

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet
25 June 2020

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

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

To approve the '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 Talbots 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.

With the advent of the global pandemic, partners to the VAWDASV Leadership group were asked to set out current service pressures and demands, and furthermore to agree immediate priorities and these will be included in the strategy as an addendum.

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. However as reported in February it was proposed to undertake further consultation and engagement to ensure that Strategy had wide support.

The consultation included 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.

The consultation has been completed and the response has not required any material change in the strategy as presented, for your consideration.

Members of the Community Safety and Public Protection Scrutiny Sub-Committee have been involved at all stages of preparing the Strategy.

Immediate Priorities - Covid-19

The Strategy was due to be presented for approval in April, but was delayed because of the immediate response required to the global pandemic.

The VAWDASV Leadership group met in May 2020 to take stock of the impact of the pandemic on the work of the partners. Partners concluded that the strategy remained relevant, however, within the context of the response to the pandemic, some actions need to be given priority over others. These immediate priorities have been included as an addendum in the strategy (attached). For example as an immediate priority, the Communications & Engagement Group will launch a partnership campaign to encourage victims to come forward and seek support, and we will continue to work closely with the Police, Courts and Probation to ensure we are still able to effectively support victims whilst current restrictions are in place.

A communication plan is being developed to support the launch of the strategy.

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 overall intention and impact is Positive, in respects of equalities, Community Cohesion/ Social Exclusion/Poverty, Biodiversity and wellbeing and future generations.

It is anticipated that the strategy will have an important contribution recognising that violence and abuse affects people regardless of their age, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and marital status.

Within equalities there are areas where it is recognised that further investigation is required in order to fully understand the impact of the strategy on people who share specific protected characteristics, for example LGBT

Violence in relationships may have a range of consequences including homelessness, mental health, problematic substance misuse, child protection issues, physical injury and offending behaviour. By tackling violence and abuse the strategy should have a positive impact **in respect of Community Cohesion/ Social Exclusion/Poverty.**

There will be a positive impact in respect of **Well-being of Future Generations** as the strategy has been developed in line with the five ways of working.

In respect of Welsh is anticipated that that there will be both positive and negative impacts due to the ability of and statutory requirements for partners and providers to provide services n Welsh.

While the anticipated outcome of the Strategy will be positive, some potential negative impacts have been identified and mitigating actions have been developed to address these. In addition, it is acknowledged that potential negative impacts are likely if implementation of the Strategy is not fully achieved or undertaken sensitively.

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:

Cabinet formally approves the approve the ‘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.

Reason for Proposed Decision

To provide the formal approval to the strategy and ensure 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
2. Addendum: Immediate priorities

List of Background Papers

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

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