

# LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

<b>REPORT:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>	
<b>DATE OF DECISION</b>	<b>24<sup>th</sup> July 2024</b>	
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan</b>	
<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR / DIRECTOR:</b>	<b>Nick Hibberd</b> Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery  <b>Kristian Aspinall</b> Director of Culture & Community Safety	
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	Alison Kennedy Strategic lead for Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Modern Slavery  <a href="mailto:alison.kennedy@croydon.gov.uk">alison.kennedy@croydon.gov.uk</a>	
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Ola Kolade</b> Cabinet Member for Community Safety	
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	Key Decision Number: 0124CS  Community Impact Criteria
<b>CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>	

## 1 SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1** Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is one of the most significant crimes in Croydon that harms many of our residents every year, The Executive Mayor has made tackling violence against women and girls a key priority in his Business Plan, and this report sets out our plan of action to make Croydon one of the safest boroughs in London for women and girls.
- 1.2** This plan was co-produced with the voluntary sector, our statutory partners, and victim/survivors. The voices of victim/survivors are present throughout, and this plan was co-produced with the help of our communities. Our plan is a plan for Croydon, not just the council, and only by working together can we make our borough safer.

- 1.3** The Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan is attached, Appendix 1.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the reasons set out in the report and its appendices, Cabinet is recommended:

- 2.1** To endorse the work undertaken to deliver the Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan
- 2.2** To agree the plan contained in appendix 1 as the three-year delivery plan.
- 2.3** To agree the commitment to maintain the levels of funding for making Croydon safer for women and girls at the same levels for the three-year duration of this plan.
- 2.4** To support the ongoing work and future commitments with the voluntary sector and communities.

## **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1** In 2023 Croydon had the 6<sup>th</sup> highest per capita rate of domestic abuse and the 8<sup>th</sup> highest per capita rate of sexual assault in London. Currently there are 10 ongoing domestic violence homicide reviews taking place. Violence against women and girls is a major issue for London & Croydon. It underpins and furthers the cycle of violence involving young people. Furthermore, we know that experiencing domestic violence in the home increases the risk of a young person being involved in violence themselves.
- 3.2** In recognition of this, at Cabinet in September 2022, the Executive Mayor endorsed the “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)” Statement of Intent to show his commitment to making Croydon safer for women and girls.
- 3.3** Additionally, the Executive Mayor’s Business Plan outlines the outcome to ensure “Croydon is a cleaner, safer and healthier place, a borough we’re proud to call home” with the priority to “tackle anti-social behaviour, knife crime and violence against women and girls so that Croydon feels safer”.
- 3.4** The attached plan draws the work into a framework for delivery over the next three years, based on the key themes of:
- Strengthening, Prevention and Early Intervention
  - Pursuing Perpetrators
  - Supporting & protecting victims/survivors and their families
  - Partnership Working and enhancing the coordinated community response to domestic abuse

- 3.5** Co-production was at the heart of this plan, and the voices of partners, victims and survivors is present throughout. It has been developed in consultation with key partners and will continue to be developed with the voluntary sector, communities, and victim/survivors over the lifespan of the plan.
- 3.6** The Council also deliberately targeted the voices of people who were critical of our services, or who felt we could improve, as part of our consultation and co-production work for this plan. The Executive Mayor has been clear that we need to be willing to listen to difficult truths to deliver the best service possible in this area, and that our best response needs to be informed through everyone's voices.
- 3.7** This plan directly links to, and was developed alongside, the Youth Safety Delivery Plan. Both complement each other and work towards the same outcome – making Croydon safer.
- 3.8** The plan outlines an achievable series of actions that will lead to measurable improvements in safety and is recommended for approval.

## **4 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS**

- 4.1** Violence against women and girls has been unacceptably high in Croydon for many years. Croydon has had some of the highest levels of violence against women and girls in London.
- 4.2** We recognise that this domestic abuse is disproportionate as it affects women more than others. It also furthers the cycle of violence within the borough.
- 4.3** In recognition of this, the Council, statutory partners, and the voluntary sector have developed and delivered many significant pieces of work over the years to make Croydon Safer. Key to this was the Vulnerable Adolescent's Review in 2019, which looked at the multi-agency response to youth violence where domestic abuse was present. This was developed into an action plan and delivered from 2019 to 2021 through the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- 4.4** Prior to developing the plan, the partnership explored other approaches to better understand best practices. Croydon has incorporated ideas from other plans that can benefit the local area.
- 4.5** In 2023, the London Borough of Croydon commissioned an independent consultant to engage with local victims/survivors of harmful behaviours that fall under the banner of Violence Against Women and Girls, the workforce supporting them, community group representatives and children/young people.
- 4.6** Between July 2023 and March 2024, individual interviews, focus groups and online surveys (online surveys both had relatively low engagement rates) were conducted. Attempts have been made to seek opinions and feedback from as many people as possible and to represent the diverse make-up of Croydon's population and workforce. As outlined above, this was done to ensure the voices of those who were not heard, or

who were critical of the boroughs work, were heard throughout so we could learn, improve and be better in the future.

- 4.7** From this consultation process a range of repeated themes emerged, some of which can be grouped into specific activities and initiatives (including those which are already working well within the borough) and others which constitute underpinning approaches and values which might usefully permeate throughout Croydon's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls' Delivery Plan.
- 4.8** The key themes identified through the consultation have been included in the Delivery Plan.
- 4.9** This new plan was developed in response to the Executive Mayor's commitment to making Croydon safer. It builds on all the work delivered in recent years by the Council, the Police, and the Voluntary Sector. It is evidence-based and draws upon the annual Crime and Disorder Strategic Assessment, the Youth Safety Delivery Plan and contributions of Croydon's voluntary sector and communities.
- 4.10** Whilst the plan is wide ranging and seeks to address all areas of tackling VAWG in the borough, our key actions for making the biggest difference are:
- Maintaining the current level of funding for council services, to continue to safeguard the most vulnerable victims of violence in Croydon.
  - Recruit a VAWG education officer to deliver targeted sessions in schools to help prevent VAWG amongst younger people.
  - Further develop our work to tackle perpetrators, including support for them to cease committing crimes of violence.
  - Improve support to victim/survivors with protective characteristics who face additional barriers in accessing services with particular focus on the south Asian community.
  - Implement a community ambassadors programme across minoritised communities and faith groups
- 4.11** The plan will be delivered through the "Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board" that will be led by Community Safety Service with key partners from across the partnership. The Board is chaired by Health Services and features all statutory partners. The board will report into the Community Safety Engagement Board, the new forum established in spring 2023 to empower and work with a wide range of Croydon's voluntary sector to make Croydon safer. Ultimately it will report into the statutory Community Safety Partnership led by the statutory partners.
- 4.12** The borough's VAWG forum, and the Black Women's Domestic Abuse Network, will continue to play a key role in maintaining, delivering and evaluating the effectiveness of this plan.

- 4.13** This plan is a living document that will continue to be developed over its three-year lifespan.

## **5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1** One option was not to develop a delivery plan, and to continue the reactive responses to violence that the partnership has developed and delivered over the last four years. However, doing so would inhibit a pro-active approach and long-term planning. It also would have prevented any development of long-term funding options and the ability to attract additional resources from outside Croydon.
- 5.2** Another option was the development of a 10-year public health strategy. This option was not taken forward as it was felt that:
- Significant work on the long-term causes had already been delivered through the Vulnerable Adolescent's Review.
  - There was a need to deliver on the Executive Mayor's commitments and act rapidly given the challenges facing Croydon.

## **6 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1** As outlined in page 25 of the plan, numerous organisations have fed into the development of this work.
- 6.2** Between July 2023 and March 2024, individual interviews, focus groups and online surveys were conducted with the following within the borough:
- Croydon VAWG Network
  - Domestic Abuse / Sexual Violence Partnership
  - BAME Domestic Abuse Partnership Forum
  - Community Safety Engagement Board
  - Freedom Programme participants
  - Survivors of domestic or sexual violence (incl. those with protected characteristics)
  - Family Justice Service Staff
  - Children (16 – 18 year olds)
  - Community organisation representatives
  - Safe and Together Implementation Lead
  - Online survey for victims / survivors living in Croydon
  - Online survey for relevant professionals working in Croydon
- 6.3** During the annual Crime & Disorder scrutiny session in April 2024, a deep dive was undertaken into VAWG by scrutiny. Their recommendations are addressed within this delivery plan.

- 6.4** It is key to this plan's continued development and delivery to work in true partnership with residents, voluntary sector organisations, and especially victims through relevant engagement opportunities. This includes through the borough's VAWG forum and Black Women's Domestic Abuse forum, the peer networks supported through the FJS, and capturing the voices of clients accessing our services,

## **7. CONTRIBUTION TO EXECUTIVE MAYOR'S BUSINESS PLAN**

- 7.1** This plan directly contributes towards the Executive Mayor's Business Plan:

"Croydon is a cleaner, safer and healthier place, a borough we're proud to call home"

"Tackle anti-social behaviour, knife crime, and violence against women and girls so that Croydon feels safer"

- 7.2** This plan also delivers on one of the key objectives of the Croydon Safer Partnership: Tackling Domestic Abuse.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1.1. One of the commitments of this plan is to maintain the current level of funding for tackling VAWG at its current level for the duration of the plan from Croydon Council. Although the Council continues to need to identify fundings and savings efficiencies, the issue of VAWG is so significant that the Executive Mayor has directed that the current levels be maintained for the next three years.
- 8.1.2. The service will continue to look for further efficiencies, particularly through public health funding and external grants, that will allow for reductions in core council funding in a like for like arrangement so that the overall service remains at its current levels.
- 8.1.2 Comments approved by Darrell Jones Acting Head of Finance, for Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery Department on behalf of the Director of Finance.

### **8.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.2.1 The Safer Croydon Partnership (SCP) acts as the statutory Community Safety Partnership for Croydon, as stipulated by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The SCP is responsible for co-ordinating the development and implementation of Croydon's Community Safety Strategy. The Partnership comprises the Police, Council, fire, probation and health agencies, as well as businesses, and community and voluntary sector organisations. It works with other boards on Croydon's Local Strategic Partnership on crime and safety matters, in particular the Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Adults Safeguarding Board.

- 8.2.2 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 came into force in April 2021. The Act includes provisions creating a statutory definition of domestic abuse as behaviour consisting of physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, physical, emotional or other abuse. As part of this definition, children are explicitly recognised as victims if they see, hear, or otherwise experience the effects of abuse. The Act also places additional duties on local authorities around housing provision and delivery of support to survivors of domestic abuse in accommodation-based services.
- 8.2.3 In exercising its public functions, local authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for the Home Department under section 84 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Chapter 7 of the guidance outlines the need for multi-agency working in response to domestic abuse.
- 8.2.4 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on local authorities to consider crime and disorder implications and to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substance reoffending and serious violence.
- 8.2.5 The proposed Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan' complies with several of the Council's key safeguarding duties. The Children Act 1989, confers a duty on the Council to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect and to promote the welfare of all children and young people in their area (sections 17, 20, 31 and 47 of the 1989 Act). Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places duties on a council to ensure its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Section 10 of 2004 Act and Section 27 of the 1989 Act refers to the requirement for local authorities to cooperate with other agencies to promote the well-being of children.
- 8.2.6 The provisions of the Care Act 2014 are intended to promote and secure well-being of vulnerable adults in the Council's area. Under the definition of well-being, it is made clear that the protection from abuse and neglect is a fundamental part of that. The specific safeguarding duties on local authorities in England are set out in section 42 of the Care Act 2014. This imposes a duty to promote well-being and the duty of enquiry. Where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and as a result of those needs is unable to protect themselves against abuse or neglect or the risk of it, the local authority must make enquiries. The statutory guidance accompanying Care Act 2014 indicates abuse to encompass physical abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational abuse and neglect, as well as financial abuse.
- 8.2.7 Comments approved by Kiri Bailey, Head of Commercial, Housing and Litigation and Deputy Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

### **8.3 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

8.3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to comply with the provisions set out in the Equality Act 2010. In summary, the Council must in the exercise of all its functions, “have due regard to” the need to comply with the three arms or aims of the general equality duty. These are to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Having due regard means to consider the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. This means that decision makers must be able to evidence that they have taken into account any impact of the proposals under consideration on people who share the protected characteristics before decisions are taken. The focus of the report is on Violence against Women and Girls as defined by the Geneva Convention and based on proportionality. It is important to note that support is also provided to male victims of violence. This does not constitute discrimination under Equality Act 2010. The statement should also incorporate intersectionality, noting that there are groups of women and girls that are subject to forced marriage and FGM. These issues may be potentially intersected with religion and culture. It is important to collect data on all protected characteristics of targets of violence and refer to relevant national/local data relating to each of the protected groups.

Comments approved by Ken Orlukwu, Senior Equalities Officer, on behalf of Helen Reeves, Head of Strategy & Policy on 30/04/2024

## **8.4 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

8.4.1 If the Council decided to approve the Delivery plan this would reinforce the partnership’s commitment to prioritising Violence Against Women and Girls in the borough. It would also support the Council and its partners in delivering the Safer Croydon Strategy, specifically the importance to focus on Domestic Abuse.

Approved by: Director of Culture and Community Safety

## **9. APPENDICES**

9.1 **A** Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan

**B** Equalities Analysis

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None