacent properties.
- 3.3. Over the past 14 to 15 years (since 2008/ 09), Merton street lighting energy consumption has reduced from 7,283,250 Kwh (Estimated Annual Consumption) to 2,254,462 Kwh (Estimated Annual Consumption) at the end of financial year 2022/23, meaning total energy consumption savings of 70%.
- 3.4. It is recommended that Merton shouldn't reduce its lighting class beyond P4 as this would be more in keeping with village lighting and potentially have a negative affect when considering anti-social behaviour, crime and resident perspective when using the highway network at night.
- 3.5. Particularly during the summer months, when trees are in full leaf, in some locations due to the close proximity of where lamp columns and trees are located, the lighting levels/ outputs can be reduced due to shadowing. Also, when larger vehicles are parked in a residential street nearby a lighting column, this too could impend the lighting output of the lantern.
- 3.6. Weekly lighting night scouts are undertaken within the borough by Merton Council employees within Highways as well as by Merton Council's street lighting term maintenance contractor. The borough is split into right areas, and night scouts of each area is rotated. Therefore, each week, two of these areas are checked for any lighting issues and in addition any ad-hoc third party complaints that the Council receive via Fix My Street, e-mails, telephone calls etc are checked, and if necessary associated jobs are issued to our term contractor to repair.
- 3.7. Safer Merton link in with the Highways department with regards to any feedback received regarding poor lighting and the impact this has on feelings of safety, so these areas can be inspected as part of the night scouts. The Women's Walk and Talks previously described have been a useful tool to enable this.

## **4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1. There are no alternative options, we continue to use the VAWG Strategy 2022-25 to inform our work.

## **5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 5.1. The VAWG Strategy 2022-25 and action plan was developed by the VAWG Board and shared with partners. Feedback from victims and survivors has been incorporated into the strategy.

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

- 6.1. Currently the domestic abuse service is funded by the Council and MOPAC LCPF funding which runs 2022-25. The women's Refuge is funded by the Council's Housing Department. We will continue to look for additional funding to maintain and grow our services.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The work of VAWG and Safety of Women and Girls agenda is part of the Council's statutory duties under legislation such as the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- 7.2. There are no legal implications arising out of the update in this report.

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

- 8.1. Domestic abuse can have major implications on community cohesion. With 1 in 20 residents affected by this crime, the partnership's work in supporting victims, acting against perpetrators, and ensuring that our communities understand the work we are doing is vital in achieving our ambitions; for more victims to report and for more friends, family and/ or neighbours to report matters of concern.
- 8.2. The United Kingdom ratifies the Istanbul Convention, and this will be a positive way forward supporting victims and survivors.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. As Safer Merton oversee the work, the team ensure that all crime, disorder, and safeguarding concerns are considered within this work.
- 9.2. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and subsequent guidance from the Home Office and MOPAC sets out the responsibilities for the Local Authority and the Community Safety Partnership

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



10.1. Due to the large and ongoing demand for the domestic abuse services during the pandemic and onwards, we are looking for additional funding to ensure the domestic abuse community service can grow to manage increased demand.

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

- Appendix 1 – Merton VAWG Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Merton Council VAWG webpages:  
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/vawg>

**12 BACKGROUND PAPERS – NONE**

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