

## Cabinet and Executive Template

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CABINET</b> <b>14 September 2022</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: Statement of Intent</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Nick Hibberd</b> Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Recovery <b>Kristian Aspinall</b> Interim Director of Culture and Community Safety
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<i>Councillor Ola Kolade</i> Cabinet Member for Community Safety
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>

### **SUMMARY OF REPORT:**

The 'Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' Statement of Intent report outlines:

- 1) The prevalence and levels of VAWG in Croydon
- 2) Our work to tackle this
- 3) The Mayor's commitment to tackling VAWG

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There are no significant financial impacts from the Policy identified and no additional funding is being requested.

### **KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.:**

Not a key decision

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Executive Mayor, and Cabinet, is recommended to:

- i. To endorse the 'Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' Statement of Intent.

## 1. WHAT IS VAWG?

- 1.1 The United Nations Declaration (1993) on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, defines Violence Against Women and Girls (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”*

The term ‘*violence against women and girls*’ refers to acts of violence and/or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls.

- 1.2 The term Violence against Women and Girls can often cause concern about the exclusion of men and boys from services, and a lack of recognition that men and boys can also experience these forms of violence and abuse. The UN declaration is based on the concept of disproportionate impact. Croydon Council understands the gendered nature of these types of abuse and crimes, and that men and boys can be victims of these types of abuse and crimes. It is important that men and boys are included in all aspects of our work on all forms of violence against women and girls (particularly work on prevention and awareness raising). Croydon Council are committed to ensuring that any victim will receive a sensitive and appropriate response, according to their needs. The Family Justice service continues to support male victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence (DASV) as well as all victims of crime related to VAWG regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

## 2. SAFER CROYDON PARTNERSHIP

- 2.1 The Strategic Assessment 2021 and the Croydon Community Safety strategy clearly identified 5 key themes:

- Tackling Domestic Abuse
- Protecting young people from violence and exploitation
- Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system
- Strengthen community resilience, offer trauma-informed services, focusing on Hate Crime, and build trust in the partnership
- Focus on high priority neighbourhoods

Tackling domestic abuse as part of the violence against women and girls agenda is the top priority for the borough, and aligns with the Mayor’s commitment to working in partnership with the Police to tackle crime and disorder in Croydon.

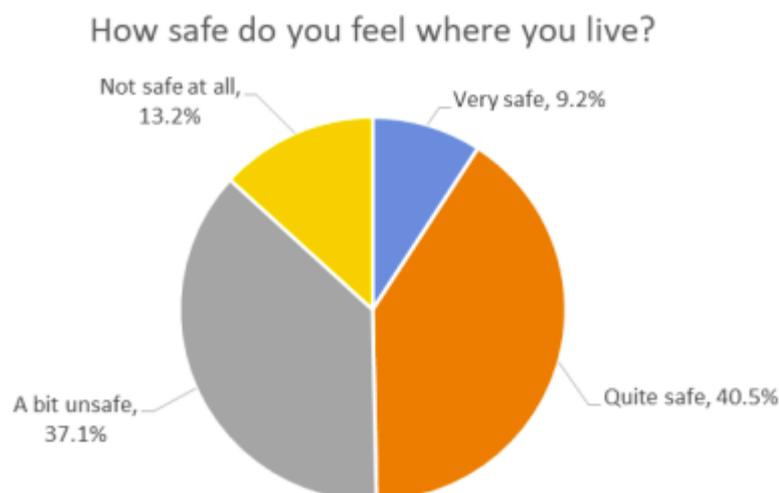
- 2.2 As part of our work, the Safer Croydon Partnership will continue to apply a multi-agency approach to tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence (DASV) within Croydon and provide multi-agency service provision for victims. DASV

must be understood as part of the wider context of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

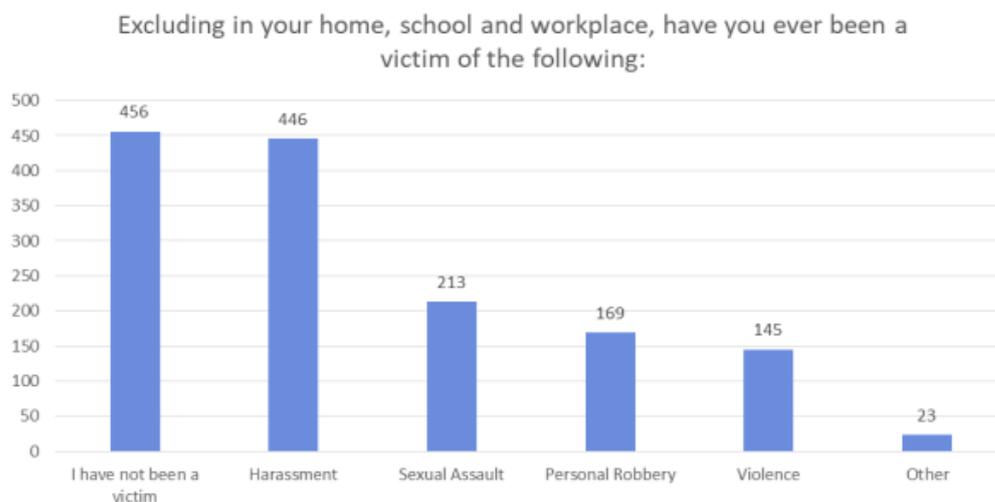
### 3. RESIDENTS FEEDBACK

3.1 The Safer Croydon Partnership undertook a survey in 2021 to improve our understanding of crime and safety from the point of women and girls. The survey focused on safety for women and girls and identified areas where residents did not feel safe and what would be needed to take place in order to improve their safety. There were 1,245 responses, of which 1,113 were used for analysis after data cleansing.

3.2 Half of women and girls felt a bit unsafe or not at all safe where they lived (in contrast with one sixth of young residents); this was mainly because of harassment, sexual assault and personal robbery.



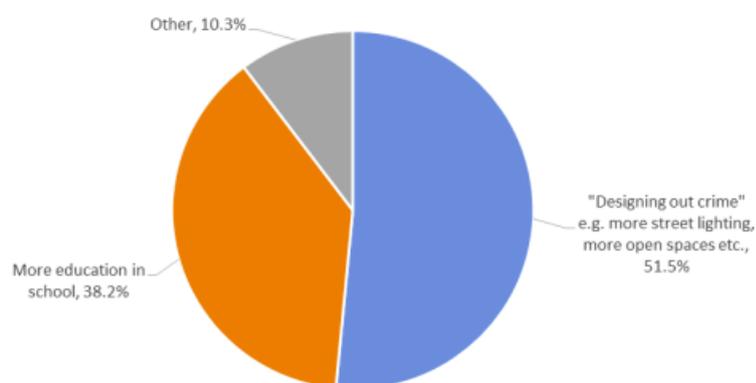
3.3 59% had experienced crime and three quarters had witnessed crime. Larger district centres in the north and east, such as West Croydon, Thornton Heath, South Norwood and New Addington, as well as Croydon Town Centre, were most frequently mentioned as areas they would avoid.



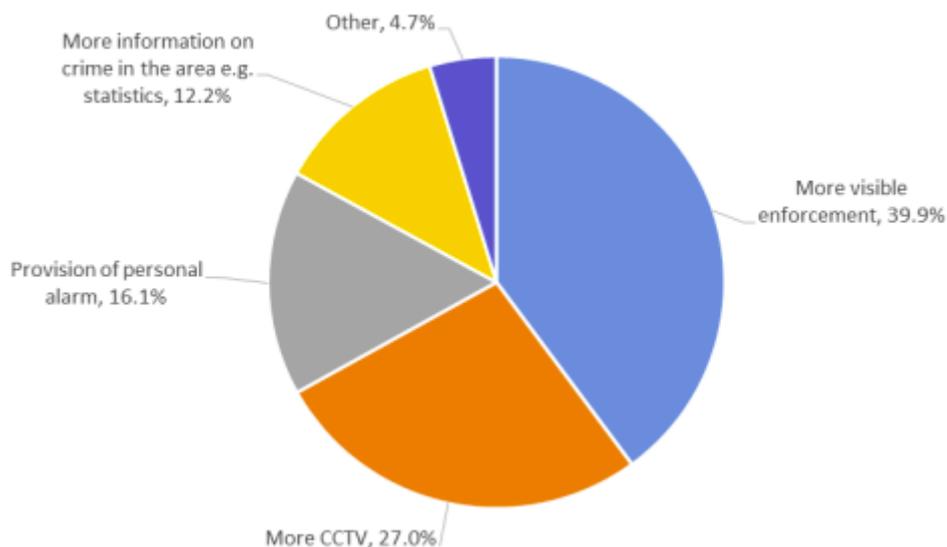
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- 3.4 Respondents did not feel safe while travelling or waiting for public transport, in parks, shopping centres and high streets, as well as in pubs, bars and clubs.
- 3.5 A fifth of respondents would not report an incident, mainly because it was a long process or for fear of reprisals, or of not being believed, and because of a lack of trust in the authorities.
- 3.6 In the short and medium term, more visible enforcement and more CCTV would make most people feel safe, as well as provision of personal alarms. In the long-term respondents wanted more education in schools and crime designed out of the public realm.

What would you like to see more of in order to feel safe in the long term (Multiple answers optional)?



What would you like to see more of in order to feel safe in the short and medium term (Multiple answers optional)?



- 3.7 The Partnership also promote the "StreetSafe" reporting mechanism which is a pilot service developed by the Met Police. The purpose of the service is for anyone to anonymously share with the Police public places where they have felt or feel unsafe, because of environmental issues (e.g. *street lighting*,

*abandoned buildings or vandalism) and/or because of some behaviours, (e.g. being followed or verbally abused).*

#### **4. CROYDON DATA**

- 4.1 Domestic abuse offences include all types of crime where the offence has been flagged as domestic.
- 4.2 The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a sharp increase in offences – not just locally but nationally. There was significantly higher reporting in areas of high density compared to low density due to “third party” reporting i.e. a neighbour was also in their home so they can witness and report the abuse.
- 4.3 We expected the number of reported domestic abuse offences to decrease following the end of Covid restrictions and a return to more normal living and working environments due to the factors outlined in 4.2. However, this has not occurred and the number of offences continue to rise as does domestic harm. Over the last 12 months, the volume and harm of domestic abuse cases are at their highest levels for 5 years.
- 4.4 Domestic abuse continues to be the long-term priority issue for the VRN, not just because of its prevalence in Croydon, but because of research done both inside and outside the borough showing the “knock-on” effect on those that experience domestic abuse at a young age being more at risk of being involved in it as they grow older as well as being involved in other forms of violent crime e.g., serious youth violence.
- 4.5 The rate of domestic abuse incidents and offences per 1,000 population has been increasing year on year in Croydon, which had the 3rd highest rate in London in 2020. Subsequently domestic abuse has continued to rise and is now the highest level in London per head of population. There were 5,154 reported incidents of domestic abuse, an increase of 17.9%, compared to the previous year. In the year to August 2021 there was a 3.3% increase in the average level of cases with a high risk of severe harm referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).
- 4.6 Equally other forms of VAWG have risen significantly over the last twelve months, and in particular reported incidents of stalking, threats to kill and malicious communications have all increased in over the last year.

#### **5. WHAT CROYDON COUNCIL AND THE SAFER CROYDON PARTNERSHIP ARE DOING**

- 5.1 Support victims: The Partnership works through the police, council, including the Family Justice service, and voluntary and community organisations to mobilise the professional and community network through raising awareness and training frontline staff.

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- 5.2 The Family Justice service brings together several agencies to provide a single, multi-agency assessment of victims' risk and harm, obviating the need for victims to repeat their history, and refers victims for specialist support including accommodation and legal services. It coordinates volunteers who provide emotional support and practical help. Its freedom programme supports survivors who have left abusive relationships.
- 5.3 Independent Domestic Violence Advisors at the Family Justice service, Police stations, and Croydon University Hospital provide specialist support, which extends to victims who are homeless, experiencing modern slavery or radicalisation, and those with no recourse to public funds. An independent sexual violence advisor is also available. Several local voluntary and community organisations support BAME women experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence and work to improve their relations with the criminal justice system to encourage engagement and trust.
- 5.4 The Police use the Domestic Violence Disclosures Scheme (Claire's Law) to reduce serial perpetrators and give more control to women.
- 5.5 The Family Justice service works closely with the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) Domestic Abuse Panel to support Voluntary sector and Grassroot organisations in raising awareness within their communities and addressing the low reporting figures relating to Black, Asian and minority ethnic women. The Family Justice service coordinates the Croydon VAWG forum in which VAWG organisations and support groups come together to discuss prevalent issues affecting women and girls in their communities, offering advice on how best to 'reach' marginalised victims.
- 5.6 People with learning disabilities are at high risk of suffering domestic abuse due to factors including difficulties in recognising abuse, fear or lack of knowledge of how to report this, emotional vulnerability and communication difficulties. The Family Justice service has an IDVA based permanently in the adult's social care team front door to ensure domestic abuse victims are recognised and supported when they present, and adults social care are an essential part of our multi-agency response to domestic abuse. The VRN plan on wider engagement with the deaf and disabled community over the next year to strengthen our work in this area.
- 5.7 Challenge perpetrators and support them to change: The police arrest perpetrators at the scene wherever possible, and otherwise within 24 hours. They will use and enforce bail conditions and compliance with Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) to protect victims. Referrals to the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator's Panel (DAPP) where appropriate, are made via MARAC with the aim of progressing to the rehabilitative DRIVE programme, which delivers interventions to address behaviour change and hold domestic abuse perpetrators accountable for their behaviour.
- 5.8 Partnership Development: Several themed forums coordinate activity among practitioners in Croydon and exchange good practice, including the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) coordinators meeting (Pan London), the

Croydon VAWG Forum, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Board, and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Operational Management Group. Relevant case management meetings include the Adults Safeguarding Board, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), and Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Programme (DAPP) Meeting.

## **6. STATEMENT OF INTENT**

- 6.1 Croydon Council know that there are significant issues in Croydon around violence against women and girls - we want to change that.
- 6.2 All women and girls should feel safe in Croydon and the Council's aim is to work with the Police, our partners, and women and girls to make Croydon safer.
- 6.3 The Safer Croydon Partnership will develop a high-level three-year plan to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG). The plan will set out a clear multi-agency, long-term approach to tackling and preventing VAWG and to take our work to the next level by actively involving a greater number of people and partners in our solutions to reduce violence against women and girls. It will include a delivery plan that is focused on outcomes.
- 6.4 Croydon Council will listen to the views and ideas from the full range of our residents, communities, and partners, building upon the community event convened by the Mayor in August 2022. We will put victims and survivors at the centre of service design and delivery.
- 6.5 Whilst the Safer Croydon Partnership develop the Plan we will continue to deliver our key services to help women and girls, and work with victims and survivors to improve services.

## **7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION**

The Council has a duty to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area and work towards delivering the objectives of the Safer Croydon Partnership plan. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is one of the priorities of the Partnership and for Croydon.

## **8. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

N/A

## **9. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

### **a. Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations**

There are no capital or revenue implications associated with this report. There are no significant financial impacts from the Policy identified and no additional funding is being requested.

**b. The effect of the decision**

If Croydon Council were to introduce a 'Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' Statement of Intent then it would reinforce the borough's commitment to reducing and tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in our borough.

This is in accordance with delivering against the priorities within the Safer Croydon Strategy. This will in turn support the borough's ability to provide reassurance to the community and partners. The team and partnership governance framework already exists that will absorb and deliver this work so there is little or no financial impact.

**c. Risks**

As previously stated in the report there has been a significant increase in the reports of VAWG incidents, if further action is not taken we may see a further increase which may result in loss of life.

**d. Options**

Approve the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' Statement of Intent to reinforce the borough's commitment to reducing and tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in our borough

Do not approve the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' Statement of Intent

**e. Future savings/efficiencies**

There are no savings or efficiencies associated with this report

(Approved by: *Darrell Jones Acting Head of SCRER Finance*)

**10. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Head of Litigation and Corporate Law comments on behalf of the interim Director of Legal Services that:

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.

Approved by Sandra Herbert, Head of Litigation and Corporate Law on behalf of the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

## **11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

There are no staffing implications or any other HR impact arising from this report or from this decision. If any issues arise these will be managed under the Council policies and procedures. The Council have implemented the domestic abuse ambassador programme, it has been set up to reduce the fear and lack of understanding around engaging with someone experiencing domestic abuse, and to encourage those who are hindered from seeking help to come forward. The Council also has a Domestic abuse and sexual violence policy.

Approved by: *Jennifer Sankar, Head of HR, Housing and Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Development Directorates, for and on behalf of Dean Shoemith, Chief People Officer*

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

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

Approved by: Denise McCausland – Equality Programme Manager

## **13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

There are no environmental impacts from this statement and report.

**14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

If the Council decided to make the Statement of Intent 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)

**15. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

**WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?**

**NO**

**HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?**

**NO**

The Director of Culture and Community Safety

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**CONTACT OFFICER: Christopher Rowney, Head of the Violence Reduction Network**

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

None.

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.