

H&F Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2022 to 2027

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Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a fundamental human rights violation, which harms the lives of millions of adults and children. It is recognised as a worldwide issue of epidemic proportions and it is something that is happening here in Hammersmith & Fulham (H&F), affecting around 1 in 3 women and girls.

In many instances VAWG remains hidden, but it is not inevitable and collectively we can end it. No one agency can end VAWG alone and this strategy sets out the role we can all play in ending VAWG as part of a coordinated community response.

H&F were the first borough to adopt the coordinated community response model in the UK. This strategy builds on the nationally recognised best practice that has been happening in H&F since the launch of our first VAWG strategy in 2015 and affirms our continued commitment to ending violence and abuse.

This strategy has been co-produced by partners, including survivors, residents, and local businesses, and sets out our collective vision to make our borough safe for anyone who is living, studying, working, and travelling in H&F.

This strategy will be accompanied by a robust action plan which will outline the actions we will take as a partnership to achieve our objectives. The strategy and action plan will be the foundation for our approach to ending VAWG, a key priority for H&F.

What is violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the umbrella term used to describe a range of violent and abusive acts and behaviours, which are predominantly, but not exclusively, directed against women and girls. This term is used to describe abuse against all genders but highlights the disproportionate impact on women and girls.

Locally and nationally, we have adopted the United Nations definition of VAWG, which defines it as:

"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts,

coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." (United Nations. Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. New York: UN, 1993)

Types of abuse

Domestic abuse (including coercive control)

This is when a partner or family member has power and control over their victims and uses abuse to maintain it. Abuse can be physical, emotional, economic, psychological and or sexual.

Rape and sexual violence

Rape is sex without consent. This means that rape isn't just people being physically forced into a sexual act, it also includes pressure that makes someone feel like they have no choice but to have sex, perform or receive a sexual act.

Female genital mutilation

This is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons.

Early and forced marriage

This is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities or reduced capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used, to force them to do so.

So called "honour" based violence

This is abuse and violence which is carried out in order to protect or defend perceived "honour" of the family and or community. We are clear that there is no honour in honour-based violence.

Faith-based abuse

This is when someone uses religion or faith to justify the abuse of another person, usually a child or vulnerable adult. It could be caused by the perpetrator's belief in

witchcraft, spirit or demonic possession, ritual, or satanic abuse. It is not caused by religion or faith.

Sexual harassment

This is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which violates someone's dignity, makes someone feel intimidated, degraded, or humiliated and or creates a hostile or offensive environment.

Stalking

This is a pattern of persistent and unwanted attention that makes someone feel pestered, scared, anxious, or harassed.

Modern slavery

This is an umbrella term for human trafficking and servitude. It is used when somebody is forced or controlled to do something, and another person gains from this.

Prostitution and sexual exploitation

This is where someone is being coerced or forced into selling sex or performing sexual acts. Victims and survivors may also be trafficked into prostitution.

Children, young people, and vulnerable adults may also be sexually exploited and coerced into receiving or performing sexual acts. Abuse of children and adults can include sharing pornographic images and the use of technology.

What causes violence against women and girls?

Many different reasons are given as to why VAWG happens. This includes blaming substances, mental ill health, anger issues, growing up in an abusive household, cultural practices, and stress.

These issues might have an effect, but none of these issues cause violence or abuse. Instead, evidence has shown that gender inequality is a key driver of VAWG. See General Recommendation 19, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: UN, 1992.

[The Council of Europe](#) give three factors which lie at the root of the problem: cultural, legal and political.

Cultural factors

Sexist views and the idea that men can have more power over women and children, results in abuse being used to maintain this power. Gender stereotypes reinforce this inequality and creates an acceptance of violence and abuse.

For example, sexist attitudes like believing men must be tough, strong, and always in control can result in them exerting control over a partner or family member. These attitudes are harmful to all genders.

Legal factors

Although abuse is illegal, sadly we see many victims blamed for the abuse and low sentences for abusers. This results in low reporting and abuse being allowed to continue.

For example, rape convictions remain low and have got worse in recent years, with only 1.6% cases nationally leading to conviction in 2020. Survivors have told us that this sends a terrible message that rapists can 'get away with it' and allows abuse to continue.

Political factors

The under-representation of women and minority groups in power and politics means they have fewer opportunities to shape the discussion and to affect changes in policy, or to adopt measures to end VAWG.

For example, rape in marriage only became a criminal offence in 1991 and coercive control only became an offence in 2015. Both happened because of lobbying by women's groups.

Other factors

We also know that experiences of racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism can make people more vulnerable to abuse and they may

face additional barriers in accessing support. We know that disabled people including those with mental ill health are twice as likely to experience abuse and 80% of trans people have experienced emotional, sexual, or physical abuse from a partner or ex-partner.

The Oxford dictionary defines Intersectionality as “the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage”. It can also give some people advantage and opportunities that others don’t have access to.

Our strategy recognises the need for an intersectional approach which understands the barriers people face and how these connect with each other and with their experiences of abuse.

What are the common myths about VAWG?

Myth: To stay safe, women should not go out late at night

Women should not have to restrict their lives to be safe. We need to tell abusers to stop the abuse, not tell women to restrict their freedoms. Telling women this is victim blaming.

It is important to note that staying at home doesn’t necessarily mean women will be safe either. Statistically, women are more likely to be harmed in the home than on the street. Telling women to change behaviour does not address the root cause of abuse and will not result in change.

Myth: Leaving an abusive relationship means the abuse will end

There can be many barriers to leaving an abusive relationship, and access to support and resources plays a role. Survivors should not be blamed if they do not leave, this is victim blaming.

We also know that risk escalates when survivors leave so survivors must be supported to leave safely if they choose to.

Even after leaving, survivors can still be at risk. Survivors recall abusers continuing to stalk them and even using institutions, such as the family courts, to continue abuse. Support for survivors must therefore always be long-term.

Myth: Violence against women and girls only affects certain groups of women

Research has repeatedly shown violence can affect women from all social, economic, cultural, and family backgrounds.

There is no evidence to suggest that violence is more prevalent in some communities than others. Instead, barriers to accessing support can increase vulnerability. Experiencing racism, ableism, or homophobia can influence someone reaching for support. This is why an intersectional approach is important.

Myth: Abuse is the result of an anger problem, use of substances or mental ill-health

There is no research to support this. Abuse and violence are about power and control. Abusers often choose when they abuse, often where there are no witnesses. We know that substances or mental ill health do not cause abuse. Many people who use substances or have a mental health condition do not abuse.

However, substance use or mental ill health can make existing abuse worse. It's important to offer abusers wider support, but there should be no excuse for abuse.

Myth: VAWG is mainly about physical violence

VAWG extends beyond just physical violence. Instead, VAWG is about the different ways that victims are controlled, intimidated, humiliated, or threatened.

VAWG is about being denied human rights, to achieve this, abusers may use physical violence, but they also use methods such as psychological, emotional, and economic abuse. They may also use reproductive abuse whereby abusers prevent the survivor from making their own choices about pregnancy and having children. These types of abuse can be just as harmful as physical abuse.

Abusers may use children to abuse the non-abusive parent making a partner or ex-partner feel guilty about their children, using the children to relay messages, using

children to monitor and report on the survivor's movements, using contact arrangements to harass their partner, or threatening to take children away.

Myth: Abusers can still be good parents

Children are recognised as victims and survivors in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, because where children are exposed to domestic abuse, this is a form of psychological abuse.

They do not have to witness the abuse to be affected by VAWG. However, many children do see and hear abuse taking place within the home and children may also be physically harmed by the abuser particularly if they are trying to defend the non-abusive parent.

“An estimated 90% of children whose mothers are abused witness the abuse. The effects are traumatic and long-lasting. When a child witnesses domestic abuse this is child abuse. Between 40% and 70% of these children are also direct victims of abuse.” (Women's Aid)

Where there are children, the onus should not be put on the mother to protect her children, abusers must be held to account for their behaviour and challenged on their parenting responsibilities.

Myth: There is nothing we can do to stop violence against women and girls

VAWG is the product of learned attitudes and behaviour and harmful gender norms.

By eliminating gender stereotypes and promoting a culture of respect and equality at home, at work, in communities, and across society we can work together to end VAWG.

Myth: Women involved in prostitution cannot be raped or sexually assaulted

Sexual violence is any sexual act that a person did not consent to or is forced into against their will. Women involved in prostitution do experience rape and sexual assault.

Women involved in prostitution face discrimination and are often blamed for the abuse. This is not acceptable, and we believe everyone should be supported to access support.

Myth: Forced marriage only happens in South Asian communities

Forced marriage affects a wide range of communities from different cultural backgrounds. It affects men and women all over the world, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion.

Labelling it as a problem for 'certain' communities creates harmful stereotypes and can create barriers for people accessing support.

Myth: Violence against women and girls is an issue that only concerns women and girls

It is important to note that men, boys, and non-binary people also experience the types of abuse set out in this strategy.

Although we recognise that VAWG disproportionately affects women and girls, abuse can affect anyone, and our approach will be inclusive of everyone who needs support. Men and boys also play an important role in ending VAWG.

Myth: Sexual violence is more likely to be committed by a stranger

At least two thirds of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the survivor.

According to some studies only 2% of abusers are complete strangers. 97% of women who contacted Rape Crisis said they knew the person who raped them.

Myth: If a young person accepts drink, drugs, or money for sex, it's their choice to do so

This is a form of exploitation and usually the people supplying alcohol, money and gifts have the power in this relationship and will use this to their advantage.

Often the victims may not recognise what they are experiencing as abuse and may have misplaced loyalty to the person abusing them

The local picture: What do we already know?

The difficulty of capturing an accurate statistical picture of VAWG is nationally recognised. This is for a range of reasons including the hidden nature and consistent underreporting of VAWG issues, alongside inconsistent approaches to data collection across organisations. Our data picture is therefore only the tip of the iceberg.

However, we do know that:

- 1 in 3 women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives
- 23,285 women in H&F have experienced domestic abuse
- 2,983 women living in H&F are estimated to have undergone FMG - female genital mutilation (it is not known where the FGM took place)
- 1 in 5 women will experience stalking or harassment at some point in their lives. 15,523 women in H&F have experienced stalking or harassment
- 34% of the cases referred to children and family service's "front door" were referred because of domestic abuse
- 373 people approached H&F housing because of domestic abuse between 2019 and 2020. 23% had a disability or physical health issues and 33% had mental health issues
- In 2020 to 2021 there were over 1,000 referrals to the Angelou VAWG services who support victims and survivors, over 50% of survivors had children
- 58% of the women referred to the Angelou service reported poor mental health.

These are the demographics of women accessing Angelou VAWG services:

- 60% are from a Black and minority ethnic background
- 58% have a mental ill-health
- 51% are survivors with children
- 46% are survivors at high risk of harm
- 32% are between 26 and 35 years old – this is the largest age group
- 10% are Disabled

- 5% are from the LGBT community.

We also invited residents to share their thoughts so we could better understand concerns and needs in our communities:

- 52% of those who responded told us that they had witnessed a woman being harassed by a man or group of males in public between 1 and 2 times in the last year
- 11% of those who responded told us that they had witnessed a woman being harassed by a man/group of males in public between six and ten times in the last year
- 57% of those who responded told us that they personally experienced street harassment
- 26% of those who responded told us they felt either fairly unsafe or very unsafe in the borough at night
- 78% of those who responded said it should be a priority to provide support to women when they need it for as long as they need it.

What survivors with lived experience told us

‘Survivor’ is a nationally recognised term to describe someone who has been a victim of abuse but who has continued to live. It is a positive term of empowerment and therefore used throughout the strategy.

Hearing directly from survivors from a range of backgrounds, with different experiences, is important in shaping this strategy and our direction. In developing this strategy, we spoke to survivors with lived experience about what they felt was important in developing our approach for the next 5 years. Their thoughts covered 4 main areas.

Asking the Question

Survivors told us that:

- professionals need to be curious about abuse
- survivors should not be stereotyped as there is no ‘type’ of survivor

- the right response is also important. They want to be believed and supported. They don't want to have to prove themselves.
- support should be made available sooner, not when survivors reach crisis.
- it can take a while for abuse to be identified.

We need to make sure professionals, friends and family can identify abuse and understand how to ask and respond.

Sustainability of support

Survivors told us that:

- there needs to be long-term support, not just a response to crisis
- there should be awareness of the increased risk after separating
- services need to work together better so that survivors don't have to keep telling their story
- services need to see the whole person and meet wider equality needs
- there needs to be understanding of the links between experiencing abuse, using substances to cope and impact on mental health.

Support needs to be long-term, intersectional and needs led. Professionals need to work together so that the right support is in place.

Training for Professionals

Survivors told us that:

- there is a need for widespread training so that awareness could be raised on a range of VAWG issues and emphasised this point
- training must include key messages on not blaming victims for the abuse and on holding perpetrators to account
- understanding coercive control, and abuse beyond physical violence, is key. Survivors felt there should not be a hierarchy of types of abuse.

Training and awareness need to be raised amongst professionals but also more widely, so everyone understands the issue.

Responding to children

Survivors told us that:

- it must be a priority to educate children about abusive behaviours and recognise where they are victims of abuse. They need a voice for themselves
- they wanted boys to learn about empathy and opportunities for them to see what a healthy relationship looks like
- schools and education settings need to be part of the coordinated community response to VAWG.

The needs of children and young people must be recognised within the strategic response. Their voices must be heard and shape provision.

Our approach

The coordinated community response

We recognise that real change in responding to and ending VAWG can only be achieved when all agencies, residents, and communities work effectively together.

On a survivor's journey, they are likely to encounter a number of services, organisations, and individuals. Each will hold vital information and can help build a picture of what support is needed so survivors do not have to navigate services to get the help they need.

Ensuring everyone knows the role they play in responding to VAWG and how they work with each other is a process known as the coordinated community response (CCR). Our CCR approach ensures a whole system response to a whole person.

Some of the agencies and groups who need to be involved in the response include:

- banks
- businesses
- charities
- courts
- health organisations

- housing services
- places of worship
- schools
- social services
- the police.

The ecological model

Our approach to VAWG is also based on the ecological model on violence prevention. The ecological model looks at developing interventions across multiple levels - the individual, the community, the institutional and societal. When working closely across these levels, we can address the wider context in which VAWG happens and make wider cultural change.

The ecological model explains how improving responses across communities, institutions, and wider society, can better support individuals. By understanding the challenges that an individual faces at these levels, we are also better able to respond to survivor's needs.

Change requires an enabling environment where VAWG is increasingly unacceptable. Understanding what this looks like on different levels ensures that everyone plays their part in changing the culture in which VAWG happens.

Across this strategy, we will look at how we can meet our objectives by better understanding the actions individuals, communities, institutions, and society can take to meet our aim to end VAWG.

Our objectives

The problem

Violence against women and girls, and the threat of such violence, exercised through individuals, communities and institutions in both formal and informal ways, violates women and girls human rights, constrains their choices and agency, and negatively impacts on their health and ability to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development.

Our goal

Our vision is to end VAWG through our coordinated community response approach (CCR). Our theory of change shows how we will meet this goal through the following 4 objectives. Our theory of change also shows the problems and barriers we want to address in achieving our goal.

Objective 1: Violence against women and girls is prevented

Prevention of VAWG must always be our first priority. To prevent VAWG we must address the root causes of the problem. As VAWG is the result of gender inequality and discrimination, we will work collaboratively with agencies and communities in tackling the harmful behaviours and attitudes that underpin abuse.

This approach must include challenging sexist and misogynistic attitudes. We want to build confidence across H&F by creating a culture change and a zero-tolerance approach to abuse in all its forms. We must also promote the rights of women and girls, including their fundamental human right to live free from abuse in their homes and in public places.

We must also recognise the intersecting experiences of abuse and discrimination that survivors may experience based on but not limited to their age, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, religious beliefs, and disabilities. We must therefore challenge discrimination in all its forms.

The behaviours and beliefs that can lead to VAWG are often manifested in early years. We will work preventatively with children and young people in schools and other settings to promote healthy relationships, gender equality and respect.

This work is important, but our response must be wider – working with adults, both professionals and residents is key. We want to support people to be allies in ending abuse, to provide early intervention and to be active in improving our response to VAWG.

We recognise that children living within a family where there is abuse are also victims and by providing support to survivors and their families, we can prevent further harm to children and educate families around abuse.

Our theory of change shows how we will do this.

Theory of change

Our goal: To end VAWG through our CCR approach

Our first objective: To ensure VAWG is prevented

How will we achieve our outcome?

- Increased knowledge and understanding across communities through training and events
- Awareness raised through campaigns and activities
- Preventative work with young

What difference will this make?

- Residents and professionals are supported to better identify and respond to VAWG.
- Communities can come together to challenge harmful attitudes
- Everyone understands their role in responding and ending VAWG

The barriers

- A lack of understanding of the social and economic impact of VAWG
- Gender inequality and sexism
- Victim blaming

What survivors have told us about why this objective is needed:

“A big campaign is needed to educate about reality of abuse.”

“We need to stop victim blaming. Professionals need to be more clued up.”

“I asked my doctor for support. I was given a leaflet but there needs to be more knowledge and awareness.”

What does this outcome look like across the coordinated community response?

Individual

- Training and awareness to understand abusive behaviour
- Knowledge of support services
- Understanding of how to support family and friends

Communities

- Communities are resilient against VAWG
- Posters and literature are clearly displayed
- Harmful attitudes are safely challenged

Institutional

- Policies and procedures in place
- Emphasis on early intervention and identification
- Referrals for support are made at an early stage

Societal

- Zero tolerance approach to VAWG
- Funding is allocated for prevention
- Root causes of VAWG are identified

Spotlight on best practice: Women and girl's safety

H&F recently invested over £4million to increase public safety through its Law Enforcement Team (LET), doubling the numbers patrolling the street and increasing the service to 24 hours a day.

Police and the Safer Business Network provide training for local bars and restaurants so that they can support women who may feel unsafe or be at risk of abuse. H&F's Night Time Economy working group has also developed women's safety as part of its action plan.

H&F are doing a review of lighting and public space across the borough and will be trialling a passive lighting system that increases light when it detects human movement, this will improve the environment for residents when out at night.

In addition, we are delivering sessions on women's safety for officers across Transport and Highways. We also made a successful bid for the Safety of Women at Night funding and have been awarded over £100,000 towards initiatives aimed at improving the safety of women including:

- a VAWG and women's safety campaign
- delivery of a programme for young women to become leaders of change in their community
- business/community women's safety champions to improve identification and access to safety
- an independent women's safety audit to enable us to deliver evidence-based solutions
- specialist by-stander training to create women's safety champions within the LET
- increased homelessness outreach provision to increase identification and pathways to support for women as part of our street population.

Objective 2: Survivors are supported

We recognise that survivors need a range of support at different stages of their journey. We understand that survivors not only need specialist support for the abuse they have experienced, but may also need support with housing, mental health, substance use, childcare, immigration, and other support.

We are determined to create a joined-up approach with services working together, so that survivors are provided the right support at the right time. This support must be led by the needs of survivors, be provided immediately and be long-term, holistic, and intersectional. We must also consider the needs of children and young people as survivors of VAWG whether they experience abuse within their home, from family members, at school, in public or in their young intimate relationships.

Survivors have told us that they want to be asked about their experiences in a non-judgmental way, they want to know what support is available, and they want therapeutic support, not just a focus on crisis response.

Long-term support is vital to support the journey towards recovery. This includes access to training and employment, support groups, and opportunities for wider development. We recognise that survivors with lived experience are key stakeholders, and they have told us that they need more spaces where they can talk to other survivors and to “give back.”

Our theory of change shows how we will do this.

Theory of change

Our goal: To end VAWG through our CCR approach

Our second objective: TO ensure survivors are supported

How will we achieve our outcome?

- Agencies follow duties and best practice
- Referrals are made to the right support, when needed
- Trauma-informed and intersectional support is in place
- Creation of Survivor Forums

What difference will this make?

- Abuse is identified and support is offered
- A joined-up approach is created with agencies working together
- Survivors' holistic needs are met
- Survivors' voices are heard and shape responses

The barriers

- A lack of awareness around VAWG and intersectionality
- Risk prioritised over need
- Victim blaming

What survivors have told us about why this objective is needed:

“You should not have to tell your story repeatedly.”

“The stereotype of a ‘victim’ needs to be challenged – especially if a survivor ‘looks okay.’”

“They should be asking about and making the connections between trauma, substance use and mental ill-health.”

What does this outcome look like across the coordinated community response?

Individual

Individuals are made aware of services available to them and supported to access the right service for them

Communities

- Communities know the role they can play in providing support
- Safe spaces created to enable disclosures
- Concerns are shared with specialist services

Institutional

- VAWG services are funded so there is consistent support across agencies
- Survivor voices shape provision
- There is a shared understanding of need and best practice

Societal

- Survivors are not blamed for the abuse
- Survivors with lived experience are acknowledged as knowing what support is needed
- Survivors are believed

Spotlight on best practice: Al-Hasaniya

Maria (not her real name) was referred to Al-Hasaniya's domestic abuse project as she needed practical and emotional support around her experiences of domestic abuse.

An advocate who spoke Maria's language contacted her and arranged an assessment. Maria disclosed that she was being subjected to harassment and stalking from her estranged husband and that this had been ongoing for many years.

Previous incidents of abuse included threats of acid attacks, threatening her with a knife and an attempt to strangle her. She also expressed her concern, fear, and anxiety at the impact it was having on their children, particularly where one of them was now living with her estranged husband. He would regularly attend the family home, loiter, and bring his friends to intimidate her. He asked their children to inform him of what was happening in the household and what she was doing.

Maria was referred to Children's Social Services and a referral to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was made. Safety plans were made with Maria and the children.

Maria was supported to report incidents to the Police and to apply for a non-Molestation Order. The Non-Molestation Order allowed Maria to feel protected and safe enough to apply for a divorce. The Advisor liaised closely with the Social Worker and the children's schools to ensure safety plans were in place for the children there.

With the help of a therapist, the children were able to confide their feelings, their relationships were strengthened, and all the children were reunited in Maria's care as the safe parent.

By services working together, the family started to come together, feel safe and stable. "I've been suffering for so many years and never thought this nightmare would end. Without your support, advice, and help, I would still be stuck, and my child would be away from me. Thank you so much for all your help. No matter what I say, I cannot express how grateful I am for you!"

Objective 3: Abusers are held to account

Ending VAWG can only happen if perpetrators stop their abuse. Our strategy recognises that we must address the root causes of VAWG. This involves holding abusers to account and providing intervention and support for them to change their behaviour. This should include support for young people who are displaying signs of abusive behaviour providing intervention at the earliest opportunity.

Holding abusers to account must happen across the board. Abusers may have contact with multiple services and professionals must be trained in identifying abusers, accurately assessing the risk they pose to others, safely challenging their behaviour, and using their power and influence to hold them to account. Employers also have a responsibility to challenge any sexist or abusive behaviour amongst employees. They should have firm policies and procedures in place if an employee is identified as an abuser, using the appropriate disciplinary action where required and proportionately sharing information to ensure the safety of others.

Our response also means having a fit-for purpose criminal justice system which holds abusers to account. Victims of abuse deserve justice and it is important that this is reflected by an increase in prosecutions and convictions. However, justice is wider than just the criminal justice system. Abusers must be held to account by all sections of society, by the services working with them and within the systems that govern us.

Our theory of change shows how we will do this:

Theory of change

Our goal: To end VAWG through our CCR approach

Our third objective: Abusers are held to account

How will we achieve our outcome?

- Professionals are confident in holding abusers to account
- Abusers will be provided support to reform
- Root causes of abuse tackled

What difference will this make?

- Justice for survivors. Abusers know that their behaviour will not be tolerated
- Abusers will change their behaviour, reducing harm to others
- Everyone's equal human rights are upheld

The barriers

- Limited funding for programmes
- Lack of established best practice model
- Victim blaming and abuser invisibility

What survivors have told us about why this objective is needed:

“They (professionals) need to be more clued up – something like Safe & Together.”

“Justice needs to be served, so that those [that] are being abused are actually getting justice. A lot of people get away with it – what kind of messages does this send victims and survivors?”

“Stop blaming those who experience abuse.”

What does this outcome look like across the coordinated community response?

Individual

Individuals are made aware of services available to them and supported to access the right service for them.

Communities

Abusers are challenged and communities do not tolerate VAWG.

Institutional

- Zero tolerance approach to VAWG
- Abusers are identified, supported to change and held to account for their behaviour by institutions

Societal

- Everyone's human rights are upheld and respected
- The onus of change is placed on abusers not survivors
- Victims are not blamed for abuse

Spotlight on best practice: The criminal justice response for survivors in H&F - Advance and Standing Together

There is a specialist domestic abuse court (SDAC) in H&F which is now a national mentor court of best practice for managing domestic abuse cases. The H&F Impact project enhances the support provided by the SDAC. There is a Coordinator who ensures that all relevant information is available to the court to improve victim safety and swiftly progress cases through the courts, avoiding delays.

There are also domestic abuse (DA) advocates who are co-located alongside the police to ensure that victims are offered support. The SDAC and the Impact Project work closely with the Police, CPS, the courts, Magistrates, and probation to ensure that at every stage of the criminal justice journey the survivor is supported and interventions reduce the risk posed by abusers, ensure that abusers are held to account and increase victim's confidence in the criminal justice response.

Survivors consistently report that after the support they have received they are at reduced risk and have improved safety. Many also report having a positive experience of the criminal justice process and the police. The interventions provided by the Impact project, the SDAC and criminal justice partners have also had a positive impact on conviction rates.

The conviction rate for Hammersmith & Fulham is consistently above the London average. We also see that a variety of sentencing options are used by DA informed magistrates at the SDAC as demonstrated by use of rehabilitative sentences as opposed to fines or unconditional discharge.

"I think I felt empowered when I left court at the end of the trial (when he was convicted). I felt validated, that I am not mad...the support I received from Advance, the police, the prosecutor, and my family practitioner. That made me feel safe."

Objective 4: Collaboration to create change

We will build on the success of the coordinated community response (CCR) model to bring survivors, services, and the community together. We will create a culture change to address the issues that cause VAWG and develop services that meet the intersecting needs of survivors and their families.

In H&F we are committed to working collaboratively with our partners and recognise that survivors are a key partner in developing the response to end VAWG. Our CCR approach addresses prevention, early intervention, crisis response, and long-term recovery and safety.

We work with a wide range of services, pathways, and systems so survivors can access support where and when they need it. The CCR works across systems including health, housing, social care, education, criminal justice, and communities.

An effective partnership:

- will have robust ways of working to ensure it is meeting its objectives
- has a shared understanding of what best practice looks like
- has respect between agencies
- is informed by the voice of survivors.

We recognise that there are challenges to working effectively in a partnership. This includes limited resources and capacity, competing priorities and different ways of working.

However, the model of a coordinated local partnership to tackle and ultimately prevent VAWG is proven to be effective. A key indicator of a successful partnership is the effect it has on improving and delivering services to survivors and their families.

We will continue to develop and improve services for survivors, with survivors. In H&F, survivors are at the heart of what we do and through collaboration and co-production they will also be at the forefront driving our response.

Our theory of change shows how we will do this.

Theory of change

Our goal: To end VAWG through our CCR approach

Our fourth objective: Collaboration to create Change

How will we achieve our outcome?

- All agencies see ending VAWG as core 'business'
- A shared understanding of need and response
- Informed by the experience of survivors
- Increased knowledge, skills, and capacity in responding

What difference will this make?

- Survivors can access support through multiple routes
- Processes are in place to ensure a positive initial response and referral to appropriate specialist if needed
- Professionals are well trained and feel competent and confident to respond

The barriers

- Competing priorities
- Limited resources and capacity
- Clashing cultural approaches
- Victim blaming

What survivors have told us about why this objective is needed

"Information should be easily accessible. Information in one place."

"Services follow safeguarding when they see bruises not when seeing coercion."

"Sometimes people don't look like us and don't speak our language and don't understand our needs. We don't want to feel judged; we want to be helped."

What does this outcome look like across the coordinated community response?

Individual

- Individuals work within partnership agreements and protocols
- A recognition that no one person or agency can end VAWG and that collaboration with survivors is needed

Communities

- Community groups and organisations are included in partnership approach
- Communities share concerns and insights with VAWG agencies

Institutional

- Institutions work collaboratively and have a shared approach
- Grass roots organisations are fully embedded in all responses

Societal

- Recognition and prioritisation of VAWG across all sectors of society
- Coordination across all government departments

Spotlight on best practice: A whole health approach to domestic abuse

Survivors have often told us about the negative impact experiencing VAWG has had on their physical and mental health. Indeed, evidence tells us that 80% of women experiencing domestic abuse seek help from health services and these are often their first, or only, point of contact.

To meet the needs of survivors, a partnership approach was established to improve responses to domestic abuse across the health economy. H&F were a key partner in the 'Pathfinder Project' - a project which looked to improve the responses in mental health services, GP surgeries, and acute services across multiple sites.

A steering group was set up which included domestic abuse charities, local authority representatives and health partners. Over 18 months, the partnership trained a

range of health professionals, our health partners held conferences and events to raise awareness and health partners developed policies to make sure their whole organisation understood the role they play.

The project trained 180 NHS staff on domestic abuse which resulted in the recruitment of 60 domestic abuse ambassadors and a new domestic abuse coordinator in mental health.

The success of the project led to us setting up a health focused operational group to continue this work going forward and through the IRISi (Identification and Referral to Improve Safety) programme domestic abuse experts are now co-located in GP surgeries in the borough to provide on-the-spot support for survivors.

This includes specialist domestic abuse experts who work with Black and Asian women and women from ethnic minority backgrounds (global majority). There are also co-located independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) in housing, children and family services and criminal justice settings in H&F, to meet the intersecting needs of survivors and provide survivors with independent support to navigate these systems.

How we will deliver this strategy

We will deliver this strategy through our coordinated community response where everyone plays their part in responding to and ending VAWG. The strategy will be reviewed and held by the H&F VAWG Strategic Board which is attended by senior representation from voluntary, statutory and community organisations working to tackle VAWG across the borough.

The board will be influenced by 7 operational groups that each have a coordinator and a chair who oversee a specific area of work in accordance with a detailed action plan based on our strategic objectives. Our governance structure will be underpinned by dedicated spaces for specialist services and survivors with lived experience. This will ensure that our work is meeting best practice and identified need.

The following outlines our proposed VAWG partnership structure to oversee and support the delivery of our strategy.

Proposed H&F VAWG governance structure

The proposed governance structure in H&F includes a number of groups and boards that share information with each other to ensure that various workstreams are aligned and VAWG informed. Information and recommendations should flow both ways and be disseminated widely amongst partners.

The H&F VAWG board is a strategic board which oversees the workstreams that will enable us to achieve our objectives. All key stakeholders including service providers are in attendance

We have 7 operational groups who lead on individual workstreams and report into the VAWG board:

- Children and Young People Group
- Whole Heath Group
- Risk and Review Group
- Harmful Practices Group
- Modern Slavery and Exploitation Group
- Housing Group
- Survivor Forum.

In addition we have a specialist services group who will share information with the VAWG board where trends, gaps or issues are identified by the service providers in attendance.

We also propose that a council wide commissioning group should also share information with the VAWG board to ensure that when commissioning services we are ensuring that they are VAWG informed.

The VAWG board and the groups will all share relevant VAWG information with other boards and vice versa.

The other strategic boards are the:

- Community Safety Partnership
- Safeguarding Children's Board

- Safeguarding Adults Board
- Health and Wellbeing Board.

All of these boards also report into the Youth Ambitions Board.

To ensure that we can deliver this strategy it is important that we have funding in place to achieve our 4 strategic objectives.

We commit to commissioning specialist VAWG service to support survivors. However, we know that more always needs to be done. Our partnership will continue to identify and apply for funding to meet need. We will also pool resources and work together collaboratively to ensure the right support is available to prevent abuse, support survivors and their children, and to hold abusers to account.

Proposed H&F VAWG governance structure

The way forward: A call to action

This strategy sets out our vision for ending violence against women and girls. This is an ambitious vision which will be realised through a robust action plan. We are working closely with residents, survivors, and multi-agency partners to develop this to address our 4 strategic objectives:

- violence against women and girls is prevented
- survivors are supported
- abusers are held to account
- collaboration to create change.

An action plan will be published later in the year setting out the steps to be taken.

Initial conversations suggest that these actions will include:

- work with schools in a preventative capacity
- projects helping to make our streets safe
- focused work with survivors from minoritised backgrounds and those who experience multiple disadvantage
- focused work on how to meaningfully engage with a diverse range of survivors including children and young people

- work in changing abuser behaviour
- a focus on improving systems and referral pathways.

The emphasis of the action plan will be on our coordinated community response and the role we can all play in ending VAWG.

The action plan will also build on best practice work that we have been delivering across the borough.

This includes:

- commissioning commended services such as the Angelou Partnership, a partnership of ten agencies who provide a single front door of support for survivors of abuse
- co-located independent domestic violence advisors working across a range of services
- Housing First, which looks to meet the needs of rough sleeping women affected by domestic abuse and multiple disadvantage.

This strategy and the action plan will link with and support other strategic priorities to increase safety, including ending serious youth violence, promoting safeguarding, addressing modern slavery, and embedding equality, diversity, and intersectionality.

Conclusion

Together we can end violence against women and girls.

We are determined to end violence against women and girls and believe that this can be done best if we work in partnership and as part of our coordinated community response.

This strategy sets out the role we can all play in responding to and ending VAWG. We welcome professionals, residents, and survivors to join us in achieving our four objectives. Together, we can work to make our borough safer for everyone who is living, studying, working, and travelling in H&F.