

CABINET MEETING – 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board

Author(s):

Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning

Purpose of Report:

This report has been produced to:

- set the national context for the need to establish a new board to support the local authority to fulfil its functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;
- set the local context and case to extend the scope of the board beyond statutory responsibilities required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in order to address the wider violence against women and girls (VAWG) agenda; and
- seek approval to appoint a new Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board (the Board).

Description of Decision:

It is recommended that Cabinet approve:

- (a) the appointment of a new Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Executive Board pursuant to the Council's duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;
- (b) the Terms of Reference and membership of the Board as set out in Appendix 1 to this report;
- (c) authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning, to appoint representatives to the Board and to agree any outstanding appointments where necessary and to take all other necessary administrative steps to establish and maintain the Board.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? *Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

The reason for the decision is to ensure the Council can fulfil its statutory functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and address the wider violence against women and girls (VAWG) agenda.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

An alternative would be to allow the responsibility to sit within the Safer Sunderland Partnership, where previously responsibilities for domestic abuse and VAWG have been addressed. This option has been dismissed as both the Council and partners believe the domestic abuse and VAWG agenda should be given prominence in its own right given the new statutory functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

It would be possible to set up the Board in a way that only fulfils the statutory functions, but this would risk the needs of those experiencing multiple forms of gendered violence and abuse not being met and so this option is not recommended.

Impacts analysed;

Equality **Privacy** **Sustainability** **Crime and Disorder**

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values? Yes

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions? Yes

CABINET – 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

SUNDERLAND DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS EXECUTIVE BOARD

Report of The Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning

1. Purpose of the Report

This report has been produced to:

- set the national context for the need to establish a new board to support the local authority to fulfil its functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;
- set the local context and case to extend the scope of the board beyond statutory responsibilities required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in order to address the wider violence against women and girls (VAWG) agenda; and
- seek approval to appoint a new Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board (the Board).

2. Description of Decision (Recommendations)

It is recommended that Cabinet approve:

- (d) the appointment of a new Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Executive Board pursuant to the Council's duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;
- (e) the Terms of Reference and membership of the Board as set out in Appendix 1 to this report;
- (f) authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning, to appoint representatives to the Board and to agree any outstanding appointments where necessary and to take all other necessary administrative steps to establish and maintain the Board.

3. Introduction/Background

Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) have been key priorities for the City for many years. The Safer Sunderland Partnership has 'protect and support our most vulnerable people and places from harm' as one of its two priorities, with one of the key workstreams being 'Domestic Abuse and other forms of VAWG.' The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has brought a new set of statutory responsibilities, but it is important these are addressed in the context of our local position. Further information on the national and local context is set out below.

4. Current Position

4.1 Background: Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 ('the 2021 Act') received Royal assent in April 2021. It provides improved protection for the many victims of domestic abuse (DA) as well as strengthened measures to tackle perpetrators.

An overview of the 2021 Act is provided in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021: overarching factsheet](#). Draft statutory guidance on Part 4 of the Act aimed at local authorities across England has been issued (and is currently under consultation).

The 2021 Act places a duty on each Tier 1 local authority, such as the City Council, in England to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it must consult as it performs certain specified functions (below, i - v):

- i. Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims (and their children) who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area.
- ii. Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area having regard to the needs assessment.
- iii. Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning / decommissioning decisions).
- iv. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- v. Report back annually to central government.

As set out under Part 4 of the 2021 Act, the local domestic abuse partnership board should provide advice to the Council on the exercise of its functions as detailed above.

The 2021 Act sets out the statutory membership of domestic abuse local partnership boards. Members **must** include:

- i. a representative of the relevant local authority;
- ii. at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of victims of domestic abuse;
- iii. at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of children of domestic abuse victims;
- iv. at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of charities and other voluntary organisations that work with victims of domestic abuse in its area;
- iv. at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of persons who provide, or have functions relating to, health care services in its area; and
- v. at least one person appearing to the authority to represent the interests of persons with functions relating to policing or criminal justice in its area.

The board representation listed above is the minimum and there is an expectation that wider representation includes charities and VCS, housing and similar or connected boards such as Community Safety Partnerships and Homelessness Reduction Boards. In addition, there is an expectation that the board reflects the make-up of the locality and works collaboratively with neighbouring areas.

4.2 Local context and potential governance arrangements

As outlined above, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) have been key priorities for the city for many years via the Safer Sunderland Partnership.

A detailed VAWG needs assessment was completed in 2019 and was widely shared across the City. Although the 2021 Act aims to ensure all victims of domestic abuse have access to the right support within safe accommodation, many survivors do not live single issue lives as they can experience multiple forms of gendered violence and abuse. For example, a survivor of domestic abuse may also experience forced marriage, and/or sexual violence and/or stalking and harassment etc. It is therefore important to acknowledge this and ensure our new local governance arrangements continue to tackle the whole of the VAWG agenda as opposed just responding to the specific requirements of the Act.

Until very recently the Domestic Violence Partnership had met on a regular basis and was supported by a time-limited cross-partnership Domestic Abuse Strategic Projects Group (DASPG), with representation on this group from the Safer Sunderland Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board, Safeguarding Children Partnership and Safeguarding Adults Board.

The establishment of this new Executive Board ('the Board') provides an opportunity to review existing domestic abuse and VAWG governance arrangements, ensuring future arrangements are fit for purpose to respond to local needs and meet the specific duties of the 2021 Act.

A suggested governance model is set out below whereby the Board is supported by the establishment of wider partnership arrangements.

- An Operational Partnership – to advise and support the work of the Board by driving forward business and operational matters requiring focus, attention and development.
- A Provider Forum – this would provide a regular formal forum for commissioned and non-commissioned providers working in and around this field of work to consult and be consulted on local, regional and national initiatives and developments. It is proposed that there would be representatives from the Provider Forum on the Operational Partnership.
- A Survivors' Forum – this would provide a forum for survivors of domestic abuse and wider forms of VAWG over the age of 18 years to have a space for safe discussions and dialogue.
- A Practitioner Forum - open to all professionals who have a relevant interest.
- Task and Finish Groups – to be established to support the delivery of the Board's priorities.

4.3 Terms of Reference for the Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board

Terms of Reference for the Board are provided in Appendix 1, including membership details. The Board will be chaired by the Chief Executive of Sunderland City Council.

5. Reasons for the Decision

The reason for the decision is to ensure the Council can fulfil its statutory functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and address the wider violence against women and girls (VAWG) agenda.

6. Alternative Options

An alternative would be to allow the responsibility to sit within the Safer Sunderland Partnership, where previously responsibilities for domestic abuse and VAWG have been addressed. This option has been dismissed as both the Council and partners believe the domestic abuse and VAWG agenda should be given prominence in its own right given the new statutory functions under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

It would be possible to set up the Board in a way that only fulfils the statutory functions, but this would risk the needs of those experiencing multiple forms of gendered violence and abuse not being met and so this option is not recommended.

7. Impact Analysis

(a) Equalities – The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) and this includes having due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This is known as the “general equality duty.”

The “protected characteristics” are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage or civil partnership.

Appointing a new Board and consulting them on the delivery of the authority’s statutory duties will have a positive impact on equality. The new duty will also have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics and/or complex needs. A broad definition of ‘accommodation-based services has been proposed to meet the support needs of diverse groups of victims and children. For example, we will be required to provide “Specialist safe accommodation which provides dedicated specialist support to victims with protected characteristics and/or complex needs, such as specialist refuges for BAME, LGBT, and disabled victims and their children. In addition, by ensuring the new Board addresses the wider VAWG agenda, there will be a supplementary positive impact on women and girls.

A full equality analysis has not been completed in relation to the decision to appoint the Board, but an equality analysis will be undertaken as the local accommodation based support strategy is developed.

- (b) **Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA)** – N/A
- (c) **Sustainability** – N/A
- (d) **Reduction of Crime and Disorder – Community Cohesion / Social Inclusion** - The Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board will enable the local authority to undertake its statutory functions in relation to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and also seek to address the wider VAWG agenda. Appointing the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board and then undertaking associated work would therefore contribute to crime reduction.

8. Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

- (a) **Co-operative Values** – Once the Board is established it will work in a way that is consistent with the Council's co-operative values:
“Sunderland City Council is a co-operative Council and in being so will act ethically in all its actions while adhering to and actively promoting its co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. These values will underpin its decision making and actions.”
- (b) **Financial Implications** – The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) secured £125 million to cover the cost of new burdens placed upon local authorities in England to meet the statutory duty relating to the provision of support within domestic abuse safe accommodation. This funding covers two combined aspects: support costs, i.e commissioning services, and administrative burdens.

The Council received a £666,874 grant fund for the period 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 to support it to fulfil the functions under the statutory duty as set out in Part 4 of the 2021 Act. This funding allocation has only been confirmed for 2021/22 by MHCLG. Future funding allocations would form part of the local government finance settlement and at this stage there is no indication as to the funding levels for 2022/23. The financial implications for the provision of such support in line with the strategy and having regard to the needs assessment will be considered at the appropriate time prior to commissioning the relevant activity or service.

- (c) **Risk Analysis** – There is a risk of not meeting statutory responsibilities if the board is not appointed.
- (d) **Employee Implications** – There are no employee implications in establishing the partnership although a Public Health Practitioner is being recruited to support the work of the Board.

- (e) **Legal Implications** – The Council is under a legal obligation based on the new duty to appoint a local, multi-agency domestic abuse partnership board to support it, and which it must consult with, to undertake a number of functions including assessing the need for support, preparing and publishing a strategy for provision of support for victims and their children who need to reside in safe accommodation. There is a risk of the Council being in breach of its statutory obligations if the board is not appointed.
- (f) **Policy Implications** – The new duty requires the Council to prepare and publish a local strategy for the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse or their children who reside in safe accommodation by 31st October 2021. The draft strategy will be presented to Cabinet for approval in October 2021 following consultation with the Board.
- (g) **Implications for Other Services** – The Board is a strategic partnership with representation at a Sunderland City Council Chief Officer level from the Chief Executive, Chief Officer of Together for Children, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services and Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning.
- (h) **The Public / External Bodies** – Key statutory partners have been involved in an initial meeting of the Executive Board in June 2021 and have had opportunity to influence the proposed membership and remit of the board.
- (i) **Children's Services** – The Chief Officer of Together for Children / Director of Children's Services will be a member of the Board and can therefore influence future strategy.

9. Glossary

VAWG – Violence Against Women and Girls

10. List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for the Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board

11. Background Papers

[The Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

[Delivery of Support to Victims of Domestic Abuse, including Children, in Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Services: Statutory guidance for local authorities across England. Draft for consultation Issued under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

[Domestic Abuse Act 2021: Overarching factsheet](#)

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for the Sunderland Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board

Aim

To ensure a coordinated local partnership response to tackle all forms of domestic abuse and wider forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Sunderland.

[The definition of domestic abuse as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act is set out in appendix 1, along with the definition of VAWG and a statement setting out the importance of taking a gendered approach to tackling violence and abuse].

Purpose

The Sunderland Domestic Abuse and VAWG Executive Board (referred to as 'the Board') will:

1. Lead the response in Sunderland, ensuring local systems keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account, and prevent domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG.
2. Address prevention, early intervention, crisis, and long-term recovery and safety by working with a wide range of services, pathways and systems to improve outcomes for children, adults and their families affected by domestic abuse and wider forms of VAWG in Sunderland.
3. Take every opportunity to mitigate the impact that Covid-19 has had on our communities.
4. Build on best practice taking a Coordinated Community Response (CCR)¹, and in doing so will ensure domestic abuse and VAWG is:
 - everyone's business;
 - locally developed, locally owned;
 - a shared responsibility across agencies, with coordination and good governance;
 - delivering more than a crisis response, by focusing equally on prevention and early intervention; and
 - trauma informed.
5. Take an inclusive approach, ensuring the needs of the survivors (including multiple forms of difference and intersectional needs) are central to the service criteria² and recognising the diversity of survivor experience, including the voices of children.
6. Take a whole system response to a whole person, shifting responsibility for safety away from individual survivors to the community and services existing to support them.
7. Fulfil the purpose of a local partnership board as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act, through:
 - a) Being the group responsible for supporting Sunderland City Council ('the Council') in meeting its duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

¹ In Search of Excellence refreshed guide to effective domestic abuse and partnership work – The Coordinated Community Response (CCR) produced by Standing Together.

² Many victims/survivors face additional vulnerabilities and barriers in accessing services and so consideration must be given to (a) intersectional inequalities (including ethnicity, class, gender identity, age, disability, immigration status, sexuality, religion and belief) and (b) intersecting issues (e.g. alcohol, drugs, diagnosed and undiagnosed mental ill health, employment, accommodation etc.). The most marginalised victims and survivors experience significant barriers to accessing support e.g. a disabled victim of violence and abuse will face barriers linked to her experience of abuse and also because of her disability. Some survivors will have multiple and enduring needs and so the service offer needs to fit to the needs of survivors rather than survivors having to fit into service criteria.

- b) Supporting, advising and working in partnership with the Council to ensure adult and child victims of domestic abuse have access to adequate and appropriate support within safe accommodation services.
- c) Improving outcomes for adult and child victims of domestic abuse through a strategic approach to identifying and addressing gaps in support within safe accommodation services.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board supported by the Operational Partnership will have strategic oversight of an annual plan based on the local strategy and needs assessment. The Board will ensure services are commissioned in accordance with MHCLG Quality Standards and the VAWG sector shared core standards (see appendix 2). To meet the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act the Board, will:

1. Oversee a robust local needs assessment to identify and understand the needs of domestic abuse victims within their area (including those that present from out of area).
2. Lead the development of a local strategy, agreeing the appropriate steps needed to meet the needs identified.
3. Effectively engage with domestic abuse victims and expert services in understanding the range and complexity of needs.
4. Support the Council and other commissioners to make commissioning and decommissioning decisions (where appropriate). This can include when and how commissioning is undertaken to ensure the best and most appropriate services are made available for victims.
5. [Members will] support in ensuring join up across other related areas such as housing, health, early years and childhood support, social services and police and crime services [not limited to].
6. Advise and support in dealing with issues raised and identified from engagement through formal and informal routes.
7. Provide advice to the Council about the provision of other local authority domestic abuse support.
8. Escalation of issues to the relevant representative / body

Membership and chairing

The Board is made up of a number of responsible bodies and agencies that by law, must be represented. However, the membership of the Board has been extended as there is an expectation that wider representation includes charities and VCS, housing and similar or connected boards such as Community Safety Partnerships and Homelessness Reduction Boards. In addition, there is an expectation that the board reflects the make-up of the locality and works collaboratively with neighbouring areas.

Officer representatives of Sunderland City Council:

- Chief Executive (**Chair**)
- Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning
- Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services
- Chief Officer of Together for Children / Director of Children Services

Elected member representatives of Sunderland City Council:

- Cabinet Member for Healthy City

Representation of and advocacy for victims of domestic abuse and children of domestic abuse: (to be confirmed).

Representative/s for charities and other voluntary organisations that work with victims of domestic abuse in the area: (to be confirmed).

Representative/s for health care services:

- Chief Officer, Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group
- Executive Director of Nursing, Quality and Safety, Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group

Representative/s for housing services:

- Chief Executive, Gentoo

Representatives of policing/criminal justice services:

- Northumbria Police (Temporary Detective Chief Inspector (T/DCI), Safeguarding Strategy Innovation and Partnership (SIP) Team)
- Northumbria Police, Superintendent for Sunderland Area Command

Locally determined representatives:

- Independent Chair of Sunderland Safeguarding Adult Board
- Independent Scrutineer Sunderland Children Safeguarding Partnership

The Board will be chaired by the Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council. The Vice Chair will be **(to be confirmed)**.

Members of the Board are responsible for ensuring they report back and feed into the Board on behalf of their represented group / body. This includes relevant members of the Board ensuring there are the appropriate links into child safeguarding and early help, adult safeguarding, housing, community safety and health and wellbeing.

Those members of the Board representing an organisation hold a strategic role. Each Board Member should identify a Deputy to attend Board meetings when the nominated member is unable to attend. A Deputy is entitled to take part fully in meetings of the Board with the right to speak on issues under discussion and therefore must have sufficient standing within their agency to allow them to do this.

Organisations receiving minutes:

- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

In addition, the Police and Crime Commissioners Office will receive regular progress updates via the regional Domestic Abuse Leads meetings.

The Board will be supported by a Domestic Abuse and VAWG System Co-ordinator who will attend Board meetings.

Specialists to be invited as required to give a specific perspective or in relation to specific areas of work.

Agendas

Members will be able to put forward suggested agenda items for consideration. The secretariat will circulate final agendas 5 working days ahead of meetings.

Absence

Where members are unable to attend a meeting, they are responsible for informing the Board ahead of the meeting and as far as possible should ensure their Deputy is present.

Quoracy

Meetings will be quorate if the Chair or Vice Chair, and a minimum of three other members of the Board are present. If the meeting is not quorate and urgent decisions are required to be made this can be done outside of the meeting with the agreement of all members.

Declarations of Interest

Board members are required to declare any interest or potential conflict of interest that arises or may be perceived to arise in the course of conducting Board business. They should declare this at the start of Board meetings. Board members who have declared a personal interest will be able to participate in the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

Frequency

The Board will meet as a minimum on a quarterly basis and may hold additional meetings and development sessions as required.

Governance and accountability

The Board will support the Council in reporting back to MHCLG on delivering the duty in line with statutory guidance and the standardised reporting form.

The Board will be supported by an Operational Partnership, along with a Provider Forum, Survivor Forum, Practitioner Forum and Task and Finish Groups, as required.

The Board will have a reporting relationship to other strategic partnerships in the city, namely:

- Sunderland Health and Wellbeing Board
- Safer Sunderland Partnership
- Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board
- Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership

These partnerships may scrutinise the Board at intervals, similarly the Board may scrutinise other partnerships in their ability to improve outcomes for those impacted by domestic abuse and wider forms of VAWG.

The Board's annual report will be shared and discussed with these four strategic partnerships.

Annex 1: Definition of Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls, and a statement setting out the importance of taking a gendered approach to tackling violence and abuse

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act as:

- (1) Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if
 - a. A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
 - b. The behaviour is abusive.
- (2) Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:
 - a. Physical or sexual abuse
 - b. Violent or threatening behaviour
 - c. Controlling or coercive behaviour
 - d. Economic abuse
 - e. Psychological, emotional or other abuse

And it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

- (3) “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to
 - a. Acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
 - b. Obtain goods or services.
- (4) For the purposes of this Part A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).
- (5) References in this Part to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.

In Sunderland we want to ensure the definition of domestic abuse is inclusive. Our definition includes child/adolescent to parent abuse. Child/adolescent abuse is a common and often hidden form of family violence and abuse. The presence of child/adolescent to parent abuse may indicate a host of other risk factors including harm, trauma and dysfunction.

What is Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)?

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) states that it is *“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”*

Many survivors don’t live single issue lives as they can experience multiple forms of gendered violence and abuse. For example, a survivor of domestic abuse may also experience forced marriage, and/or sexual violence and/or stalking and harassment etc. It is therefore important to acknowledge this and consider how we tackle the whole of the VAWG agenda as opposed just tackling one part of it.

VAWG crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls are:

- Domestic Abuse
- Sexual Violence
- Stalking and Harassment
- So-called ‘Honour-Based’ Abuse, including Forced Marriage; and

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)³.

A VAWG approach does not exclude violence against men and boys, it simply has a stronger focus on women and girls due to root causes being gender inequality and disproportionate levels of severity and frequency of abuse. Men and boys can and do experience forced marriage, domestic abuse, so-called honour-based abuse, sexual abuse etc⁴.

The Board supports the development of an updated Male Victims Position Statement by central government that recognises the needs and experience of male victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking and so-called 'honour-based' abuse, alongside the barriers they face in accessing help and support.

The importance of a gendered approach to tackling violence and abuse

- a) We firmly acknowledge that both men and women can be violent and controlling and that domestic abuse occurs in all types of relationships, including same sex relationships. Violence and abuse in intimate relationships is a **gendered crime** and must be recognised as such. We also recognise that including men and boys within the definition of violence against women and girls can be excluding to male victims and it is not necessarily helpful to categorise male victims of intimate crimes as victims of VAWG. In relation to male victims and survivors we **support the use of, and strengthening of, the government's Male Victims Position Statement as a mechanism to draw out specific barriers faced by men and boys.**
- b) Whilst anyone can be a victim of violence and abuse in an intimate relationship, it is important to **recognise there are some key gendered differences that need to be considered when formulating policy and strategy** to ensure ALL victims receive the right help and support.
 - Male against female violence and coercive control in heterosexual relationships is the most statistically common scenario.
 - Most male victims and survivors are victims of other men's violence and this is especially the case for sexual violence and other forms of serious violence.
 - Men's violence and abuse toward women is more likely to be associated with physical injury, which is a proxy for fear and control.
 - Men's violence and abuse is also more likely to be tied to wider patterns of coercive control. Importantly, coercive control is a stronger predictor of domestic homicide (x 6 times) than physical abuse.
 - Unfortunately, most of us still live in communities where men are given more permission to be violent and to control other family members.
 - In the context of domestic abuse and children, we have learned that ignoring the widely different expectations of men and women as parents (gender double-standards) can make it harder for us to help survivors. This often leads to victim blaming as mothers are usually the ones being held accountable by statutory services for keeping their children safe, instead of the focus being on the behaviour of the perpetrator and the multiple pathways of harm their abuse has on the child and family functioning.
- c) The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) shows that:
 - Where self-reported domestic abuse is more frequent and more severe, that this is primarily experienced by women as survivors and men as perpetrators.
 - Where self-reported domestic abuse was a one-off incident and less severe, the victim was more likely to be male and the one causing harm, female.
- d) **Women are far more likely than men to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse, including sexual violence. Women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation and are**

³ It is also recognised that VAWG can include crimes around some types of modern slavery and human trafficking e.g. sexual exploitation, domestic servitude; as well as prostitution / sex work and child abuse..

⁴ VAWG is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality' (HM Government, 2016) (World Health Organization, 2009)

much more likely to be seriously hurt or killed than male victims of domestic abuse.⁵ Figures show that from the year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2018, the majority of victims of domestic homicides (homicides by an ex/partner or by a family member) were female (74%).⁶ This contrasts with non-domestic homicides where the majority of victims were male (87%). Of the female victims, 81% were killed by a partner or ex-partner, 9% were killed by a parent and 10% killed by a child or other family relative (e.g. brother or sister).

- e) Whilst the statutory definition of domestic abuse (which includes FM and FGM) is gender-neutral, we recognise that more women than men are affected by domestic abuse. Statistics from the last ONS bulletin⁷ (CSEW Nov. 2019) showed that in the year ending March 2019 women were around twice as likely to have experienced domestic abuse as men. Research⁸ also suggests that **when controlling or coercive behaviour is taken into account, the differences between the experiences of male and female victims becomes more apparent**, with the vast majority of victims being women. The **disproportionate levels of severity and frequency** of abuse experienced by women and girls is a key issue that **must continue to be addressed**.

Violence and abuse perpetrated towards women by men is also linked to harmful gender norms. These may include a belief in stereotypical gender roles, such as men being dominant in relationships and women being submissive, or that men should be in charge of family finances and should be entitled to make all decisions. Abusive behaviours are supported by cultural ideas that can conflate masculinity, fatherhood and dominance over others, especially women and children. This needs to be addressed as part of a VAWG strategy and if there was to be a parallel strategy for men and boys then this issue **must** be addressed within that too with men and boys championing the need for gender equality as a way to help erase VAWG.

⁵ Walby and Towers, Measuring violence to end violence: mainstreaming gender, 2017

⁶ ONS data, year ending March 2019

⁷

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/novembcr2019>

⁸ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801214568032>

