

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

12 February 2020

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer K. Jones

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Joint response to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Purpose of Report

To seek authority to consult on the draft revised 'Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities Strategy' - the council and health board joint response to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

Executive Summary

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 was introduced to improve arrangements for the prevention of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence; improve arrangements for the protection of victims of such abuse and violence; and required the appointment of a National Adviser on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence;

The Act placed a new general duty on local authorities to have regard (along with all other relevant matters) to the need to remove or minimise any factors which increases the risk of violence against women and girls or, exacerbate the impact of such violence on victims;

The Act also placed a duty on local authorities and health boards to produce and publish a local strategy for the local authority area and then to take reasonable steps to achieve the objectives set out in the local strategy.

In 2017, Neath Port Talbot's first 'Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities' strategy was prepared. This was a 3 years strategy, overseen by the VAWDASV Leadership group. Significant progress has been made across all areas of VAWDASV related support and services. A draft revised strategy has been prepared for 2020-2023.

The objectives within this revised strategy mirror those in the original strategy, but the actions within them are new, to be delivered on over the next 3 years.

Attached, at Appendix 1 is the revised Strategy which has been developed and approved by a strengthened multi-agency partnership, chaired by Councillor Leanne Jones.

Background

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 aims to improve arrangements for the prevention of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence; improve arrangements for the protection of victims of such abuse and violence; improve support for people affected by such abuse and violence; and requires the appointment of a National Adviser on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The Act created a number of new responsibilities for local authorities in Wales including a duty to prepare and public a strategy for the local authority's area, jointly with the relevant health board.

In order to meet the requirements of the Act, the former Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (DASG) was disbanded and replaced by a new multi-agency Leadership Group. There has been sustained senior commitment to the Group over the last three years and significant progress has been made on all aspects of the strategy. This commitment has continued with the development of the revised strategy for 2020-2023.

As with the original strategy, this revised Strategy follows the structure of the Welsh Government's National Strategy for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, enabling the local partnership to demonstrate its contribution to delivering the national policy objectives established by the Welsh Government. It includes all of the areas of activity that are set out in various statutory guidance documents, but most importantly, it identifies the strengths and challenges for this area

and sets out a series of achievable actions to help us to achieve our long term vision:

“To prevent and eradicate violence against women, domestic abuse sexual violence by promoting equality, safety, respect and independence to enable everyone to live from abuse and the attitudes that perpetuate it.”

Key Objectives

There are seven objectives set out in the Strategy:

1. Communications & Engagement

To Increase awareness and challenge attitudes towards violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

2. Children & Young People

To Increase awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong

3. Perpetrators

Increased focus on holding perpetrators to account and provide opportunities to change their behaviour based on victim safety

4. Early Intervention & Prevention

Make early intervention and prevention a priority

5. Training

Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate response to victims

6. Accessible Services

Provide victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Neath Port Talbot

7. Courts & Criminal Justice

Increased focus on improving the recognition of and responses to violence against, women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in all criminal justice proceedings

Consultation

A wide range of stakeholders were consulted during the development of the Strategy. It is proposed that a further 4 week consultation and engagement exercise be undertaken to ensure that Strategy has wide support.

The form of consultation will include an on-line survey, face to face consultation with survivors, and distribution of the draft Strategy through various partnership networks, including the Supporting People Regional Commissioning Group, Area Planning Board, Community Safety Partnership and the Public Services Board.

Financial Impact

There are no new identified recurring revenue resources identified to support the new duties and responsibilities summarised in this report. Consequently, any proposed changes will require a refocusing of existing resource or acquisition of new funding streams.

Integrated Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.”

The subject of this report is legislation that is aimed at gender-based violence and consequently the impact should be positive as far as the protected characteristic of gender is concerned. Local research also identifies children as being affected by domestic abuse and consequently the impact of the legislation is likely to be positive for the protected characteristic of age.

An Integrated Impact Assessment is being developed and will be updated following the consultation and will be available when the final strategy is presented to Cabinet Board for approval.

Workforce Impact

The Act & Strategy has resulted in a new workplace Domestic Abuse Policy and the recent introduction of Safe Leave, for staff who are affected by any form of VAWDASV.

The Act continues to impact on commissioning activities that fall within the scope of the Act, which in turn may have particular workforce

implications e.g. the requirement to deliver training that meets the requirements set out in the National Training Framework. Other workforce impacts identified will be reported to Members when progress reports are made.

Legal Impact

The preparation and publication of a strategy will ensure the Council discharges its statutory duty as required within the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

Crime and Disorder Impact

The Council has a legal duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with “due regard to the need to prevent Crime and Disorder in its area”.

The strategy will assist the Council in discharging its duty to prevent gender-based crime and disorder in its area.

Risk Management

There is a risk of non-compliance with the duties introduced by the Act if sufficient resources are not provided to local authorities to cover the costs of the associated activities. This risk has been mitigated by ensuring proposed actions within the Strategy can be delivered within existing resource, albeit there is a continued need to refocus how those resources are best used, and work closely with partners to explore the potential to draw in additional funding.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1) The Assistant Chief Executive & Chief Digital Officer is authorised to commence a four week public consultation exercise on the draft Strategy attached at Appendix 1, and the outcome of that consultation be reported back to the Cabinet in March 2020.

Reason for Proposed Decision

To provide the formal authority to the relevant officer to take the actions necessary to secure compliance by the Council with the duties under section 5 (1) of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

1. Draft Neath Port Talbot Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities Strategy (2020-2023); implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

List of Background Papers

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

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