

3 February 2022		ITEM: 6
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Michelle Cunningham, Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director Housing Management		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers, Director of Public Realm		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the areas of work associated with the Thurrock Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2020-2023. The current VAWG strategy and vision was agreed by members of this committee in February 2020, a month before the Covid pandemic brought unrecognisable change to the world. For many women and children who were experiencing VAWG crimes, staying at home was not a place of safety.

All forms of VAWG can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. However according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)¹ for the year ending March 2020 women are disproportionately likely to experience domestic abuse, repeat victimisation, be physically injured or killed as a result of domestic abuse and experience non-physical abuse - including emotional and financial abuse - than men. According to the CSEW for the year ending March 2020, around one in four women aged 16 to 74 (27.6%) had been a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime whilst around one in seven men aged 16 to 74 (13.8%) had been a victim of domestic abuse in their lifetime.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) through the VAWG Coordinator works to ensure that all partners, both statutory and voluntary work together to provide effective support and protection to victims, including children, and response to perpetrators.

¹ [Domestic abuse: draft statutory guidance framework \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/domestic-abuse-draft-statutory-guidance-framework)

With the restrictions imposed, it was important that victims and survivors knew that the isolation rules did not apply to victims of domestic abuse. Victim's access to support shrunk further due to increased social isolation. The decrease in social contact is now known to have had significant mental health impacts on the general population, and this is even more acute for survivors coping and recovering from trauma.

Crucial legislation and policies that were meant to increase support for survivors were delayed in receiving royal assent. The Domestic Abuse Act was enacted in late April 2021, accompanied shortly afterwards by an updated government VAWG strategy.²

Whilst the national and local strategies have a focus on women and girls, due to the disproportionate nature of the crimes committed against them, both strategies recognise that men and boys are also affected by these crimes. Government are expected to update the current men and boys' position paper³ later this year, which will continue to be reflected within the Thurrock VAWG strategy. Thurrock's support services for all VAWG crimes are available to any victim or survivor.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Note the progress on delivery of responsibilities detailed within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and scrutinise the recommendations**
- 1.2 Provide comment on the proposed Thurrock Community Safety Partnership priorities in relation to VAWG for 2022/23**
- 1.3 Note the key successes and the programme to deliver on the VAWG strategy for Thurrock 2020/23**
- 1.4 Request that members champion the VAWG agenda and raise the profile of the services that are available to Thurrock residents**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 National & Local Framework: The role of local authorities in the prevention of crime and disorder became a legal requirement under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. To meet this obligation, Community Safety Partnerships (as they are now known) were created, ensuring that the named 'responsible authorities' worked together on a statutory basis. Locally the VAWG work stream is a priority of Thurrock Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and is delivered by the Thurrock VAWG Strategic Board. Thurrock are the only authority in Essex to have a longstanding VAWG strategy.

² [HM Government: Tackling violence against women and girls strategy- July 2021](#)

³ [HM Government: Male victims position paper \(March 2019\)](#)

- 2.2 In December 2020 for the first time, the Home Office opened a Call for Evidence to hear directly from the public their views on tackling violence against women and girls. Following the national outpouring of grief as a result of the tragic death of Sarah Everard, it was reopened in March 2021. This call for evidence received more than 180,000 responses. That is an unprecedented response. The full findings are not yet public, however reports include that many women and girls have bad experiences at school, at work, on buses and trains, on the street, and at home. Sadly this violence continues, at least 139 UK women were killed by men (or where a man is the principal suspect) in 2021⁴. Women are murdered on average every three days in the UK. Inside and outside of homes. By total strangers, and by people they know and trust.
- 2.3 On 26 March 2021, the Home Secretary commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to inspect how the police work with female victims, offenders and witnesses. HMICFRS concluded that there is an epidemic of offending against women and girls and a whole-system approach is needed to tackle it, involving not only the police but also other partners such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Health, Social Care and Education.⁵

In response to the findings, The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) announced the appointment of a National Police Lead for Violence Against Women and Girls to coordinate police action across England and Wales. The new role will be responsible for agreeing and delivering a new police strategy that will focus on interventions to prevent violence, target perpetrators and help victims achieve justice. Locally, Essex police have recently appointed a force lead for tackling VAWG within the force.

- 2.4 The Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Crime Plan 2021-2024⁶ recognises this agenda with the priority of **Reducing violence against women and girls**, stating that they will not tolerate male violence and abuse against women and girls in any form. This is in addition to the priorities of **Protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse** and **Improving support for victims of crime**.

Domestic Abuse and **Rape** are also identified within the Crime Prevention Strategy for Essex 2021/25 (Appendix 1) as 2 of the 14 thematic strands which Essex Police recognise not only pose the greatest potential threat, harm and risk to our people and communities, but also present the greatest opportunity for prevention.

- 2.5 **Violence Against Women and Girls** – encompassing: sexual violence, abuse and exploitation; stalking; sexual harassment; modern day slavery and human trafficking; domestic abuse; female genital mutilation (FGM); forced

⁴ [Karen Ingala Smith: CountingDeadWomen](#)

⁵ [HMICFRS: Radical action needed to tackle crime epidemic against women and girls](#)

⁶ <https://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk/what-we-are-doing/police-and-crime-plan/encouraging-volunteers-and-community-support/>

marriage and so called “Honour” based abuse of all genders, was identified as a Priority for the CSP for 2020/21 and extended to March 2022.

In line with National and Essex Police Fire Crime Plan, Thurrock CSP are considering separating Domestic Abuse from VAWG to individual priorities for 2022/23 namely:

- **Tackling disproportionality in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls** – including sexual offences, stalking and rape, whilst recognising that men and boys can also be victims
- **Breaking the cycle of Domestic Abuse:** in line with the Domestic Abuse Duty and needs assessment

2.6 In April 2021, Government asked Ofsted to undertake a rapid review of sexual harassment in schools and colleges after anonymous testimonials of sexual abuse were published on the website ‘Everyone’s Invited’. The number of testimonies nationally currently stands at 54,046, with a further 99,600 from communities⁷. This review prompted The Department for Education to commission the NSPCC to launch a new helpline called Report Abuse in Education. Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnerships (LSCP) were tasked with providing information and guidance to schools and colleges on how to support young people who report experiences of being harassed or being a victim of sexual offences. Thurrock LSCP wrote to all schools and colleges outlining available guidance, support and resources for staff and young people. Support and information continues to be provided through Head Teacher networks and Safeguarding Leads Forums.

2.7 Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established on a statutory basis through the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). A DHR is a multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse, or neglect by a person to whom they were related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship, or a member of the same household as themselves. They are also undertaken where a victim took their own life (suicide) and the circumstances give rise to concern, for example it emerges that there was coercive controlling behaviour in the relationship. Section 9 of the Act came into force on 13 April 2011 which requires Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to undertake a DHR following a domestic homicide that meets the criteria set. Within Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) it was agreed that this process would be centralised and coordinated by the SET Domestic Abuse team, which commenced in July 2017. In the year ending March 2021, almost half (46%) of adult female homicide victims in England and Wales were killed in a domestic homicide – 81 women.⁸

In 2021 Thurrock Community Safety Partnership (TCSP) commissioned their first Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) under Section 9 of the Domestic

⁷ [Everyonesinvited](#)

⁸ [DHR Network](#)

Violence, Crime & Victims Act 2004 and the Thurrock Safeguarding Board agreed that the case also met the criteria for a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) as set out under Section 44 of Care Act 2014. It has been agreed that this review will be conducted jointly. This process is now underway and the TCSP and Thurrock Safeguarding Adults Board will implement and identified recommendations accordingly.

2.8 There have been a number of key successes of the current Thurrock VAWG strategy and notable progression within other internal services that contributes to and has an impact on the response and support offered to victims of VAWG related crimes and behaviours.

- Thurrock commissioners worked with the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) and were successful in a bid for community based Respect accredited domestic violence perpetrator programme. This include a dedicated Integrated Support Service for victims of domestic abuse and their children. The programme is available for men, women, and those within same sex relationships. This programme is for those who want to stop being abusive towards intimate partners and are motivated to change their behaviour.
- Within the Housing Safeguarding team there are now Community Liaison Officers providing outreach support for domestic abuse victims. This is a developing initiative including reaching out to residents on the Thurrock Council managed traveller sites.
- Participation and contribution to numerous partnership groups such as Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership, SET Domestic Abuse Board and the Domestic Abuse Best Practice Implementation plan. These forums ensure that Thurrock is involved in joint commissioning opportunities, working in a consistent way across SET and striving towards improved services for victims.
- There has been comprehensive training offer across VAWG including :
 - J9 Domestic Abuse awareness training: an initiative aimed at raising awareness of domestic abuse and to assist survivors to access support safely by training professionals and members of the community to recognise domestic abuse and respond to survivors
 - Sexual Violence awareness training ‘Challenging myths, changing attitudes’
 - Domestic Abuse and Stalking awareness – a new offer for this year which has seen approximately 150 professionals attend
 - Modern day slavery training: again a new offer with dates scheduled for early 2022 with Essex police delivering
- Annual promotion of initiatives such as ‘16 days of activism’, including a ‘Safer Streets’ community engagement event where 800 personal alarms were handed out along with a leaflet on staying safe. The SET wide stalking awareness campaign, International Women’s Day and Ask for Angela.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021⁹

The Domestic Abuse Act introduced a new statutory definition of domestic abuse with an aim to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable and actively challenged across statutory agencies and in public attitudes. Part 4 of the Act places a number of statutory duties on tier 1 local authorities in England relating to the provision of support for victims and their children residing within relevant safe accommodation. Local Authorities have been awarded 'new burdens' funding by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) under the new duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Thurrock's allocation was £366,530 p.a. Funding will be reviewed two years after implementation (Autumn 2023) with a view of integration into the Local Government Finance Settlement following the 2023 spending review. Thurrock Councils duties and responses are summarised below.

- 1) Appoint a multi-agency domestic abuse local partnership board to be consulted when performing certain functions. The terms of reference of the existing Thurrock Violence Against Women & Girls Strategic Board have been amended to reflect the duties of the act. The Board will assist the local authority in its functions of the newly required local domestic abuse partnership board. The Thurrock VAWG Board is the domestic abuse local partnership board for Thurrock and is chaired by the A/D for housing.
- 2) Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support of survivors and their children in their area, including the need of those coming from outside the area. Thurrock Council have completed a needs assessment of the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support of survivors and their children in their area, including the need of those coming from outside the area. Recommendations were agreed by the VAWG Strategic Board and current progress is detailed in section 3.2.
- 3) Develop and publish a strategy, by 5th January 2022, for the provision of support. Thurrock CSP have amended the existing VAWG strategy (Appendix 2) to reflect the duties for local authorities under part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The existing strategy already detailed support for domestic abuse victims including safe accommodation provision as defined by the Act. This strategy is an amendment of the current Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, with existing links to other work streams such as Modern Slavery, Community Safety, Victims Strategy, Housing and Homelessness Reduction and Safeguarding. The full VAWG strategy will be reviewed in 2023.
- 4) Give effect to the strategy by commissioning and de-commissioning services. Thurrock Council are in the process of commissioning new

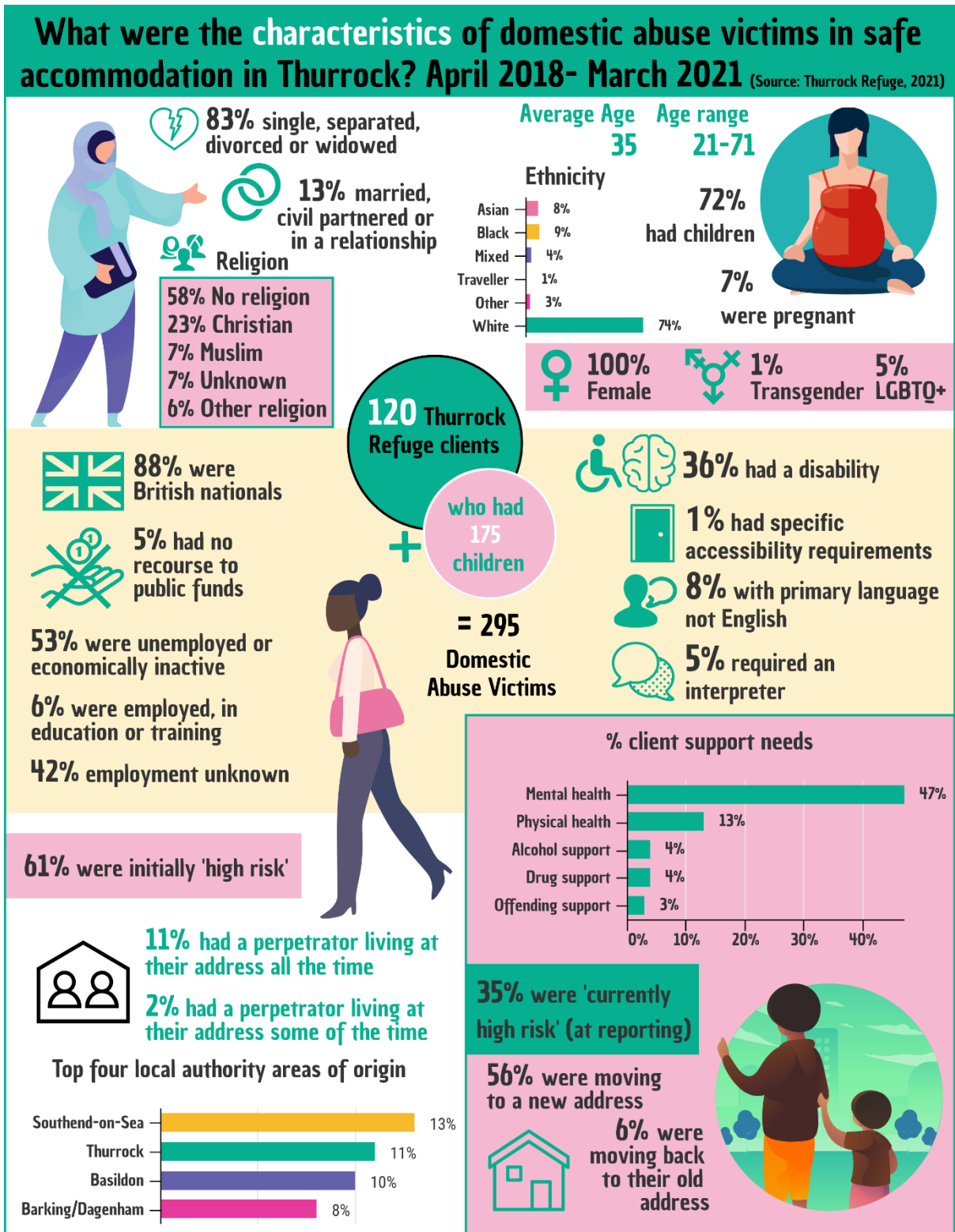
⁹ [The Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

services of support as a result of the recommendations from the needs assessment.

- 5) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy and report back to central government and to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. Annual review dates will be scheduled within the VAWG Strategic Board to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy in order to report back to government within the timescales specified.

3.2 A full needs analysis focussing on safe accommodation was completed utilising data from a range of partners including: specialist domestic and sexual violence services; the Police; Health; Housing; Children and Adult Services; commissioned services and service users. The executive summary is provided at Appendix 3.

The characteristics of residents of safe accommodation in Thurrock are identified within the infographic below¹⁰:



¹⁰ Source: Thurrock Refuge (Changing Pathways), 2021

- 3.3 This needs assessment has identified the following priority areas for victims whom are resident within safe accommodation.
- Support around financial inclusion for victims supporting access to education, training and employment in preparation for moving on from the refuge.
 - Support to increase staff knowledge and working practices around victims with physical and learning disabilities and mental health issues.
 - Specialist drug and alcohol support for resident adults & children.
 - Support to expedite the process of moving on from refuge to independent accommodation when safe to do so and to ensure support is continued once victims are settled.
 - Implementation of trauma informed psychological support for resident adults and children.
 - Specialist sexual violence counselling support
 - Increase in capacity of the existing children's worker to support parenting work.
 - Tutoring for resident children who as a result of moving into refuge have additional identified learning needs.

- 3.4 A range of developments are expected in the near future locally and nationally that will have an impact on the VAWG agenda.

The Department for Education introduced compulsory Relationships Education for primary pupils and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for secondary pupils from September 2020. All schools were given a reprieve from the implementation date due to the pandemic. The statutory guidance states that 'pupils should know the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, and how these can affect current and future relationships and Grooming, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, should also be addressed sensitively and clearly. The Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) are in the process of collating responses to a statutory audit with schools which will inform the current progress status of this duty within schools across Thurrock.

- 3.5 The project Operation Encompass is due an Essex wide review. This is a multi-agency approach to give early notification to schools, academies, colleges and nurseries that a child or young person has been present, witnessed or been involved in a domestic abuse incident. Nominated key adults within local schools will receive information from Essex Police and Thurrock Council Children's Services to afford them the opportunity of assessing the needs of the child during the school day and, should it be deemed appropriate to do so, to provide early support. This originally launched in January 2020, however was severely hindered by the pandemic as schools were closed. In spring term 2 from 1/3/21 a total of 7 notifications were received by participating schools in Thurrock.

- 3.6 A key area of work that continues to help with understanding of sexual violence is the 'Sexual Violence and Abuse: A Thurrock Joint Strategic Needs Assessment' (JSNA). The needs assessment led by Thurrock Public Health sought to further understanding of the nature, prevalence and types of sexual violence and abuse occurring locally in Thurrock. This assessment is a unique piece of work, engaging with local survivors and professionals. The recommendations are now progressing through a governance structure led by the Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership Board. The lead officers were recently successful in securing funding from the Thurrock Safeguarding Adults Board to expand the training offer for sexual violence awareness for public and professionals so that it is reflective of the current offer for domestic abuse training. This area of work also links in with the new proposals within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy refresh (Domain 6- Community Safety).
- 3.7 The murder of Sarah Everard and the testimonies provided through the Everyone's Invited movement sparked a national conversation and an outpouring of grief, distress and anger about the violence and abuse that women and girls experience daily.

In response to this Synergy Essex (partnership of the three Rape Crisis Centres in Essex) produced a briefing into Male Sexual Violence and Abuse against Women and Girls and is at Appendix 4. The report recognised that whilst not perfect in its approach, Thurrock Unitary Authority has a Violence against Women and Girls Strategy, a Sexual Violence and Abuse Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and funding is made available to the Rape Crisis Centre based in Thurrock (SERICC)

The report made six clear recommendations which must be central to the development of any future Essex wide actions for addressing male sexual violence and abuse against women and girls:

1. We call on you to name the problem.
2. We call on you to insist on the development of educational programmes that use strong messaging that challenges rape culture, ensuring that male sexual violence and abuse will not be tolerated.
3. We ask you to prioritise the systems change required to tackle men's sexual violence and ensure that tackling male sexual violence is identified as a clear priority in strategic planning across Essex.
4. We call on you to do all you can to secure the future of the specialist sexual violence and abuse services women and girls need, as evidenced by the current demand.
5. We urge you to encourage specialist sexual violence and abuse training and awareness for frontline staff within your sphere of influence
6. We call on you to support and encourage the development of public awareness campaigns.

Thurrock is responding to these recommendations through the CSP Strategic Board of which SERICC are a member.

The evidence of need in Thurrock is provided at Appendix 5: SERICC data for – 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

3.8 Following a “Call to Action” from specialist domestic abuse organisations for a domestic abuse perpetrator strategy, government have now committed to publishing a strategy. The perpetrator strategy will form part of the wider domestic abuse strategy and is due to be published by May 2022.

3.9 Equality Impact Assessment

The Equality Impact Assessment for the VAWG strategy 2020/23 highlighted:

- There is a gender imbalance in relation to reported crime. Nationally, the majority of victims were female, and the majority of perpetrators are male
- Sexual exploitation adversely impacts young people
- Elder abuse is acknowledged as under reported and is being highlighted for action
- The scope of the 2020-2023 strategy now recognises gender reassignment
- Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse
- National research highlights that BAME, LGBT and disabled individuals face significant barriers when reaching out to seek help.
- The established religions do not condone the abuse highlighted within this strategy
- Domestic abuse affects all communities, certain wards have higher reporting levels.

The Thurrock Community Safety Partnership is committed to meeting the needs of all residents by tackling all forms of exploitation and abuse across Thurrock and by delivering preventative measures, protection, and legal redress for all.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 This paper provides the committee with an opportunity to be assured that Thurrock Council is meeting its statutory requirements as detailed in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as outlined in 3.1.

4.2 This paper provides the committee with an opportunity to comment on the proposed priorities outlined at 2.5.

4.3 This paper provides the committee with a summary of the key successes and further planned delivery of the VAWG strategy 2020/23.

4.4 Leadership is required to be demonstrated in order to provide a Co-ordinated Community Response to VAWG. SERICC would be happy to deliver a briefing for members.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Annual reporting to the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership and the Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.2 The VAWG Strategic Board members were consulted on the needs assessment recommendations and the amended VAWG strategy to reflect the Domestic Abuse Act duties and response.
- 5.3 Thurrock Council are currently consulting on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022/26, which includes the proposed priority of Provide safe, suitable and stable housing solutions for people who have or who are experiencing domestic abuse / violence and / or sexual abuse / violence.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The VAWG strategy is central to delivering Thurrock Council's priority of:
 - **People** - a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay. All elements of this priority are relevant to VAWG.
 - **Prosperity** - a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations. In particular 'vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all.' which provides victims with access further opportunities to help them rebuild their lives.
- 6.2 The VAWG action plan links closely to and supports delivery of the SETDAB Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2025. Within the PFCC Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 it supports the priorities of reducing violence against women and girls, protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse and improving support for victims of crime.
- 6.3 We have worked closely with the Health and Wellbeing Board to develop the proposed new domain in relation to Community Safety within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2026. When agreed we look forward to the focus this will provide on the wider determinants of health including domestic and sexual violence and / abuse.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

Thurrock Council have received £366,530 New Burdens funding for 2021/22. The TCSP has committed £5k of funding for training and awareness raising and Public Realm contribute £17k for the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service commissioned by the OPFCC.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

This report provides Members with an update on progress of statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

There are no direct implications in relation to diversity and equality from this report. The VAWG strategy has an Equality Impact Assessment in place and summarised at 3.9

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder and Looked After Children

This report contributes towards Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- [HM Government: Tackling violence against women and girls strategy- July 2021](#)
- [The Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)
- An assessment of the needs of domestic abuse victims residing in safe accommodation in Thurrock April 2018 – March 2021

9. Appendices to the report

1. Crime Prevention Strategy for Essex 2021/25
2. <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/violence-against-women-and-girls/strategies-and-policies>
3. An Assessment of the needs of Domestic Abuse Victims residing in Safe Accommodation in Thurrock (Executive Summary)
4. Report of Synergy into Male Sexual Violence and Abuse Against Women and Girls
5. SERICC data report 2020/21

Report Author: Priscilla Tsang, VAWG Coordinator, Community Safety Team, Public Realm