



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL
SOCIAL IN SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
CABINET BOARD**

21st September 2023

**Report of the Interim Head of Housing & Communities – Chelé
Zandra Howard**

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected All Wards

Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities Strategy

Purpose of Report

To present the final draft of the “Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities” Strategy (2023-2026) for approval.

This strategy is Neath Port Talbot Council’s (“The Council”) and Swansea Bay University Health Board’s (“The Health Board”) joint response to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (“The Act”).

Executive Summary

In 2015, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 was introduced, which 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 year strategy, overseen by the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and

Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Leadership group. A revised strategy was produced for 2020-2023. Significant progress has been made across all areas of VAWDASV related support and services.

A draft revised strategy has now been produced for 2023-2026.

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.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the actions of the earlier strategy have been carried forward.

Attached, at Appendix 1 is the revised Strategy which has been developed and approved by a strengthened multi-agency partnership, chaired by the Strategic Manager for Partnerships & Community Cohesion.

Following Cabinet approval, the strategy was subject to a 2 week consultation between 29th May 2023 and 12th June 2023.

The consultation responses have been considered, and there was no requirement for any additional changes to be made to the strategy.

Background

In 2015, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 was introduced. This Act 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 publish 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 6 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 2023-2026. 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

Increase the reports of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Neath Port Talbot, through awareness raising and challenging attitudes.

2. Children & Young People

Increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices.

3. Perpetrators

Increase the focus on holding those who commit abuse to account and supporting those who may carry out abusive or violent behaviour to change their behaviour and avoid offending.

4. Early Intervention & Prevention

Make early intervention and prevention a priority – To reduce the number of repeat victims and reduce the number of high risk cases.

5. Training

Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors.

6. Accessible Services

Provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, inter-sectional and responsive services across Wales.

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 and local survivors were consulted during the development of the Strategy. A further 2 week consultation and engagement exercise was undertaken to ensure that the Strategy had wide support.

The consultation included an on-line survey, face to face consultation with the local community, and distribution of the draft Strategy through various partnership networks, including the Area Planning Board, Community Safety Partnership and the Public Services Board and the

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Leadership Group, and its wider network.

The consultation exercise focused on Chapter 7 of the strategy, as this is where the amendments for 2023-26 have been made; outlining the work we will undertake to achieve each of the objectives.

As the strategy was developed in partnership from the outset, we had not anticipated many suggested changes, nor a high level of responses.

Of the online responses received, 100% were in agreement that each of our objectives were the right matters to focus on. 100% of respondents also agreed that all of the actions contained within the strategy were appropriate and fit for purpose.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments or feedback. The following comments were shared;

‘This is such an important area of work for our young people within Neath Port Talbot’

‘Consistency and commitment to VAWDASV within the Criminal Justice System for all victims’

‘Excellent Work’

‘This strategy shows great commitment from NPTCBC and Partners to tackling VAWDASV’

As there were no concerns raised by partners or residents, or any suggested amendments; there have been no changes made to the final version of the strategy, attached as Appendix 1.

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 has been developed and is attached as Appendix 2.

Workforce Impact

The Act & Strategy has resulted in a new workplace Domestic Abuse Policy and the 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 this revised 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 Cabinet Board approve the content of the final strategy and its publication.

Reason for Proposed Decision

1. 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.

2. To also ensure the Council will continue to benefit from the Welsh Government grant that supports this legislation, which has been pooled on a regional basis since 2018/19.

Implementation of Decision

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

Appendices

1. Neath Port Talbot Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities Strategy (2023-2026); implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015;
2. Integrated Impact Assessment;
3. Presentation slides, highlighting the 7 key objectives and their associated actions, to be delivered during 2023-2026.

List of Background Papers

None

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