



## Mayor and Cabinet

### **New Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-26**

**Date:** 1 October 2021

**Key decision:** No

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Emily Newell, CYP Joint Commissioner

### **Outline and recommendations**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the new Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy for Lewisham, 2021-26. The report outlines the engagement work undertaken, the priorities, values and aims of the strategy, improvements made to the strategy following consultation, and how success of the strategy will be measured. It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet approve this new strategy.

### **Timeline of engagement and decision-making**

September 2020: Engagement with survivors of abuse via interview

October – November 2020: Engagement with local professionals via workshops

February 2021: Review of draft strategy via survey with local professionals

24<sup>th</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021: Public consultation on draft strategy via survey

16<sup>th</sup> June and 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021: Draft strategy presented to Safer Strong Communities Committee

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. Lewisham Council are launching a new five-year Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, which sets out our partnership approach to ending domestic abuse and all forms of VAWG in Lewisham. The strategy aims to ensure that everyone living and working in Lewisham is able to contribute to making the borough a safer place for victims of abuse. It builds on our existing partnerships to provide a more co-ordinated and strategic response to tackling violence and abuse, with clear priorities that can be embedded into strategic plans across partner agencies.

- 1.2. The strategy is centred around five strategic priorities:
  - PREVENT: Preventing violence and abuse through early intervention and education
  - PROTECT: Providing support that keeps individuals and their families safe from harm
  - RECOVER: Providing longer-term support to enable recovery following abuse
  - PURSUE: Holding perpetrators to account whilst providing opportunity for change and support
  - PARTNERSHIP: Working in partnership across agencies and with the community, to ensure our response to abuse is integrated, innovative and inclusive
- 1.3. As well as working towards the priorities of this new strategy, we will continue to ensure we provide a safe and effective integrated VAWG service for survivors and their families in Lewisham.
- 1.4. The priorities of the strategy have been developed in partnership with a wider range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations across Lewisham. Council officers have undertaken a number of consultation exercises engaging with local survivors of domestic abuse and professionals working in local services. We have built on our experience of what works in tackling domestic abuse and VAWG in Lewisham, and will continue to ensure our work is evidence-based and meaningful.
- 1.5. The draft strategy was presented to Safer Stronger Communities Committee on the 16<sup>th</sup> June and 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021, during which the committee reviewed the document and provided feedback.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. For Mayor and Cabinet to note the contents of the report and approve the new Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy for Lewisham, 2021-26.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1. The Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy contributes towards the 'Building safer communities' priority within the Council's Corporate Strategy 2018-2022, which includes commitments to: *'focus on combating sexual violence and domestic abuse'*, *'support all survivors who are able, and choose to, flee violence and domestic abuse through our work with the voluntary sector'*, and *'give survivors priority in social housing allocation'*.
- 3.2. In 2019/20, Lewisham recorded the second highest levels of domestic abuse-related crime in London, and this figure appears to be increasing year on year. During the 12 months between June 2019 and May 2020, there were over 9,500 incidents and offences of domestic abuse reported to the Police in Lewisham. We only have a partial picture of the levels of abuse that residents are experiencing as much will go unreported, but data suggests that approximately 7.5% of Lewisham adults experience domestic abuse or other forms of VAWG.
- 3.3. The Domestic Abuse Act was enacted into law in April 2021. This Act will for the first

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time create a cross-Government statutory definition of domestic abuse, to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable, and actively challenged, across statutory agencies and in public attitudes. The measures brought in by the Act are welcomed in Lewisham, and many align with the work that has already been underway locally for a number of years. However the Act further increases the need for co-operation across public services, particularly when it comes to meeting the new duties placed on the local authority around housing provision. Responding to the implications of the Domestic Abuse Act is a key part of this strategy, and will be a priority for the first year of the Strategic Action Plan.

## 4. Background – Strategy development

- 4.1. In April 2020 a new Domestic Abuse and VAWG Partnership Board was established with membership from officers across Children’s and Adult Social Care, Community Safety, the Met Police, the CCG, Lewisham housing services and Lewisham Homes. One of the key aims of this group was the development of a new Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls strategy for the borough. The previous Lewisham VAWG Strategy expired on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.
- 4.2. The initial step in developing the strategy was to undertake in-depth interviews with survivors of domestic abuse in Lewisham. There were a number of common themes that arose through this process, which set the values and priorities of the strategy. There were:
  - A lack of understanding within the community and by professionals of coercive control and emotional abuse, including how this exhibits and the impact that this can have on victims
  - A lack of understanding in the community about what abuse looks like, and how to get support if you are experiencing abuse
  - A gap in the support available to aid recovery from abuse, for survivors and their children
  - The importance of professional curiosity for supporting disclosures
  - How impactful the relationship with professionals is for survivors
- 4.3. Following this, officers held seven co-production workshops with professionals across organisations in Lewisham. Each workshop looked in-depth at a different aspect of the response to domestic abuse and VAWG in Lewisham, namely housing, children’s social care, adult social care, education, criminal justice, health and voluntary and community sector. Each of the sessions included real case studies and particular focus was given to the feedback raised by survivors. 83 different professionals attended these workshops (a full list of which is available in the Strategy appendices) and there were a number of areas for improvement that emerged, namely:
  - A need to build the skills, capacity and understanding of practitioners through training.
  - A need to raise awareness at a community level
  - A need for support to enable multi-agency working
  - A need to strengthen our response to perpetrators of abuse

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- A need to better recognise the long-term impact of abuse
- 4.4. A public consultation on the draft strategy was open for responses between the 24<sup>th</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> July. This consultation aimed to help us to prioritise the proposed actions within the strategy; ensure that the language used within the strategy document was acceptable and appropriate; ensure that we had captured all of the resident and community groups that require services; and help us to target and deliver promotional campaigns.
- 4.5. The questions within the consultation survey asked respondents to:
- Rate the importance of the proposed actions under each of the strategic priorities
  - Suggest any priorities or actions that are missing from the draft strategy
  - Give feedback on the language used to describe the five priorities – Prevent, Protect, Repair, Pursue and People
  - Suggest any particular groups within the community that should be prioritised for support
  - Tell us where they would go if they or a friend or family member needed support
  - Tell us the best way of providing information to the public about services to support people affected by domestic abuse and VAWG
- 4.6. A number of changes were made to the draft strategy in response to the public consultation, which are outlined in section 6 below.

## 5. Strategy outline

- 5.1. The strategy document and a one-page summary are available in Appendices A and B. The sections below set out the key priorities, values and ambitions of the strategy.
- 5.2. The new Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy 2021-26 sets out our partnership approach to ending domestic abuse and all forms of VAWG in Lewisham. The strategy aims to ensure that everyone living and working in Lewisham is able to contribute to making the borough a safer place for victims of abuse, whether this is through supporting victims and their families, or through empowering victims to seek support themselves.
- 5.3. The strategy builds on our existing partnerships to provide a more co-ordinated and strategic response to tackling violence and abuse, with clear priorities that can be embedded into strategic plans across partner agencies.

### ***Strategic priorities***

- 5.4. The strategy is centred around five strategic priorities:
- PREVENT: Preventing violence and abuse through early intervention and education
  - PROTECT: Providing support that keeps individuals and their families safe from harm
  - RECOVER: Providing longer-term support to enable recovery following abuse
  - PURSUE: Holding perpetrators to account whilst providing opportunity for change

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and support

- PARTNERSHIP: Working in partnership across agencies and with the community, to ensure our response to abuse is integrated, innovative and inclusive

### ***Our values***

5.5. Through our engagement with service users and stakeholders, it was clear that how professionals and services work in responding to domestic abuse and VAWG is of critical importance, and that there are key behaviours, values and attitudes that should be adopted across the partnership, in order to deliver an effective response. These are:

- COMPASSION: We will value, respect and be compassionate with every professional, adult, child and family. We will seek to intervene and support individuals and families no matter their behaviours, and be trauma-informed in our approach.
- CURIOSITY: We will listen to victims and their families with genuine curiosity to enable trust to be built. We will have the curiosity to understand the problem, and the courage and integrity to do all we can to achieve the best solution.
- FLEXIBILITY: We will work in a way that is informative, reflective, and adaptive to the needs of children, adults, whole families and whole communities.
- SAFETY: We will be innovative in our approach and interventions, but keep the wellbeing and safety of victims and children as our priority.

### ***Strategy Action Plan***

5.6. Under each of the five priority areas listed in 5.4, there are a number of outcomes that we are seeking to achieve through this strategy. The draft strategy document includes a Strategic Action Plan which sets out the intended outcomes, and the actions that will be taken to achieve these over the next five years.

### ***Measuring success***

5.7. A new VAWG Partnership Dashboard has been developed, which includes a wide range of Key Performance Indicators. This will be monitored regularly throughout the life of the strategy, and used to assess the impact of the Strategic Action Plan on improving our response to domestic abuse and VAWG in Lewisham.

5.8. One of the initial aims of the Strategy is to bring together and analyse data from multiple sources to establish a richer understanding of patterns and profiles of abuse in Lewisham, helping us to target resources where they will be most impactful. This will include overlaying data from a wide range of sources across the partnership, including incorporating data from relevant regional and national provisions.

5.9. As the core aim of this strategy is to increase awareness and understanding of domestic abuse and VAWG, we expect reporting, referrals and access to services for related issues, to increase over years 1-3. We then expect to see these numbers decrease in years 4-5 as the prevalence of domestic abuse and VAWG decreases, in response to the actions put in place.

### ***Governance***

5.9. The Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board will be responsible for monitoring our

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progress against the aims of the strategy and the Strategic Action Plan. As well as this, the aim of the Board is to continue to secure high-level commitment to the strategy across multiple agencies, and ensure that domestic abuse and VAWG is included in wider policy and strategy developments across Lewisham.

- 5.10 Underneath this, a small number of task and finish groups will be formed to drive forward change in specific areas of the strategy. These will be short-term and focused groups of multi-agency professionals, formed to address a particular issue, need or challenge as it arises. The focus and membership of these groups will be decided by the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board.
- 5.11. We will continue to deliver the successful VAWG Forum. This is an opportunity for professionals across Lewisham agencies to share best practice and reflect on the experience of supporting victims and perpetrators.
- 5.12. The Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board will be accountable to the Safer Lewisham Partnership. It will also report to the Lewisham Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Adults Board.

## **6. Changes to the strategy following consultation**

### ***Feedback from Safer Stronger Communities Committee***

- 6.1. The draft strategy was presented to Safer Stronger Communities Committee for review on the 16<sup>th</sup> June. Feedback from members was that the title of the strategy, in including 'Domestic Abuse' alongside 'Violence against Women and Girls', acted to dilute the importance of the disproportionate impact that these crimes have on women and girls, and there was a concern that the strategy was named so to recognise that men and boys can also be victims.
- 6.2. In response to this concern from the committee, the authors of the strategy would like to make clear that the rationale for the title was not related to a desire to increase the recognition of male victims. The title of the strategy was developed in consultation with a diverse group of agencies as part of the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board, and a number of discussions were had amongst this group before agreeing on the wording. The group recognises that women and girls carry by far the highest burden of these crimes, and also that the accepted definition of 'VAWG' includes men and boys as victims. The membership of the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board is included in Appendix C for reference.
- 6.3. The Strategic Board chose the title based on the following rationale:
  - Though we recognise that all forms of VAWG are under-reported, Domestic abuse is by far the most prevalent VAWG crime impacting on Lewisham residents, and so should be the primary focus of our resources.
  - Domestic abuse is also the form of abuse that is seen most regularly in referrals to Children and Adult Social Care. There is an incredibly high prevalence of domestic abuse within families referred to Children's Services in particular, and it has causes and consequences that are very specific and complex. It was therefore felt that a special focus is needed to develop a tailored response from these services. We have seen strong and increased engagement from Children's Social Care in the development of this Strategy.

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- The UK Government will be publishing a new Domestic Abuse Strategy in 2022, to be delivered alongside the national VAWG Strategy. This is the first of its kind and the rationale for this is that, because of the level of harm caused by this form of abuse, the expected increase during the pandemic, and the publication of the Domestic Abuse Act, that a separate strategy was needed. Our hope is that the new Lewisham strategy meets the aims of both of these national strategies, but we will review this on publication, and continually adapt our local planning as necessary in response to national drivers.
- There were no concerns raised about the title of the strategy during the consultation with professionals or the public.

6.4. We also wish to emphasise that the strategy encompasses all forms of VAWG, and many of the planned actions, including our awareness-raising campaigns, staff training, and improved routine enquiry, will improve how we identify and respond to all forms of VAWG collectively.

### ***Feedback from the public consultation***

6.5. A public consultation on the draft strategy, as detailed in section 4.4 above, was open for responses between the 24<sup>th</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> July. There were 91 responses to the consultation. A number of changes have been made to the strategy in response to this feedback, set out below.

6.6. The public consultation asked respondents to identify which of the proposed actions they felt were most important under each of the strands of the strategy. The most popular responses are listed, with detail of how we will be working towards these in the first year of the strategy.

- Under PREVENT, respondents said the priority action should be for '*Children and young people in Lewisham are educated around safe and healthy relationships and understand that violence and abuse is not normalised behaviour*'. There are plans in place to develop a 'best practice toolkit' for primary and secondary schools, to strengthen their delivery of healthy relationships education, including to give staff the confidence and skills to discuss issues of domestic abuse. The proposal is for a dedicated post be commissioned by the LBL Education and Public Health Teams, to develop and disseminate resources during the 2021/22 academic year.
- Under PROTECT, respondents said the priority action should be to '*Provide safe housing for victims and their families fleeing abuse*'. As of June 2021, the LBL Housing Service have developed new rehousing pathways for victims fleeing domestic abuse, in order to meet the requirements of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Housing Service is also undergoing accreditation by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), which the UK benchmark for how housing services should respond to domestic abuse, by addressing the needs of survivors and holding perpetrators to account. Housing and Community Safety are also in the process of commissioning a full housing needs assessment, which will be submitted to the MHCLG to inform their London-wide commissioning of additional safe accommodation for survivors fleeing abuse.
- Under RECOVER, respondents said the priority action should be to '*Provide*

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*recovery support to children and survivors of domestic abuse*. Children's Services are currently running two grant-funded programmes piloting and evaluating a range of different interventions for families affected by domestic abuse. The interventions include the Children Overcoming Domestic Abuse (CODA) programme, which is a recovery programme for children and mothers, The Freedom Programme, and specialist one-to-one play therapy for children affected by domestic abuse. Additionally, in 2021 we have trained a number of staff, predominantly Children's Social Workers, in these therapeutic interventions to enable them to deliver support to families directly after the external grant funding ends. 21 professionals were trained to deliver CODA, 19 to deliver The Freedom Programme, 14 to deliver in Caring Dads, and 27 were trained in Trauma Informed and Restorative Practice.

- Under PURSUE, respondents said the priority action should be to *'Ensure perpetrators are held accountable for their actions through legal means'*. Within the strategy, the Met Police have committed to review and increase the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders, Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders and Forced Marriage Protection Orders. Under Operation Dauntless there are a number of improvement initiatives in place, such as the use of 'Clare's Law' to inform victims if their new or existing partner has a violent past.

6.7. The following changes were made to the language used within the strategy:

- Changing the name of priority four from 'Repair' to 'Recover'. A number of respondents commented that the 'Repair' was not appropriate because it implied that a person was damaged and lacked the supportive tone required. It was felt that 'Recover' was more empathetic, positive and future-facing language.
- Changing the name of priority five from 'People' to 'Partnership'. Respondents commented that 'People' was unclear and it was felt that 'Partnership' more accurately reflected the intention behind this strand of the strategy.

6.8. Feedback provided demonstrated that some of the aims and intentions held by the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board, were not made clear enough in the strategy wording. Changes were made to the wording to make more explicit our commitment to:

- Ensure the strategy covers all forms of Violence against Women and Girls, including sexual violence and harmful cultural practices, by more clearly defining these in the introduction and including relevant data.
- Improve the way we measure and analyse data on all forms of VAWG in the borough, including to bring together and analyse data from multiple sources to establish a richer understanding of patterns and profiles of abuse in Lewisham, helping us to target resources where they will be most impactful.
- Work in partnership with other London boroughs to develop and deliver services and share good practice.
- Address 'lower-level' forms of VAWG including street harassment and sexual harassment.

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- Meet the specific needs of survivors who are less likely to access services, particularly those without English as their first language, but also those that identify as LGBTQ+, those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and those or experiencing homelessness and/or multiple disadvantage.
- Recognise the ways in which violence in relationships manifests within different age groups.

## 7. Equalities implications

- 7.1. This strategy recognises that domestic abuse and VAWG can affect anyone, although women and children carry the highest burden. It highlights that a number of groups face additional barriers to accessing help, and also may be at increased risk of certain types of abuse, and takes account of these intersecting needs. This includes older people, LGBTQ+ people, Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, refugees, and adults with care and support needs. We are committed to ensuring that our services are inclusive and accessible to all.
- 7.2. A core outcome within the Strategic Action Plan is to ensure that victims of abuse have access to integrated VAWG services that fully meet their needs, and provide support to all victims and their families, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion and care and support needs.
- 7.3. Our commissioned community-based specialist VAWG service, Athena, provides support across all strands of VAWG, to all victims regardless of their gender and whether or not they have children. We undertake regular monitoring to ensure all commissioned services are meeting needs of residents from diverse groups, and delivering an impactful and high quality service.
- 7.4. Through the new strategy we will work in partnership across health and community services to ensure that victims facing additional barriers to accessing help, such as those identifying as LGBTQ+, are able to get the support they need.

## 8. Crime and disorder implications

- 8.1. The new Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy aims to prevent and reduce the impact of crime and violence, and reduce the fear of domestic abuse and other violent crimes against women and girls, amongst the local community. There are a number of actions within the strategy which directly relate to the prevention of such crimes and the protection of victims, which will be delivered in partnership between the Met Police, Community Safety and other partner organisations.

## 9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1. The new Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy aims to improve the health and wellbeing of residents experiencing or at risk of experiencing domestic abuse and VAWG, and their families. The community VAWG Service if commissioned to deliver a wide range of health and wellbeing outcomes for service users, and also ensure that victims are linked with local mental and physical health services.

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## 10. Glossary

Term	Definition
Domestic abuse	An incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, coercive control, psychological and/or emotional abuse, physical or sexual abuse, financial or economic abuse, harassment and stalking, and online or digital abuse.
Violence against women and girls (VAWG)	Acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, 'honour'-based abuse (including female genital mutilation forced marriage, and 'honour' killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online. While we use the term 'violence against women and girls', throughout the Strategy, this refers to all victims of any of these offences, including men and boys.
Coercive control	A pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence.

## 11. Report author(s) and contact

- 11.1. Emily Newell - CYP Joint Commissioner, [emily.newell@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:emily.newell@lewisham.gov.uk), 07825 456559

## 12. Appendices

- 12.1. Appendix A – One-page summary of Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy  
12.2. Appendix B – Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategy  
12.3. Appendix C – Membership of the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board

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## **Appendix C – Membership of the Domestic Abuse and VAWG Strategic Board**

As of June 2021:

Pinaki Ghoshal - Executive Director for Children & Young People, LBL (Chair)  
Charlene Noel – VAWG Strategic Lead, LBL  
Fiona Mitchell – Adult Safeguarding Lead Nurse, SEL CCG  
Maureen Gabriel – Children’s Safeguarding Lead Nurse, SEL CCG  
Alice Wu – GP Lead, SEL CCG  
Fen Beckman – Director of Housing Services, LBL  
Dan Byron – Detective Inspector, Safeguarding, SE BCU  
Emily Newell – CYP Joint Commissioner, LBL  
Martin Crow – Lewisham Safeguarding Adults Board  
David Goosey – Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership Independent Scrutineer  
Rebecca Hare – Head of Service for Family Support and Safeguarding  
Justine Mortelmans – Group Manager for Family Support and Safeguarding  
Joanna Georgiades - Strategic Safeguarding Lead, Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership  
Iain McDiarmid - Service Group Manager – Prevention, Inclusion and Public Health, LBL  
Clare Hopkins – Head of Housing and Communities, Lewisham Homes  
David McCollum – CYP Joint Commissioner, LBL  
Jannet Hall – Head of Community Safety, LBL  
Laura Murray – Initiatives Officer, Strategic Housing, LBL  
Karen Kemsley – Data Scientist, LBL  
Brian Scouler – Service Manager, Adult Social Care  
Catherine Bunten – Service Manager, Early Help and CYP Commissioning  
James Lee - Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure

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