

BUILDING BLOCKS: A STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THURROCK

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THE TASK AND HOW WE APPROACHED IT

CWASU were commissioned to develop an integrated policy and practice approach to VAWG in Thurrock, building on work that had been begun in 2011, through a process of engagement, consultation and consensus building. This document combines a VAWG strategy and action plan. It draws on three months work in Thurrock, during which we have:

- held three meetings with elected local councillors;
- interviewed representatives from the statutory sector and specialised VAWG services;
- undertaken an online survey distributed to local organisations and councillors;
- conducted an audit of existing local policy documents;
- held a feedback meeting on interim findings attended by over 20 people;
- linked all of the above to the Westminster government VAWG strategy and action plan.

The consultation process followed a set of questions which included: what Thurrock could be proud of; gaps in understanding and provision; what a strategy should contain; and priorities for the next 12 months and five years. This revealed considerable gaps between those who had depth understanding of a range of forms of VAWG and the majority for whom it remained limited to domestic/intimate partner violence. The irony of SERICC (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre) being cited most often as what Thurrock could be proud co-exists with the relative invisibility of sexual violence in policy and practice: this irony was widely acknowledged at the feedback meeting. We address why synchronising perspectives will improve practice in the round below: creating a more inclusive approach requires integration of both sexual violence and the full range of forms of VAWG, alongside investment in frontline staff and universal services to ensure that this is understood and embraced.

A broad consensus emerged about the importance of a ‘joined-up’ approach across the borough, connecting short and long term priorities within a clear direction of travel that includes agreed principles and definitions (see Table 1). Later sections of the strategy explore these issues in depth.

TABLE 1: PRIORITIES FOR THURROCKS VAWG STRATEGY

Next 12 months	Next five years
Strategy in place with shared principles, definitions and achievable actions	Harmonised responses across borough
Data collection enhanced and standardised	
Co-ordination in place	Sufficient resources for, and increased access to, support for victim-survivors
Support specialist provision to meet need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAWG commissioner 	
Survivor/service user involvement	
Needs analysis completed	Development of skills and innovative strategies to hold perpetrators to account
Training plan for universal workforce developed	
Maintain and extend early intervention with children and young people	Enhanced awareness of all forms VAWG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • across communities • within the universal workforce
	VAWG increasingly recognised as unacceptable within Thurrock
	Primary prevention embedded in schools, further and higher education and the youth service

Both managers and front line workers in statutory services recognised that VAWG was not a marginal issue, rather it was a significant, and for some the most significant, element in their everyday workloads. This is part of why VAWG can be seen as integral to achieving all five of Thurrock's current priorities, as outlined below.

We want Thurrock to be the dynamic heart of the Thames Gateway, a place of ambition, enterprise and opportunity, where communities and businesses flourish

VAWG undermines confidence, opportunity and ambition for victim-survivors, especially were it takes place during childhood or adolescence. It is not only implicated in ongoing gender inequality, meaning women and girls do not reach their potential, but also results in mistrust and isolation that undermines communities.

1. Improve the education and skills of local people

Awareness raising of VAWG in local communities and training for workers, managers, commissioners and businesses will improve their education and skills, and enable them to intervene earlier, thus preventing the educational and occupational disadvantage that VAWG can result in.

2. Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity

Unchecked VAWG has been shown to impact on women's productivity in employment, and even in some cases resulting in them giving up or losing their jobs.

3. Ensure a safe, clean and green environment

Women and girls do not currently enjoy safety in public or private life.

4. Provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet, wherever possible, individual needs

Specialised VAWG services are vital for women to access support, deal with the consequences of violence and rebuild their lives. Thurrock currently has specialist services which are widely recognised as models of good practice.

5. Build pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock's communities and its residents

No local area can feel pride where levels of VAWG continue at current levels, they indicate disrespect for women's physical integrity and sexual autonomy. Creating responsibility to support victim-survivors and challenge perpetrators restores respect and builds pride.

This document sets out the building blocks necessary to achieve these priorities. It begins with outlining the foundational principles which link national and local policies and why it is essential to think in terms of connections across all forms of VAWG. The strategy is then presented drawing on the '6 p's' – perspective, policy, prevention, provision, protection and prosecution¹. The actions which flow from the strategy are collated at the end in an action plan.

FOUNDATIONS FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The first reference point for this document is the current government strategy and action plan on VAWG. In November 2009 the previous Westminster government published *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls*, the first integrated approach, which placed prevention at the centre. At the same time the United Nations (UN) definition of VAWG was adopted which recognises it as both a gender equality and human rights issue. The coalition government continued this overall direction in their *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*, in November 2010, which was accompanied by a revised action plan launched in March 2011 and 'refreshed' in March 2012.

The current Westminster government strategy has five pillars:

- prevention at the heart;
- access for all women and girls to quality support services;
- addressing the health, social and economic consequences of VAWG;
- protecting women and girls;
- improving criminal justice responses.

We reflect this in the Thurrock strategy, drawing on the priorities and suggested actions from the national VAWG strategy that were identified during the consultation process as being of local relevance. This is also in line with recent European Union (EU) policies and the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women (CAHVIO)², which the government announced it would sign in March 2012. Local governments which can show they are progressing this agenda are at the forefront of innovative policy and practice in Europe.

The second reference point is the outline of what an integrated strategy needs to contain developed by the End Violence Against Women Coalition in 2008, which uses the 6 P's – perspective, policy, prevention, , provision, protection and prosecution (see Figure 1). These are the building blocks through which the strategy has been built.

¹ Coy, M. Lovett, J, Kelly, L (2008) *Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations: A Template for an Integrated Strategy on Violence Against Women for the UK* London: End Violence Against Women Coalition
http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/realising_rights.pdf.

² The Convention defines and criminalises various forms of VAWG (including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, domestic and sexual violence), and is the first legally binding instrument in the world to create a comprehensive legal framework. For the full convention, see <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/HTML/DomesticViolence.htm>.

In this introduction we outline the foundations which will enable the development of shared principles between all the agencies, statutory and voluntary: the basis for a coherent and consistent response.

Figure 1: The original 6 P’s of integrated VAWG strategies



Successive governments have concurred with the UN that VAWG is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and a violation of women’s human rights, or as the EU now terms them ‘fundamental rights’. This recognises that the impacts are not just on individual victim-survivors but also on women as a social group; the harms of VAWG include undermining women’s status and sense of self. Undoing harms requires addressing not just women’s safety but their ability to *“enjoy and exercise all fundamental rights and freedoms”*.

The most recent Westminster government strategy defines VAWG 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.³

The UN framing from which this is drawn notes further that:

... violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately... The term “women” is used to cover females of all ages, including girls under the age of 18... manifested in a continuum of multiple, interrelated and sometimes recurring forms... physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence and economic abuse and exploitation, experienced in a range of settings, from private to public, and in today’s globalized world, transcending national boundaries⁴.

³ HM Government (2011) *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*.

⁴ General Recommendation 19 of the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1993, cited in United Nations (2006) *Secretary-General’s In-depth Study on Violence Against Women A/61/122/Add.1* <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/419/74/PDF/NO 641974.pdf> p12.

Taken together this definition ensures the inclusion of both women and girls, whilst recognising that there may be some men and boys who experience the forms of violence covered. That the majority of victim-survivors are female and the vast majority of perpetrators (including against men and boys) are male requires explanation, making a gendered approach necessary. It is this disproportionality that means the UN discusses VAWG as a form of systematic discrimination, which in turn connects it to gender equality obligations.

The principle of non-discrimination, embedded in England and Wales through the Single Equality Act, is also a touchstone. This legislation places statutory responsibilities on public bodies to undertake needs assessments and to take action to remove discrimination in service provision and promote equality. The relevance of this for VAWG, and the responsibilities of public bodies is outlined in Appendix 1.

FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO VAWG

Rather than diluting progress on domestic violence as some fear, taking a VAWG approach offers the possibility of expanding and deepening understanding and improving responses. One of the strongest arguments for this is that there are overlaps and connections between forms of violence: women themselves know and live this, but it is often missed in agency responses. The following examples illustrate these overlaps and intersections.

- Domestic violence includes not just physical assaults and psychological abuse but also sexual violence and stalking: most stalking is post-separation violence. Some women are coerced into prostitution by abusive partners.
- Considerable overlaps have been documented between domestic violence and child abuse, including child sexual abuse, which in turn is connected to early entry into the sex industry.
- Sexual abuse in childhood, especially where it involves repeated penetrative assault and limited support at the time, substantially increases the likelihood of experiencing sexual violence and/or domestic violence as an adult.
- A forced marriage will inevitably also involve coerced sex.
- Trafficked women and girls are repeatedly raped.

The concept of the 'continuum' of VAW⁵ drew attention to the fact that over the life course many women encounter a range of forms of violence – from everyday incidents of sexual harassment in public, at work and in schools through to life threatening physical and sexual assaults. These experiences are not separated in either women's understandings or their impacts and meanings. Later assaults compound the impacts of those already suffered. If we are to truly develop responses which are crafted to the experiences of individuals then agencies and professionals must also be able to think in terms of these types of connections. Where these overlaps are present in women's lives, interventions which are holistic – that can encompass all their

⁵ See for the original formulation Liz Kelly (1987) *Surviving Sexual Violence*, Polity Press and for an update J Brown and S Walklate (2012) *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, Routledge.

experiences of violence - are much more likely to enable them to create physical and emotional safety and take control of their lives. This was evident in what many victim-survivors who took part in focus groups (including at SERICC) said as part of the consultation for the previous governments VAWG strategy⁶.

Collapsing all forms of VAWG into the category domestic violence confuses rather than clarifies, since it focuses attention on the domestic sphere, and the immediate protection which those who are subjected to ongoing current violence need. Much VAWG takes place in other settings and many women seek support in relation to historic experiences, and need to rebuild trust in others, agencies and their communities. Furthermore, the research overview for the Stern Report on the responses of public bodies to rape⁷ found that where sexual violence is bolted onto existing domestic violence provision it is seldom addressed with the specificity needed and resources are not equitably shared. Sexual violence – in childhood and adulthood – is not an optional ‘add on’.

Other important connections, which an over-focus on domestic violence will miss, include:

- all forms of VAWG are human rights violations and many constitute criminal offences;
- many perpetrators are known to victim-survivors, creating dilemmas with respect to reporting and supporting prosecutions;
- there are similar impacts and consequences including on health, self-esteem, aspirations and achievements in education and employment;
- myths and stereotypes that excuse perpetrators and blame victims exist across all forms of VAWG;
- there is substantial under-reporting, especially to statutory agencies, alongside high levels of withdrawal of complaints to the police and low conviction rates;
- the same communities are under-served in terms of access to support – including women from minority communities, women with disabilities, older women and young women and girls, LBT women.

Strategies and action plans that cover VAWG in the round create opportunities for joint working and integration which can address the issues outlined above thus targeting limited resources more effectively. Below are just two examples of how this could be done.

- Budgets for health, children’s and youth services and police commissioners could allocate funding for specialised VAWG organisations to address issues such as sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, FGM, forced marriage, and the impact of domestic violence on children and young people.
- Training programmes can be developed for practitioners that enable common understandings of: VAWG; the links between VAWG and other forms of violence;

⁶ See

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2010/s/still_we_rise_wnc_focus_groups_report_nov09.pdf

⁷ Brown, J, Horvath, M.A.H, Kelly, L & Westmarland, N. (2010) *Connections and Disconnections: Assessing Evidence, Knowledge and Practice in Relation to Rape* London: Government Equalities Office.

knowledge of impacts; promising practices to meet the needs of victim-survivors; and implementation of local protocols.

The spend-to-save agenda is persuasive here. All local agencies are already dealing with the immediate consequences and longer term legacies of VAWG, even if they are not aware of it.

- Health professionals treat injuries from physical and sexual violence, including female genital mutilation and deal with the longer term impacts on mental health, especially with respect to adult survivors of child sexual abuse.
- Teachers and education welfare officers are in daily contact with girls who are living with: domestic violence and/or sexual abuse; violence in their own relationships⁸; sexual exploitation; threats of forced marriage, FGM and/or 'honour-based' violence, which may include girls and young women being missing from school. Social services, missing persons units, educational welfare officers and LSCBs are often all involved in support and intervention, but may not be making connections with threats or realities of violence.
- Significant proportions of referrals to Social Services involve some form of VAWG: domestic violence; child sexual abuse; adult survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and trafficking; risk of FGM. In complex cases it will be the compounding disadvantage of multiple forms.
- Substance misuse services are working with women who use drugs and alcohol as self-medication to cope with violence and abuse⁹ and with perpetrators (NOTE: alcohol does not 'cause' VAWG, most assaults take place when individuals are sober, but it is associated with heightened levels of injury).
- Police are often first responders to incidents of VAWG, and devote considerable resources to investigating sexual offences, domestic violence and sexual exploitation of women and girls in prostitution and trafficking.
- Escaping violence and abuse is a significant reason for leaving home. Homeless women, especially those who are young, are particularly vulnerable to violence, the impacts of which add to their support needs.
- Many women offenders have experienced some form of violence/abuse¹⁰, including those in caseloads of probation services.

The argument for an integrated approach is therefore both that it both *more accurately reflects experience and offers potential for more effective interventions and responses.*

⁸ Barter, C, McCarry, M, Berridge, D & Evans, K (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships* London: NSPCC

⁹ See the Stella Project <http://www.avaproject.org.uk/our-projects/stella-project.aspx>

¹⁰ Corston, J. (2007) *The Corston report: a report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system* London: Home Office

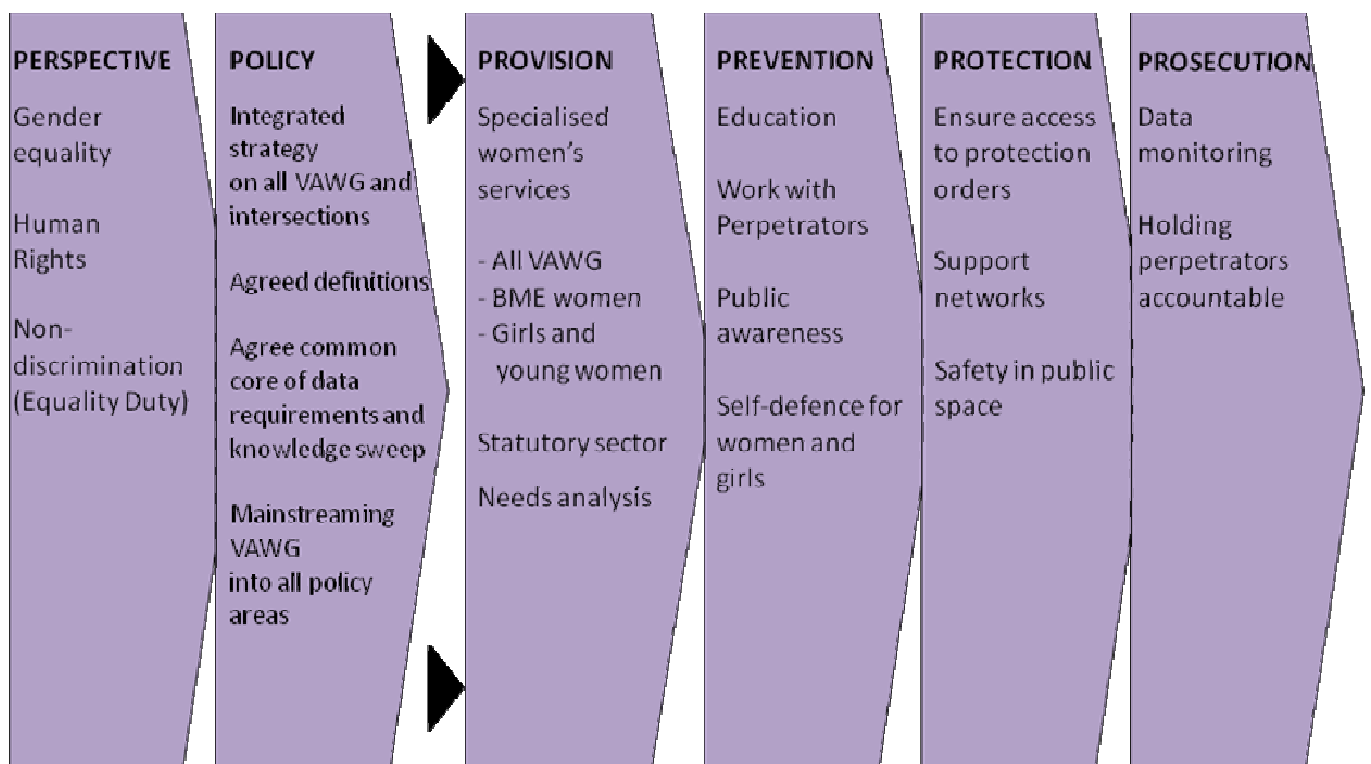
ACTIONS THAT FLOW FROM THIS

- **Table discussions with strategic bodies, elected members, and within agencies on the connections between forms of VAWG, possibly using case studies supplied by local specialised women’s services, which should be included in these sessions.**
- **Establish a consultative group with victim-survivors in which their experiential knowledge and needs area resource for reflecting on policy and practice.**
- **Agree the overall definition of VAWG noted above and promote across Thurrock.**
- **Acceptance that a gender analysis is relevant not just to women but also to men – both because men are the majority of perpetrators and we need to understand why and that the meaning of being a victim is different for men and boys.**
- **Include VAWG in the borough profile in the Community Strategy. This will provide a strategic steer for all local partnerships to ensure that VAWG is stitched into strategies and workplans.**

FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE: APPLYING THE 6P FRAMEWORK IN THURROCK

Figure 2 adapts the original 6 P’s to the Thurrock context, illustrating how they combine to create an integrated VAWG strategy.

Figure 2: Applying the 6 P’s to Thurrock



A perspective on VAWG covers both the definition and the principles on which policy and practice are to be based. The foundations from which all other activities flow and have been discussed in a previous section. The first steps in building a shared perspective are to adopt a shared definition (see p.6) of VAWG and of the specific forms of violence it covers. There is a difference between legal definitions and those which are based in practice and research, and there are no legal definitions of some forms of VAWG – there is no criminal offence of domestic violence, for example. We commend the following as offering the most current and useful definitions of the forms of VAWG covered by this strategy.

Domestic violence: physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called 'honour crimes'. Domestic violence may include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are in themselves inherently 'violent'. (Women's Aid Federation England, 2012)

Intimate partner violence: limits this to the above actions within current or ex partner relationships.

Forced marriage: a marriage without the consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor (Home Office, 2012). This also includes underage or child marriage, which is one that takes place below the legal age of marriage.

Honour based violence: a crime or incident, which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community (Home Office, 2012).

FGM (Female genital mutilation): the complete or partial removal or alteration of external genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is mostly carried out on young girls at some time between infancy and age 15 years (World Health Organisation).

Sexual violence:

For adults any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, sexual comments or advances, which are not consensual, regardless of the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, and in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. This includes rape and sexual assault.

For children - any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, sexual comments or advances, regardless of the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, and in any setting, including but not limited to home and school.

Sexual harassment: unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It can take place in the workplace, schools, streets, public transport and social situations. It includes flashing, obscene and threatening calls and online harassment.

Sexual exploitation: involvement of anyone under the age of 18 in commercial sex, including prostitution and pornography. For adults involvement in commercial sex where there is coercion or duress.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation: recruitment, transportation and exploitation of children or adults in commercial sex. This can be internal within the UK or across international borders.

Stalking: repeated (ie on at least two occasions) harassment causing fear, alarm or distress, most commonly in the context of relationship separation. It can include threatening phone calls, texts or letters; damaging property; spying on and following the victim.

It is also important to recognise that there are conducive contexts for VAWG, the current knowledge base highlights: the family and intimate relationships; institutions (including workplaces, schools and colleges and residential institutions); public space; migration and conflict (especially relevant for asylum seekers and refugees).

Whilst we know that VAWG occurs in all sectors of society there is evidence that some groups are more vulnerable, this includes: disabled women and girls; women who sell sex; young women in relation to sexual violence. The principle of non-discrimination is now accepted at national and local levels as a key principle in not only access to rights and justice but also to services and support. The relevance of the Single Equality Act to decision making, planning, commissioning and review is critical here, requiring consideration of which groups of women do and do not have access to protection and support.

We also know from research that many women and girls choose not to report the violence they are experiencing to agencies, especially statutory agencies. There are many reasons for this, ranging from not defining what has happened as abuse through to distrust of the agencies themselves. Whilst awareness raising and improved responses can address some of these barriers, there will always be some who choose to remain silent and only seek support later in life. Others will choose not to take a legal case, but to approach agencies which offer confidential services. Unless someone else, especially a child, is at risk the decisions women make about who to report to and when should be respected. It follows from this that the voluntary groups which so many women choose to seek support from need to be safeguarded as a core of local provision.

All services need to begin from an understanding that any form of violence takes away the ability of the victim to control their own body and life space. Repeated violations undermine the self and trust in others. To be violated is to have power used against you; hence the importance of 'empowerment' in all interventions. It does not restore the power of those who have been victimised to take decisions for them. Establishing a survivor/service user consultation group is one way of ensuring survivors views and needs are at the centre of policy and inform practice.

Another key principle is that perpetrators of violence should be brought into the purview of interventions and held to account for their behaviour. This is often reduced to prosecution, but as most incidents are not reported, and an even smaller proportion result in convictions, this leaves most perpetrators being seldom, if ever, challenged about their behaviour. All agencies, and

communities, can communicate that violence is unacceptable, but this requires building skills, confidence and commitment to do this. At the feedback meeting there was much discussion about the importance of creating a local culture in which perpetrators are held to account for their behaviour.

ACTIONS THAT FLOW FROM THIS

- ***Strategic work in Thurrock to be based on the UN definition of VAWG and an understanding of ‘disproportionality’.***
- ***Adoption of a set of core definitions of forms of VAWG across Thurrock.***
- ***The principle of non-discrimination to be accepted alongside ensuring all relevant officials agencies and staff understand their responsibilities under the Single Equality Act.***
- ***Core principles of response established, including respect for women’s choices of who to approach for support and that interventions with victim-survivors should be rooted in empowerment.***
- ***A survivor/service user consultative group established which should meet quarterly and give feedback on both new proposed policies and current service provision.***
- ***A working group on how to build confidence and strategies for agencies and communities to communicate the unacceptability of violence to perpetrators.***

POLICY

Taking ‘integrated measures’ to address all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a requirement under a range of international and national policy frameworks. This strategy is such a policy framework which it is expected will be supported by all statutory and voluntary sector agencies in Thurrock. That is the first building block in place. For the strategy to be a living document, rather than one which sits on shelf with countless others – a major concern throughout the consultation – awareness and actions need to ripple through from it into all relevant local partnerships and agencies. The success of the strategy can be measured through the extent to which the actions are implemented and VAWG is explicitly included in linked relevant policy documents. This should proceed immediately, and the outcomes be reviewed after six and twelve months.

At minimum this means all forms of VAWG to be:

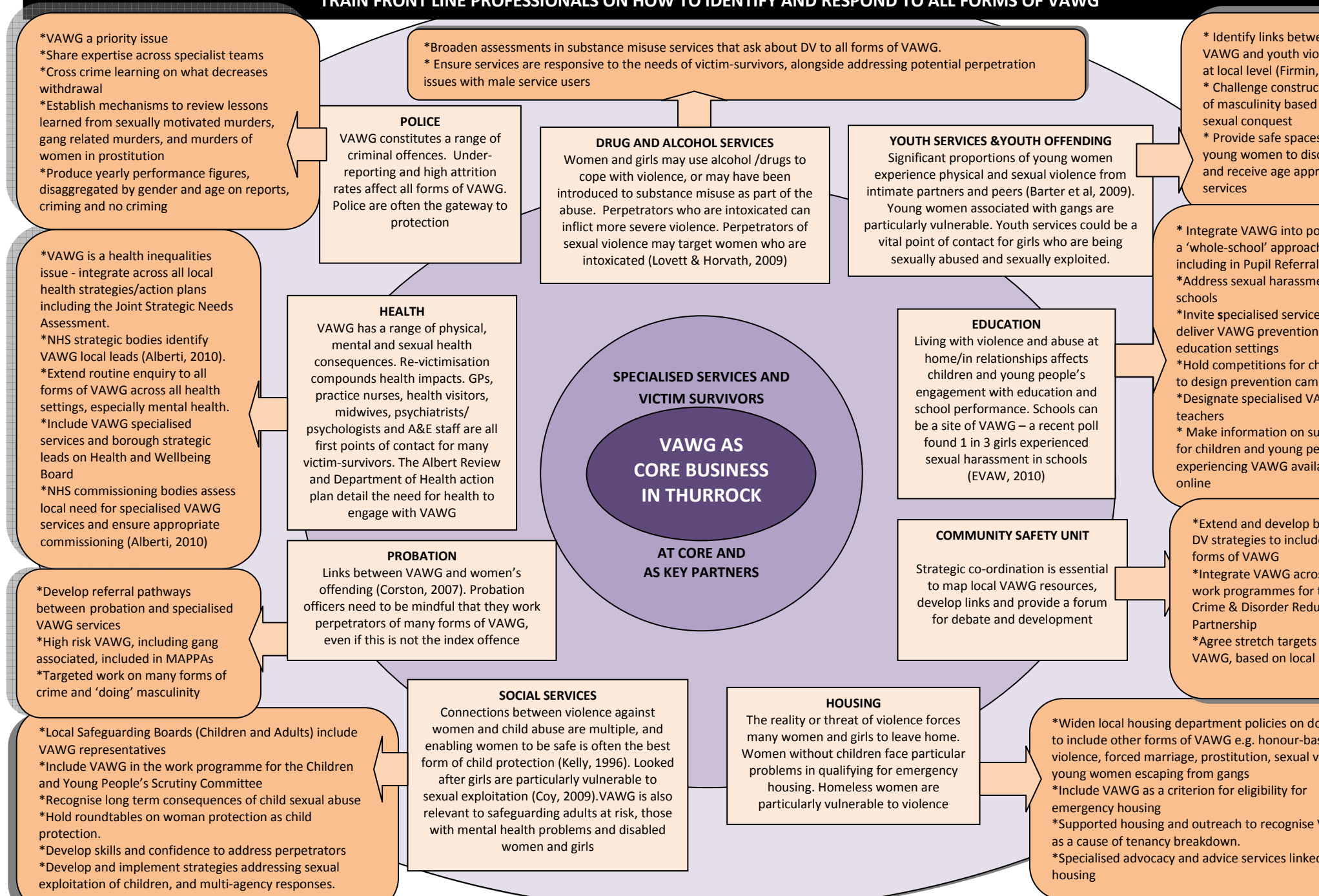
- included in the Community Strategy;
- addressed in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments;
- in action plans for the Community Safety Partnership;
- included in health planning and commissioning in the Health and Well Being board;
- addressed in both Children’s Plans and Child Safeguarding;
- understood within Adult Safeguarding;
- a key theme for Community Engagement.

For all this means not just adding in one or two new actions, but having gender equality, VAWG and non-discrimination as matters to be given due consideration in all decision making, planning and review processes (see Appendix 1). This in turn means that the issues need to be on the agendas of all associated Scrutiny Committees.

For policy to be effective and implemented requires coordination and accountability. Whilst there was consensus on the need for this across the entire consultation, there were varying views as to where this should sit, and whether the most effective mechanism is to locate this within a specific post or to develop ‘champions/leads’ in every agency. This is in part due to that fact that VAWG traverses most policy areas, and is therefore an issue for all agencies and sectors. Whichever of these options is decided upon, and they are not mutually exclusive, ‘buy-in’ at senior levels across Thurrock – high level sponsors that ensure VAWG is prioritised within specific agencies/organisations - is essential. Without this leadership – among elected members and senior management – the strategy will not be effective. Whilst which Directorate the strategy should sit within and which scrutiny committee(s) would have oversight remains open, a decision is needed on these matters within a month of it being adapted.

The following diagram illustrates how VAWG is core business for agencies and organisations in Thurrock, and how integrating VAWG into policies can lead to changes in practice.

TRAIN FRONT LINE PROFESSIONALS ON HOW TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO ALL FORMS OF VAWG



ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN LOCAL MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

ACTIONS THAT FLOW FROM THIS

- ***Adoption of the strategy and accompanying action plan by the council and all relevant partnerships.***
- ***Leadership to direct implementation across elected members and senior management.***
- ***Appropriate co-ordination and review mechanisms established within one month, with a six month and 12 month audit of progress.***
- ***Co-ordination bodies to extend partnerships to include specialist VAWG services and feedback from the survivor/service user consultation group.***

PREVENTION

Prevention sits at the core of a strategic approach, but until the most recent Westminster strategy has been a neglected part of policy on VAWG. Previous approaches have focused, in the main, on reactive responses to violence once it has happened, both in terms of support for victim-survivors and management of perpetrators. Making prevention a central pillar of an integrated approach brings the spend-to-save agenda into play, although the time scales for clear outcomes may be longer than those in some planning processes. School-based programmes that enable children and young people to question attitudes that condone or tolerate VAWG, and challenge sexist practices, are an essential element of any prevention initiative, but creating deeper and longer term change requires activity across all communities in Thurrock.

While at first glance it might appear that schools may benefit less from prevention work than the police or health sectors, where the costs to the public purse have been calculated and recognised, this overlooks the impact of VAWG on young women's educational achievement. Girls living with violence, abuse and/or its legacies, may not attend school regularly, under-achieve academically, be disruptive in class, be excluded and thus cycle through Pupil Referral Units and mentoring programmes. All involve significant financial cost, undermine reaching educational performance targets, not to mention the longer term costs in young women not fulfilling their potential. Some become high users of public services through trajectories into crime, substance misuse, serious mental health problems and multi-problem families. Strategic budget planning will hold in mind that costs and benefits of investing in prevention can be immediate and longer term, with some savings more evident than others.

An agreed set of common messages about VAWG across stakeholders will enable less visible outcomes to be recognised and factored into local decision-making. Consensus on both the necessity of prevention work and the key messages to be communicated is vital. Here Thurrock can draw on the substantial expertise which SERICC have garnered in their own work on prevention and as advisors to the Home Office campaigns over the last four years.

Recent work for the EU on pathways to perpetration¹¹ revealed that single factor explanations – such as ‘cycle of abuse’ or alcohol – are not supported by research evidence. Rather we need to think in terms of pathways that link wider social contexts with specific aspects of neighbourhoods, family and personal biography. To be effective prevention work, therefore, needs to be more clear and thoughtful about which part of a pathway it is intended to interrupt and how. This more targeted approach has been endorsed by the End Violence Against women Coalition¹², and their recommendations relevant to local delivery are reproduced in Box 1.

Box 1: More targeted and evidenced based prevention work

1. Ensure universal delivery of a ‘whole school approach’ to prevent violence against women and girls across the education system.
2. Ensure funding for specialist violence against women and girls services to deliver prevention work.
3. Invest in research, monitoring and evaluation of prevention interventions.
4. Produce evidence-based and sustained public awareness campaigns.
5. Fund community mobilisation activities to challenge violence against women and girls.
6. Promote leadership at all levels to champion gender equality, cultures of respect and care for others.
7. Tackle the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture.
8. Commission the voluntary VAWG sector to deliver quality training on violence against women and girls to a range of agencies as part of vocational qualifications and ongoing professional development.
9. Target interventions to ensure prevention of violence against women and girls addresses intersections of gender with other social inequalities.

Local resources for prevention campaigns are limited, making links with central government initiatives cost effective. The Home Office has been running online and infomercials directed at young people for the last 12 months. The most recent campaign has focused on sexual consent. There are opportunities here for a far sighted council to draw down professionally created

¹¹ For research review see http://ec.europa.eu/justice/funding/daphne3/multi-level_interactive_model/bin/review_of_research.pdf, manual for using the model

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/funding/daphne3/multi-level_interactive_model/bin/manual.pdf

¹² End Violence Against Women (2011) *A Different World is Possible: A call for long-term and targeted action to prevent violence against women and girls* London: EVAW

http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/a_different_world_is_possible_report_email_version.pdf

messages and materials and find innovative ways to work with them in schools, youth work settings and in further and higher education institutions. The 'whole school' approach commended by EAW should be extended to 'whole institutions' in order that the burgeoning post-school sector is Thurrock is included. All education and youth work setting should be encouraged to develop their own strategies for ensuring women and girls' safety: within this the involvement of young people themselves in developing policy and messages will not only tap into their creativity, but also make the interventions more appropriate.

The new policies on community engagement offer possibilities both to provide women with local spaces to share experiences, but also build communities of 'intolerance' of VAWG. This work can begin from the fact that friends, family members and neighbours are often the first to be told/know about violence. Their support is vital to individual victim-survivors, but represent and untapped resource in wider efforts to prevent VAWG more generally.

ACTIONS THAT FLOW FROM THIS

- ***Explore how the recommendations by EAW can be adapted to Thurrock.***
- ***Leadership in all agencies to champion gender equality and a culture of respect and care for others.***
- ***Plan to use Home Office awareness campaigns locally – including the current focus on abuse in teenage relationships and sexual consent.***
- ***Develop initiatives to address lone worker safety – e.g. women's self defence.***
- ***Work with young people who display harmful sexual behaviour to be developed.***
- ***Adapt national government initiatives on forced marriage and honour based violence (e.g. preventative media campaign aimed at teachers) to build local awareness raising, including within Traveller community.***
- ***VAWG integrated into policies in a 'whole-school' approach, including in Pupil Referral Units, out of school programmes and interventions such as mentoring projects. Online safety, including grooming for sexual exploitation and exposure to pornography to be included.***
- ***Greater emphasis on sexual harassment and sexual/sexist bullying in schools.***
- ***Encourage schools, referral units, further and higher education to develop policies on safety for women and girls and engage pupils and students to create innovative prevention work.***
- ***Addressing sexualisation prioritised, in recognition of how gendered stereotypes in sexualised popular culture limit 'space for action' for both young women and young men, which produces a 'conducive context' for VAWG.***
- ***Community engagement to enable neighbourhoods and other communities to build awareness and actions aimed to prevent VAWG.***

PROVISION

Provision refers to the vital specialist support services which are essential in enabling women to end violence in their lives and deal with its aftermaths. Thurrock is strong on domestic and sexual violence provision, with the long established Women's Aid group and SERICC, enhanced in recent years by Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) and Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) support. However, there remain capacity issues, with all now at full capacity. As cuts bite in both the voluntary and statutory sectors, core support services are having to make unwelcome decisions: cases which in the previous 12 months would have been designated priority or high risk are now not able to be dealt with. Provision on the basis of need would ensure that such rationing was not necessary.

In mapping work for the Equality and Human Rights commission¹³, a diversity of services was considered good practice: diversity was defined as a range of forms of provision – helpline, shelter, advocacy, counselling – across both forms of violence and for social groups with additional needs (young women, minority women, women with disabilities). On these criteria there are gaps in Thurrock, especially as there are no dedicated workers within Thurrock's existing specialist services for BME women and girls.

Diversity of provision ensures the following can be accommodated:

- the complexity and differences between forms of violence;
- both crisis/acute interventions and longer-term support;
- specificity of needs with respect to age, minority status, other vulnerabilities;
- access for women with complex needs;
- variations across criminal justice, health, wider social and community support and/or empowerment needs;
- the different routes women take into support;
- the time lag from events before many women are ready to seek help;
- the possibility for continued innovation and change.

ESTIMATING NEED FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

CWASU have recently been working with prevalence data to develop a method for estimating service need. This methodology draws on the best available research evidence, and then makes a series of assumptions about what proportion of any group is likely to need support in a 12 month period. For example, the British Crime Survey defines domestic violence as 'any incident', with an incident being as minimal as a single push or slap. This is not a sound basis for planning service provision, so we re-calculated the figures including only single incidents of serious violence and

¹³ Coy, M, Kelly, L & Foord, J. (2009) *Map of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain* London: EVAW/EHRC

three or more of lower level assaults. Whilst still in development, we present the calculations as they would apply to Thurrock, taking the female population aged 16-59 (the age range in most prevalence studies) in Thurrock is 48, 421.

- 1,260 women experiencing serious or repeat domestic violence may need support.
 - At least 170 are from a minority community.¹⁴
 - 250 could be disabled.¹⁵
- Almost all may require advocacy, in the form of practical and emotional support (85%, n=1070).
- A fifth (20%, n=250) are likely to be deemed 'high risk' and require access to an IDVA.
- For one in ten women (10%, n=130) refuge may be necessary.
- The same proportion (10%, n=130) may require specialist counselling.

With respect to sexual violence 310 women will have support needs.

- All may need support from a Rape Crisis Centre.
- 94% (n=290) may require access to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

COMMISSIONING

With specialised service provision at the core of integrated responses to VAWG, how funding is identified and allocated to organisations supporting victim-survivors is critical. A shift to a strategic approach is a vital reminder that commissioning arrangements should seek to meet current levels of need rather than simply continue historic patterns.¹⁶

As data on evidence and prevalence of VAWG develops, specialised support will need to evolve to ensure women and girls' needs are being met. For instance, recent research indicates significant gaps in specialised services for girls and young women who experience violence, including that which is criminal gang or group-associated.¹⁷ Equally, as identification of victim-survivors and referrals increase, support services will struggle to meet demand. **Monitoring this, and revisiting commissioning frameworks accordingly, is essential.**

Competitive tendering processes can disadvantage small organisations such as specialised VAWG services.¹⁸ The principle of efficiency savings through streamlining the number of contracts, which often leads to the purchase of provision from a single provider, may have disproportionate

¹⁴ Based on a proportion of adult women from minority communities in the national population as 13.57%.

¹⁵ Based on a national proportion of 19.8%.

¹⁶ Department of Health (2011) *Q&A on commissioning services for women and children who experience violence or abuse – a guide for health commissioners* London: DH

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_125902.pdf

¹⁷ Firmin, C (2011) *This is it. This is my life. Female Voice in Violence final report* London: ROTA

http://www.rota.org.uk/downloads/ROTA_FVV_FINALREPORT_2011_LR.pdf

¹⁸ Coy, M, Kelly, L & Foord, J (2009) *Map of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain* London: EVAW/EHRC http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/map_of_gaps2.pdf

impacts on women's organisations.¹⁹ There is a real danger here that the local expert knowledge which makes specialised services unique is lost, as provision is moulded to standard, generic models and approaches. Local commissioners should bear in mind that procurement of service provision is only one aspect of commissioning. There is a prior process of assessing needs, preferences of local people and intended outcomes. These processes should include consultation with victim-survivors and existing specialist services (for a model example see how this was undertaken in Brighton).

A recent study on specialised VAWG services in London shows that for every £1 invested, between £5 and £9 of social value is created²⁰. The social value includes: enhanced economic independence; reductions in self harm and suicide; increased autonomy and safety; improvements in health; increased likelihood of employment; improved levels of English leading to reduced social isolation. As well as the benefits for women and girls who use specialised services, these are all also outcomes that will have a positive impact on achieving Thurrock's wider aims as a borough.

Commissioning is a process which should begin with a careful assessment of local needs and the preferences of local people. Before the procurement stage, it may be useful to take time to explore:

- local needs, using existing data sources (see Appendix 2);
- the extent to which current provision reflects what women say they want and need;
- setting common goals and outcome measures;
- enabling existing services to adapt to different circumstances, including developing capacity and knowledge on all forms of VAWG to enable appropriate signposting to specialised services.

Maximising potentials for intelligent commissioning will be best achieved with a designated lead VAWG commissioner.

Basic training for the universal workforce and the provision of easily accessible briefing documents on all forms of VAWG, is another form of provision. It will ensure that first responders know how to react – to believe, communicate that violence is never the fault of the victim, that it should not have happened and they deserve to be treated better than this – and then signpost to the relevant specialist service. Such training should be expanded across the health sector (A&E, maternity, mental health, GPs, sexual and reproductive health) to not just use, but extend routine enquiry so that it covers domestic and sexual violence.

¹⁹ Mouj, A. (2008) *A Right to Exist – a paper looking at the Eradication of Specialist Services to BAMER Women and Children Fleeing Violence*. London: IMKAAN

http://www.imkaan.org.uk/index_htm_files/A%20Right%20to%20Exist.pdf

²⁰ Women's Resource Centre (2011) *Hidden Value: Demonstrating the Extraordinary Impact of Women's Voluntary and Community Organisations* London: WRC

- ***Political commitment to maintain the VAWG specialised services in Thurrock.***
- ***Conduct a local needs assessment that uses more than recorded crime data, and includes ‘a knowledge sweep’ – a consultation with practitioners and communities about forms of VAWG where little is known.***
- ***A training plan for the universal workforce and production of basic briefing documents on all forms of VAWG available on council website.***
- ***Recognise practice based evidence as part of the local knowledge base.***
- ***Convene a small working group that will:***
 - ***develop proposals for core data requirements across agencies;***
 - ***produce a definition of ‘adult at risk’ with respect to VAWG.***
- ***Begin a phased process of extending routine enquiry – across settings and including current and historic sexual violence.***
- ***Ensure VAWG specialised services are integrated in work with families with multiple needs.***
- ***Develop community based alternatives to custody for women offenders/risk of offending.***
- ***Assessments in substance misuse services that ask about DV broadened to all forms of VAWG.***
- ***Equality Impact Assessments by DAAT teams to ensure that drug and alcohol services meet the specific needs of women and girls, in particular those of women and girls who have experienced VAWG.***
- ***Facilitate roundtables on what the principle of ‘woman protection can be the best form of child protection’ might mean for local policy and practice.***
- ***Recognition of the long term consequences of child sexual abuse and the importance of providing support to children and young people.***
- ***Develop and fund local support for non-abusing parents where a partner/family member or friend has sexually abused a child. ‘Stay Safe’ to address VAWG as a key priority, including that to support mothers can be the most effective way to support children.***
- ***Monitor and minimise placements moves for looked after young women as a route to reduce emotional vulnerability to targeting/coercion/drift into sexual exploitation.***
- ***Strategies and action plans developed to address sexual exploitation of children and young people.***
- ***Given the proximity of military bases to Thurrock, consultation should be undertaken as part of developing the Veterans Charter and Community Covenant on how to address VAWG. This should explore the necessary support needs and interventions for both victim-survivors and perpetrators who have been in the armed forces.***
- ***Facilitate consultation with specialised service providers and victim-survivors to develop outcome measures, that include empowerment, which can form the basis against which to commission provision.***

In terms of public policy international law has held that states and public bodies have a duty to protect women from violence, and several recent cases at the European Court of Human Rights have found that that states and state agencies had failed to fulfil their 'due diligence' responsibilities in this respect. Whilst not having the same weight, recent Serious Case Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews have pointed in similar directions. Responses of agencies to the identification of poor practice and failures to protect have tended to result in more policies and information sharing, rather than serious reflection on what protecting women from violence means for the practice of their front line workers.

An integrated strategic approach to protecting women from violence is multi-faceted. In order for women to realise their rights to live free from violence, protective measures must be available across all forms of VAWG and accessible to all women. Protection covers: immediate safety for those living with ongoing abuse; early intervention to prevent forced marriage and FGM; interventions with women and girls that enables them to interrupt and end ongoing abuse (domestic violence, sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse). It can also be extended to the safety of women on public transport and in public space: women's much documented greater fear of crime²¹ is directly connected to a need to factor personal safety into routine decisions and activities. Planning, the environment and transport policies need to take women's safety into consideration, including for the upcoming Olympics.²² Offering self-defence training for women and girls, as part of sports legacy of the 2012 Olympics is one way of enhancing women's safety.

There are also possibilities and responsibilities for employers here which have yet to be realised. Thurrock Council could demonstrate local leadership by developing its own Women's Safety Policy as part of human resources responsibilities for the health and well being of employees. This could then act as a model for local employers and be promoted through the Chamber of Commerce. There are some models available with respect to domestic violence, but these would have to be extended and sexual harassment at work policies integrated within them.

The provision of high quality and accessible specialised support services (see previous section) is a route to protection, since they have decades of expertise in keeping women safe in the moment (through crisis intervention) and in the aftermath of violence (through ongoing practical and emotional support).

Civil protection orders and offender management systems are formalised systems of protection. The former are now available for a wider range of forms of VAWG, and the ability of local courts to act promptly needs to be ensured. Cuts to legal aid may necessitate that the universal workforce is able to support women in making their own applications, something the specialised agencies are likely already have the skills to do.

²¹ Scott, H. (2003) Stranger Danger: Explaining Women's Fear of Crime *Western Criminology Review* 4(3), 203 – 214

²² Newham Council have done important planning work here, which offers a model for other boroughs.

Many research studies have revealed that friends and family are often the first to know, and may encourage further help seeking. In most instances, responses are supportive and influence decisions about whether or not to access agencies, particularly the police and women's organisations. A study from the US found that informal support was the most common source of support that women sought out, highlighting that 'an informed caring community of support would greatly enhance a woman's ability to evaluate her situation and decide what assistance she needs'.²³ At the same time responses may be unhelpful, and for some forms of VAWG – especially honour based violence, FGM and forced marriage – may involve the participation and collusion of a wider group of family members and even members of the wider community. Policy and training here, therefore, requires care and consideration of the extent to which family and community members may offer deeper support or be a source of heightened and extended risk. It is also essential to guard against defining some forms of VAWG 'cultural', which may stigmatise already marginalised communities, and silence women within them.

Within this arena are complex issues about faith and social cohesion, with religious institutions and leaders both implicated in abuse and seen as sources of support by women of faith. The debate on whether faith-based institutions are appropriate spaces in which VAWG can be dealt with is an ongoing one. Where a belief system holds women, rather than the perpetrator, responsible this can do more harm to victim-survivors. If faith based organisations are to be included in local co-ordination of responses, they should have to agree to the same principles as other organisations, including to equality and non-discrimination, and demonstrate how they act to protect and empower women and girls.

ACTIONS THAT FLOW FROM THIS

- ***Ensure all agencies begin from recognition of their part in protecting women from violence.***
- ***An audit of current processes for protection orders to ensure they can be gained swiftly through the courts.***
- ***Women's safety to be integrated into planning on the environment, transport and the Olympics.***
- ***Thurrock Council to develop a Women's Safety Policy for its employees.***
- ***Information on how to apply for protection orders widely available.***
- ***Develop guidance on information sharing which takes privacy rights and the consent of victims into account.***
- ***Community engagement to include enhancing the support friends and family can give to victim-survivors, through consultation meetings and provision of basic information.***
- ***Faith based organisations to be required to commit to the principles of this strategy, and demonstrate how they deliver women's safety and empowerment, before they can be considered part of responses to VAWG.***
- ***Self-defence training for women and girls to be introduced, or enhanced where it exists.***

²³ Fugate, M., Landis, L., Riordan, K., Naureckas, S. & Engel, B. (2005) Barriers to Domestic Violence Help Seeking. *Violence Against Women*, 11(3), 290 – 310. P307

The majority of all forms of VAW are never reported to the police and, furthermore, the delivery of justice to those who do report still leaves much to be desired. Recent reports from the CPS central policy unit²⁴ and HMIC and HMICPS²⁵, whilst demonstrating progress, nonetheless highlight continuing challenges in bringing offenders to justice.

Our intention to compare performance in Thurrock to national trends proved a challenging one, since despite using several different routes we were not able to access police, CPS and court data broken down by area. Data for Essex can be drawn from returns to the CPS yearly monitoring and is presented below for the years 2007/8 and the most recent 2010/11 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Essex data from CPS Violence Against Women Crime reports

	2007-8	2011
Total VAW convictions in Essex		
N	1072	1785
%	69.4	78.6
National average		
%	68.9	71.5
Total domestic violence convictions in Essex		
N	861	1589
%	69.4	79.1
National average		
%	68.9	71.9
Total rape convictions in Essex		
N	26	56
%	57.8	65.1
National average		
%	57.7	58.6
Total other sexual offence convictions in Essex		
N	133	140
%	71.9	80
National average		
%	73.5	74.3

This shows Essex reflecting, and for some categories exceeding, national trends of both increasing levels and success in prosecution, with the most progress with respect to domestic violence. Some caveats are needed here, however.

- We do not know what proportion of all reports are prosecuted, since there is no parallel police data.

²⁴ http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/CPS_VAW_report_2011.pdf

²⁵ <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/media/forging-the-links-rape-investigation-and-prosecution-20120228.pdf>

- We have no data on current ‘no criming’ rates.
- Successful prosecutions can mean a number of things – in domestic violence it may be limited to a guilty plea and an undertaking to the court; in rape this data includes conviction for any charged offence, which may not be for rape.

Whilst Thurrock is not responsible for criminal justice agencies - this lies in the wider county - the borough needs disaggregated data in order to assess whether its community safety strategy and other provisions are successful, where improvements are evident and challenges remain. The lack of CJS data for Thurrock was noted by many in the consultation process and needs to be addressed. This may be one matter which the new Police Commissioner needs to pick up.

We know from research that being treated with respect and dignity, and having support, increases the willingness and ability of women to support prosecutions. In this sense the Independent Domestic violence Advisor (IDVA) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) services in Thurrock are key resources.

ACTIONS THAT FLOW FROM THIS

- ***Thurrock to advocate for VAWG to be identified as a key priority in the five-year police and crime plan for Essex.***
- ***Force budget to ensure that the ‘small set of minimum entitlements’ for victim-survivors of VAWG includes local specialised women’s services.***
- ***An agreement needs to be made with Essex police to produce yearly data on reported VAWG offences, including reports, no criming rates and charging.***
- ***Thurrock to request new Police Commissioner monitor and report yearly on police responses to all forms of VAWG, including no-criming rates for rape.***
- ***Commitment to maintaining IDVA and ISVA services in Thurrock.***

BUILDING BLOCKS: ACTIONS TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THURROCK

This table brings together the actions that flow from the strategy, which should be integrated into policy and practice across different agencies and services.

FOUNDATIONS

Table discussions with strategic bodies, elected members, and within agencies on the connections between forms of VAWG, possibly using case studies supplied by local specialised women's services, which should be included in these sessions.

Establish a consultative group with victim-survivors in which their experiential knowledge and needs area resource for reflecting on policy and practice.

Agree the overall definition of VAWG noted above and promote across Thurrock.

Acceptance that a gender analysis is relevant not just to women but also to men – both because men are the majority of perpetrators and we need to understand why and that the meaning of being a victim is different for men and boys.

Include VAWG in the borough profile in the Community Strategy. This will provide a strategic steer for all local partnerships to ensure that VAWG is stitched into strategies and workplans.

FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE: APPLYING THE 6Ps in THURROCK

Strategic work in Thurrock to be based on the UN definition of VAWG and an understanding of 'disproportionality'.

Adoption of a set of core definitions of forms of VAWG across Thurrock.

The principle of non-discrimination to be accepted alongside ensuring all relevant officials agencies and staff understand their responsibilities under the Single Equality Act.

Core principles of response established, including respect for women's choices of who to approach for support and that interventions with victim-survivors should be rooted in empowerment.

A survivor/service user consultative group established which should meet quarterly and give feedback on both new proposed policies and current service provision.

A working group on how to build confidence and strategies for agencies and communities to communicate the unacceptability of violence to perpetrators.

POLICY

Adoption of the strategy and accompanying action plan by the council and all relevant partnerships.

Leadership to direct implementation across elected members and senior management.

Appropriate co-ordination and review mechanisms established within one month, with a six month and 12 month audit of progress.

Co-ordination bodies to extend partnerships to include specialist VAWG services and feedback from the survivor/service user consultation group.

PREVENTION

Explore how the recommendations by EVAW can be adapted to Thurrock.

Leadership in all agencies to champion gender equality and a culture of respect and care for others.

Plan to use Home Office awareness campaigns locally – including the current focus on abuse in teenage relationships and sexual consent.

Develop initiatives to address lone worker safety – e.g. women's self defence.

Work with young people who display harmful sexual behaviour to be developed.

Adapt national government initiatives on forced marriage and honour based violence (e.g. preventative media campaign aimed at teachers) to build local awareness raising, including within Traveller community.

Community engagement to enable neighbourhoods and other communities to build awareness and actions aimed to prevent VAWG.

VAWG integrated into policies in a 'whole-school' approach, including in Pupil Referral Units, out of school programmes and interventions such as mentoring projects. Online safety, including grooming for sexual exploitation and exposure to pornography to be included.

Greater emphasis on sexual harassment and sexual/sexist bullying in schools.

Encourage schools, referral units, further and higher education to develop policies on safety for women and girls and engage pupils and students to create innovative prevention work.

Addressing sexualisation prioritised, in recognition of how gendered stereotypes in sexualised popular culture limit 'space for action' for both young women and young men, which produces a 'conducive context' for VAWG.

PROVISION

Political commitment to maintain the VAWG specialised services in Thurrock.

Conduct a local needs assessment that uses more than recorded crime data, and includes a 'knowledge sweep' – a consultation with practitioners and communities about forms of VAWG where little is known.

A training plan for the universal workforce and production of basic briefing documents on all forms of VAWG available on council website.

Recognise practice based evidence as part of the local knowledge base.

Convene a small working group that will:

- develop proposals for core data requirements across agencies;
- produce a definition of 'adult at risk' with respect to VAWG.

Begin a phased process of extending routine enquiry – across settings and including current and historic sexual violence.

Ensure VAWG specialised services are integrated in work with families with multiple needs.

Develop community based alternatives to custody for women offenders/risk of offending.

Assessments in substance misuse services that ask about DV broadened to all forms of VAWG.

Equality Impact Assessments by DAAT teams to ensure that drug and alcohol services meet the specific needs of women and girls, in particular those of women and girls who have experienced VAWG.

Facilitate roundtables on what the principle of 'woman protection can be the best form of child protection' might mean for local policy and practice.

Recognition of the long term consequences of child sexual abuse and the importance of providing support to children and young people.

Develop and fund local support for non-abusing parents where a partner/family member or friend has sexually abused a child. 'Stay Safe' to address VAWG as a key priority, including that to support mothers can be the most effective way to support children.

Strategies and action plans developed to address sexual exploitation of children and young people.

Given the proximity of military bases to Thurrock, consultation should be undertaken as part of developing the Veterans Charter and Community Covenant on how to address VAWG. This should explore the necessary support needs and interventions for both victim-survivors and perpetrators who have been in the armed forces.

Facilitate consultation with specialised service providers and victim-survivors to develop outcome measures, that include empowerment, which can form the basis against which to commission provision.

PROTECTION

Ensure all agencies begin from recognition of their part in protecting women from violence.

An audit of current processes for protection orders to ensure they can be gained swiftly through the courts.

Women's safety to be integrated into planning on the environment, transport and the Olympics.

Thurrock Council to develop a Women's Safety Policy for its employees.

Information on how to apply for protection orders widely available.

Develop guidance on information sharing which takes privacy rights and the consent of victims into account.

Community engagement to include enhancing the support friends and family can give to victim-survivors, through consultation meetings and provision of basic information.

Faith based organisations to be required to commit to the principles of this strategy, and demonstrate how they deliver women's safety and empowerment, before they can be considered part of responses to VAWG.

Self-defence training for women and girls to be introduced, or enhanced where it exists.

PROSECUTION

Thurrock to advocate for VAWG to be identified as a key priority in the five-year police and crime plan for Essex.

Force budget to ensure that the 'small set of minimum entitlements' for victim-survivors of VAWG includes local specialised women's services.

An agreement needs to be made with Essex police to produce yearly data on reported VAWG offences, including reports, no criming rates and charging.

Thurrock to request new Police Commissioner monitor and report yearly on police responses to all forms of VAWG, including no-criming rates for rape.

Commitment to maintaining IDVA and ISVA services in Thurrock.

This important law reform, in force from April 2011, replaces all previous anti-discrimination legislation, covering groups across eight “protected characteristics”: age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion of belief (including non-belief) sexual orientation and gender reassignment. Section 149 introduces the *Public Sector Equality Duty* which applies to all public bodies (this includes local authorities, schools and health bodies)²⁶.

Under this duty public authorities are obliged to pay ‘due regard’ to the three aims of the law, which are to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of a protected characteristic;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having ‘due regard’ means consciously thinking about these aims within the process of decision-making, equalities thinking should influence how public bodies:

- develop, evaluate and review policy;
- design, deliver and evaluate services;
- commission and procure from others;
- act as employers.

Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation is the most straightforward in terms of the actions it mandates, and has been read to apply to VAWG directly.

Advancing equality of opportunity includes:

- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- meeting the needs of people with protected characteristics;
- encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.

Fostering good relations involves addressing prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and others.

²⁶ For government guidance see <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/equality-act-publications/equality-act-guidance/equality-duty?view=Binary>

HOW THIS APPLIES TO VAWG

Since women are a protected group, violence against them – the harassment and victimisation in the first aim of the duty – is a clear barrier to the achievement of equality: public bodies thus have an obligation to consider it within their application of the duty. VAWG is also critical with respect to the second and third aims - advancing equality of opportunity between women and men and promoting good relations between them. The latter suggests that a focus on prevention, changing the conducive contexts that allow violence to persist, and especially changing how men and boys perceive and treat women and girls, should be part of public policy thinking and decision-making.

The duty takes us further than this, since as it is a 'single' equality duty, and due regard must be paid to all protected characteristics, the experiences and needs of specific groups of women must also be considered (sometimes called 'intersectionality'²⁷). Consideration must, therefore, include:

- older women and girls;
- disabled women;
- black and ethnic minority women;
- lesbians, bi-sexual and transgender.

EVIDENCING THAT THE DUTY HAS BEEN APPLIED

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have outlined six principles, based on case law, of which public authorities must be mindful, if they are to fulfil the Equality Duty.

Knowledge: all involved need to be aware of the requirements of the Equality Duty: compliance involves a conscious approach and open state of mind.

Timeliness: the Duty applies before and at the time that any policy or decision is under consideration and should inform the development and exploration of options. It is not possible to satisfy the Equality Duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken if there is no evidence that it was not explored in the decision making process.

Real consideration: consideration of the three aims of the Equality Duty must be integrated into the decision-making process, and this must be exercised in with rigour and with an open mind such that the exploration can influence the final decision.

Sufficient information: those making decisions must assess what information they have, and what further information may be needed in order to give the Equality Duty real consideration.

No delegation: public bodies are responsible for ensuring that any third parties which exercise functions on their behalf are capable of complying with the Equality Duty, are required to comply with it, and that they do so in practice. The duty cannot be delegated.

Review: the Duty continues to apply when policies are implemented and reviewed; it is a continuing duty.

Those for whom awareness of the **Equality Duty** is essential include:

- board members – with respect to strategic direction, reviewing performance and ensure good governance;
- senior managers – with respect to oversight of the design, delivery, quality and effectiveness of the organisation’s functions;
- equality and diversity staff – in terms of raising awareness and building capacity about the Equality Duty and how they support staff to deliver on their responsibilities;
- human resources staff – building equality considerations in employment policies and procedures;
- policy makers – ensuring equality considerations are integrated at all stages of the policy making process, including review and evaluation;
- analysts – who have responsibilities for enabling an organisation to use data to understand and assess the effect of its policies and practices on equality;
- front line staff – drawing on equality considerations in the delivery of services;
- procurement and commissioning staff – ensuring equality considerations are embedded in the commissioning process and relationships with suppliers.

The limits and availability of data in order to undertake evidence based policy making, including local needs assessments, remain a barrier to progress, and was seen by some in the consultation process as a ‘credibility gap’. Within this there is also a question about what data/evidence is, what it can and cannot tell us.

Up to date research evidence, whilst not necessarily local, offers state of the art thinking and insights on VAWG. An integrated approach should offer opportunities for policy makers and practitioners to refresh their knowledge.

There are layers of data which can inform policy and practice with two sources tending to dominate.

- National level prevalence research which includes reported and unreported cases, measured both over the life course and in the last 12 months. For England and Wales this comes from the British Crime Survey (BCS).
- Local official/agency statistics which record the number of reported/identified cases over a specific time period.

We currently do not know the full extent of VAWG, since many choose neither to report nor seek help meaning they are not present in agency data, and we have never had either a national VAWG prevalence study or a national study of sexual violence across adult and childhood (an Irish study found a lifetime prevalence rate for sexual violence of 32%).²⁸

PREVALENCE DATA

Whilst our best source of data, there are limitations to the BCS which means it may underestimate the extent of VAWG.

- It only covers domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.
- There are a limited number of questions on sexual violence.
- The inclusion criteria – being a householder – excludes some groups with potentially higher experiences ie the homeless, those in institutions including refuges, mental health settings.
- The fact the survey is framed in terms of crime may mean some do not define their experiences as relevant.
- It has been limited until the last sweep to those aged 16-59, from 2012 it will include 13-15 year olds.

Another important qualification is that the definition of domestic violence is ‘any incident’ – this can be limited to a single push or slap. This is not the same understanding as held by the public or most agencies: here domestic violence is recognised as a course of conduct and those who seek

²⁸ McGee, H., Garavan, R., de Barra, M., Byrne, J., and Conroy, R. M. (2002) *The SAVI report: sexual abuse and violence in Ireland* Dublin: Liffey Press.

help are known to have experienced multiple assaults. Where the data is analysed for frequency and impact a higher rate of disproportionality of women compared to men is evident. This suggests that the fact that women are the majority of victims seen by agencies may accurately reflect that they are more likely to experience the pattern of coercive control.²⁹ This is just one example of how using data based solely on volume may be misleading, and evidence sources need to be considered in relation to seriousness and frequency/repetition.

It is not possible to use random sample surveys like the BCS to address forms of VAWG which are less common, more hidden and/or located in groups and communities that are not randomly distributed across the population of England and Wales. This applies most specifically to: FGM, forced marriage, 'honour-based' violence (HBV), trafficking and gang-associated sexual violence. We lack a strong evidence base here but the lack of prevalence data should not be used as reason for inaction.

OFFICIAL/AGENCY STATISTICS

Local planning has required the development of local evidence bases. This process has revealed many significant gaps and that agencies are not routinely collecting and collating data.

Service level data is limited to those cases where a report or a disclosure has been made. The most available data tends to be from the police, but we know that most women still choose not to report. Police data on DV will include a range of 'family violence' offences, not all of which will be VAWG. The incident based nature of crime statistics also makes it difficult to identify which are part of patterns of coercive control. Some of the 'volume' of DV for the police are single incidents of low level violence – what some researchers call 'common couple violence'³⁰ - but we currently lack the means to identify what proportion of current statistics this covers. [We were not able to access police data for this study, despite a number of requests.](#)

Statutory services/agencies are less consistent in collecting data and it is invariably linked to funding/performance measures which are not always aligned with each other. [Again whilst some agencies said they did record data, none was made available to us, despite requests being made.](#)

Where routine enquiry has been used, this has increased disclosure, but it is currently limited to DV and to specific health settings. There are strong arguments – because women and girls say they are waiting for invitations to tell, and confirmed by a recent pilot by the DOH³¹ - for extending this to sexual violence, especially in settings such as: maternity; sexual health and genito-urinary medicine; mental health and general practice.

²⁹ See also Johnson, M. (2011) 'Gender and types of intimate partner violence' *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*. 16, 289-296.

³⁰ Johnson, M. (1995) Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 283–294.

³¹ McNeish, D & Scott, S. (2008) *Mental Health Trusts Collaboration Project: Meeting the Needs of Survivors of Abuse, Overview of Evaluation Findings September 2006- July 2008* London: Department of Health/National Institute of Mental Health.

The only data set that we received which documented the number of service users, the issues they sought support about, and their demographic breakdown was from SERRIC.

PRACTICE BASED EVIDENCE

The emphasis on numeric data has eclipsed other forms of knowledge, such as that accumulated by organisations working with victim-survivors – what can be termed ‘practice based evidence’. People are not data, and often their specific situations require tailored responses – practitioners are the ones who craft interventions that work for individuals. Of particular relevance here will be what works for small/marginalised groups. There need to be spaces for recognition of this within understandings of good practice, and for learning to be shared. One example of this is case studies – often a core part of training. They are rooted in practice based evidence; the expertise of individuals and organisations drawn from working directly with women and girls.

CONCLUSIONS

There is currently a dearth of local level statutory data on reported and identified cases of VAWG in the borough, which in turn means that Thurrock is not in a position to take decisions informed by evidence, as required not just for partnerships and JSNA, but also under the Single Equality Act. However, both Women’s Aid and SERICC keep detailed VAWG data which is available to be used as evidence to more informed decision making.

Service level data also tells us nothing about unmet needs, with implications with respect to diversity, since we know that some groups of women are less likely to access services.

There was widespread support locally for a [needs analysis](#). We have recommended a ‘knowledge sweep’ – collating the data which is currently collected and consulting with practitioners and communities about forms of VAWG where little is known. Needs assessments should always ask who is not coming forward, what are we missing?

It is also evident that there needs to be work undertaken on an agreed set of local anonymised data categories, which all agencies should be required to collect and collate data on. There needs to be a dialogue with the specialised women’s organisations to ensure the data categories are relevant.