



# Islington Together For a more equal future

**Violence Against Women  
and Girls (VAWG) Strategy**  
2021 - 2026



**ISLINGTON**



For a more equal future



# Contents

|                                                                    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Opening words                                                   | 4  |
| 2. Introduction                                                    | 7  |
| 3. Our Principles and Approach                                     | 12 |
| 4. Our journey so far and our learning                             | 14 |
| 5. Strategic Context                                               | 26 |
| 6. Legislation and Strategy                                        | 39 |
| 7. Our priorities, objectives, actions and governance arrangements | 42 |
| 8. References and Acknowledgements                                 | 46 |

# 1. Opening words

We are very pleased that Islington is launching such a comprehensive and partnership-focussed strategy in relation to reducing Violence Against Women and Girls.

This is such an important area and one that has a terrible impact on so many people. The distress of the 1 in 3 women who will experience Domestic Abuse in their lifetime and their families is enough evidence of this, but then we also need to consider the survivors of sexual offences and other forms of violence and the trauma that they have endured. In summary, the trauma and suffering caused by the use of Violence Against Women and Girls is immeasurable and this must change. This strategy sets out the commitment of the partnership to effect this change and make it long-lasting. We have achieved so much in recent times – supporting larger numbers of women and girls who need support and protection; the establishment of one of London’s first successful Daily Safeguarding meetings and a range of excellent commissioned services for women and girls. We know that there is more to do to make our community safer for all women and girls and we are determined to do this in collaboration with our partners which includes our survivors.



**Cllr Sue Lukes**  
Executive Member for  
Community Safety and  
Co-chair of the Islington  
Violence Against Women  
and Girls Board



**Cllr Michelline Ngongo**  
Executive Member for  
Children, Young People  
and Families

We fully appreciate that events over the last year have heightened concerns about violence amongst women in London. The timing of this strategy is crucial. We completely share that concern and are absolutely committed to doing everything we can to keep women and girls safe during the next five years and beyond. While we fully recognise concerns about women’s safety, it’s important to stress that London remains one of the safest cities in the world. The Met is not complacent. Every day teams across London are working tirelessly to arrest offenders, make our streets safer and to tackle domestic abuse. We have a dedicated public protection strand led by a Superintendent whose work predominately focuses on keeping children safe and tackling violence against women and girls. Our current plans involve stepping up reassurance patrols of open space across London, increasing police presence where it is needed in key locations identified through intelligence. We are also working with partners across the criminal justice system and are determined to bring offenders to justice. We will continue to prioritise action against sexual and violent, predatory offenders to prevent them bringing harm to communities.



**Andy Carter**  
Borough Commander  
of Islington/Camden  
Borough Command Unit,  
Metropolitan Police

I am very pleased to see that the safety of women and girls is a top priority for Islington, as the use of violence against us is devastating. Evidence demonstrates there are additional barriers that impact on Black and Minoritised women. It is extremely important that services are able to respond to the complex, intersecting needs of women and girls who need support.

As a survivor and co-chair of Islington's Violence against Women and Girls Strategic board, I fully support the strategy which has been developed with survivors to ensure that victims/survivors are at the heart of tackling VAWG. The development of the strategy has been an opportunity to evaluate the good progress we have made. However, it is important to acknowledge that despite the progress, significant challenges remain. Our strategy is designed to ensure that collective action is taken to address all forms of Violence against Women and Girls and to make it clear that its elimination is everyone's responsibility.



**Tanya Pinnock**  
Survivor, Homesafe  
Practitioner and Co-Chair  
of the Islington Violence  
Against Women and Girls  
Board

I survived the abuse, now I am being  
helped to recover.

**The Samira Project service user**

## 2. Introduction

Every woman and girl has the right to pursue a fulfilling and successful life without fear of intimidation, harassment, bullying and/or violence.

For many women, however, this right is not respected. At the time this strategy was being drafted, the public profile of violence against women and girls (VAWG) has been raised by a number of terrible and high profile murders, including of Sarah Everard, sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, who were killed in a park in north west London, Julia James, a police community support officer, killed out while walking her dog in Kent, and Sabina Nessa, a primary school teacher who was attacked and killed in South East London. In October the sentencing of the man who was a serving police officer at the time he abducted, raped and murdered Ms Everard has led to wide spread anger and represents a landmark and unprecedented moment in British history about matters related to VAWG. The announcement, by the government, about an independent enquiry into this case is welcomed and follows the substantially raised profile of matters related to VAWG. Sadly, for every high profile case such as the cases of the women aforementioned, there are many less publicised but no less tragic cases such as that of Helen Anderson, an Islington resident whose remains were found near a slip road on 23rd August 2021. This case did not receive much media coverage. In the 12 months to March 2020, an estimated 1.6 million women experienced domestic abuse in the UK; an average of one woman was killed by a man in England and Wales every 3 days, most often by someone they knew; and police recorded 153,136 rapes and other sexual offences, of which 84% involved female victims. In light of these statistics, recent descriptions of violence against women as an epidemic are surely justified. It is clear that much more needs to be done, across both society and public institutions, to keep more women and girls safe from harm.

In Islington, we are determined to make the borough a safer place to live, work, travel, have fun and visit for women and girls. In 2020/21, Islington supported over 1500 victim/survivors and achieved the highest sanction and detection rates (i.e. the number of crimes resolved through a formal sanction) for domestic abuse in London. We also

increased investment in specialist VAWG Services in 2020–21, funding new Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) roles and establishing one of the first multi-agency Daily Safeguarding Meeting (DSM) in London, to provide a much faster, whole-system response to high risk cases of domestic abuse. Whilst figures show that Islington has taken important steps towards improving its response to VAWG, we are aware that more needs to be done. For instance, rape offences in the borough have a sanction and detection rate of 5.5%, which whilst higher than the Metropolitan Police average, needs to be far higher. Our overarching commitment is to keep as many of our women and girls and their families as safe as possible, to make perpetrators accountable for their actions and to have a first class system in place to achieve this. This strategy demonstrates our collective commitment to address the attitudes and issues that underpin the abuse of women and ensure that all of our partners are equipped to address this. The Islington partnership has subsequently set itself a vision statement:

**“Islington has a zero tolerance approach to the mistreatment, abuse and violation of women and girls. Any form of Violence against Women and Girls is unacceptable and abhorrent. Our aim is to eliminate all forms of such violence, support survivors and to rehabilitate and make perpetrators accountable for their actions. Regardless of our own gender, we all stand in solidarity with our sisters to eradicate this epidemic”**

Over the next five years and beyond we will work towards this vision, as a partnership, by ensuring that Islington continues to be one of the leading and most forward thinking areas in the country when it comes to tackling all forms of Violence and abuse against Women and Girls.

## 2.1. Definition

**Violence against Women and Girls is defined as:**

“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.”

**(United Nations (UN) Declaration (1993) definition).**

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is the umbrella term which brings together multiple forms of serious violence under one policy strand:

- Coercive and controlling behaviour
- Crimes committed in the name of ‘honour’
- Domestic abuse
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Forced marriage
- Harassment
- Sexual violence
- Stalking
- Trafficking for sexual exploitation
- Virginity testing (of girls and young women)

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created a new statutory definition of domestic abuse which defined children as victims in their own right for the first time

- (1) This section defines “domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.
- (2) 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.
- (3) 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.
- (4) “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.
- (5) For the purposes of this Act 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).

This strategy encompasses and responds to all forms of violence against women and girls and it is important to note that the different forms of violence are not discrete strands and that victims often experience more than one form of violence at any given time, or during the experience of abuse. Some victims are affected by multiple forms of male violence within intimate and / or family relationships including child to parent violence, whilst for others their experience of violence is perpetrated by the wider community. Some women will experience all and they are all unacceptable. We are determined to support as many of these survivors as possible.



# 3. Our Principles and Approach

Islington has set out on an ambitious journey to improve the experiences of those affected by VAWG. We began by listening to the voices of survivors and others affected and finding out what they care about. Their priorities are Islington's priorities. We worked closely with partner agencies to develop these into four key Violence against Women and Girls aims:

## Violence against Women and Girls aims

### **Engaging with people who use violence and abuse in their relationships;**

To address the significant gap in services engaging with men who use violence, so that they are held to account for their abusive behaviour and/or are supported to change

### **Supporting victims and moving away from the 'failure to protect' narrative;**

Services will ensure that victims/survivors are supported and believed and recognise the impact of coercive control on victims. We will change the narrative from 'why didn't she leave?' to 'why didn't he stop?'

### **Safety planning, recovery and repair for children;**

Services are able to recognise and keep in mind the impact of violence against women and girls on children and they are supported to recover from experiences and repair the relationships that are important to them

### **Developing a coordinated community response to Violence Against Women and Girls**

Agencies will share responsibility, align best practice and work together to prevent VAWG and keep survivors and their families safe

Our ambition is for those who are affected by all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls to receive support that is trauma informed and connected to their experience and that helps them to feel heard and protected. We will ensure that survivors and children are at the centre of all of our work and are provided with the support they need to feel safe. To improve the safety of survivors and children, people who use violence and abuse in any of their relationships must also be held to account. We believe safe engagement is key to this. This means that, where appropriate, those using violence and abuse should be supported by skilled professionals to change their harmful behaviour. To help to do this, we have established the VAWG Workforce Development team to provide training to develop the skills of practitioners in Islington. Our aim is for all practitioners to feel connected to their professional network and to be supported in responding to VAWG in a consistent and accountable way.

This work involves change for most of us and we recognise that this requires us to reflect on and improve the way we think and talk about VAWG. We know that victim blaming is a systemic issue that has a significant impact on survivors and gives power to people using violence and abuse against them. To achieve this the VAWG Workforce Development team has been working with the professional network to raise awareness in order to reduce victim-blaming, by encouraging and enabling supportive challenge and ensuring accountability.

As part of our commitment to putting survivors and children at the heart of our work, we recruited Davina James-Hanman to assist us in developing this VAWG Strategy. Davina has worked extensively on domestic and sexual violence for over three decades in a wide variety of roles, including as LB Islington's first Domestic Violence Co-ordinator in 1992. She has also worked in the voluntary sector, at the GLA and the Home Office. She has written national policies, delivered training to thousands of professionals, and created best practice manuals and best practice projects. Throughout all her work, Davina's aim is to amplify survivor's voices, in particular, the most disadvantaged and marginalised. Davina acted as a critical friend throughout the drafting of this strategy, helping us to reflect on how we can achieve best practice in all of our work. We also enlisted the support of Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou. Dr Hadjimatheou is a criminologist and expert in Violence Against Women and Girls. She leads the Gender, Violence and Abuse Research Group at the University of Essex.



During the production of this strategy, we sadly lost our wonderful and incomparable Corporate Director of People (Children and Adults Services) Carmel Littleton following an illness. Carmel was one of the main champions of tackling VAWG and provided much support and input to eliminating it and supporting survivors. She was so passionate about the area (as she was about all areas of her portfolio). We would like to dedicate this strategy to her memory and to women and girls that we have lost through VAWG.

# 4. Our journey so far and our learning

## 4.1. VAWG – in Islington the local picture

This section provides information in relation to key VAWG themes in Islington during the period March 2017 to March 2021. It demonstrates the scale of the issue in terms of the number of Domestic Abuse (DA) and sexual offences and the high demand for (our) specialised VAWG services. We know that this provides only a partial picture as VAWG is a largely hidden crime, where many survivors do not report the violence and abuse they experience. Also, while we do not have full datasets on the numbers of girls and women that have been sexually harassed in Islington, it is a common experience for many women and girls of various ages. A report by UN Women UK<sup>1</sup> this year found that 97% of women aged 18-24 have been sexually harassed.

These are the crimes and the survivors that we know about in the borough.

# April 2017 – March 2021



**10,094**

domestic abuse offences were recorded by the Islington Police between April 2017 and March 2021, with additional **16,760** Domestic Abuse Incidents recorded during this period



**5,108**

VAWG survivors were supported by Islington Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy Services between April 2017 and March 2021

<sup>1</sup>UN Women UK, Open Access Government (March 2021)



**2,402**

sexual violence offences were recorded by the Islington Police between April 2017 and March 2021



**1,705**

domestic abuse offences have been given formal sanctions (including where perpetrators were charged or cautioned – sanction detection rate) by the Islington Police with Islington sanction detections rate over the four years strategy duration reaching 17% on average

# 2021 local picture



**16.5%**

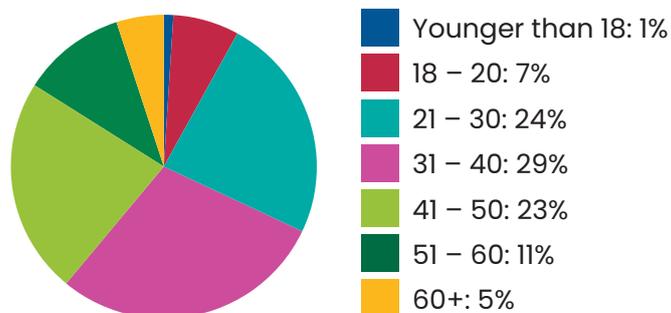
domestic abuse was the most common reason for calling Islington Children's Services Contact Team

## Age

Most VAWG survivors engaging with support services in Islington are in their mid-30s. Referrals for survivors under the age of 18 increased since establishing the Children and Young People Independent Advocate (CIDVA) post.

Survivors who are over 60 years old are mostly supported by IRIS Educators (GP based domestic abuse advocacy service) and have been referred for support by their GP.

Age of survivors supported by advocacy services (April 2017 – March 2021)



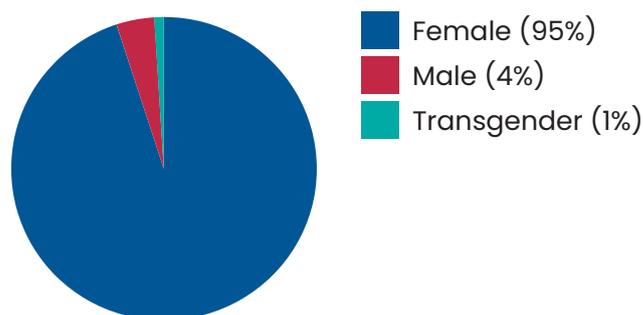
## Gender and sexual orientation

95% of VAWG survivors supported in Islington identify as female. 1% identify as transgender.

87% of male survivors had experienced abuse from a male partner or ex-partner.

Less than 1% of female survivors had experienced abuse from a female partner or ex-partner.

Gender of survivors supported by advocacy services (April 2017 – March 2021)



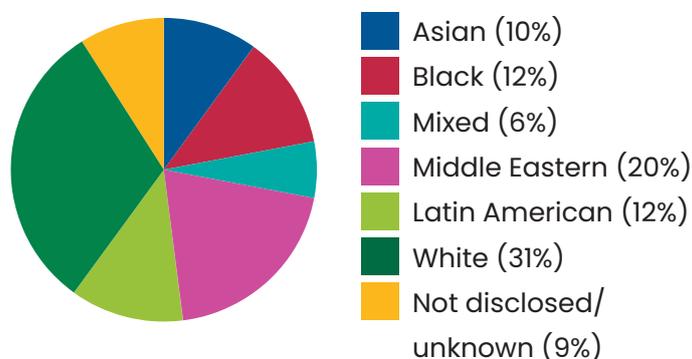
## Ethnicity

VAWG survivors in Islington come from all ethnic backgrounds, and the distribution of ethnicities is similar to that of residents in the borough.

The strong community engagement of the Samira project has increased engagement from Middle Eastern and Latin American survivors.

There is a relatively low number of reports to VAWG support services from Eastern European and Black Caribbean communities and advocacy services are working to increase engagement of Black Caribbean and Eastern European survivors in response to feedback gained from survivors.

Ethnicity of survivors supported by advocacy services (April 2017 – March 2021)

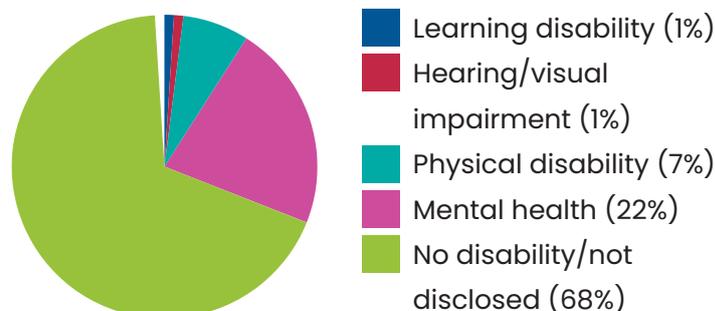


## Disability

Mental health support is the highest support need requested by survivors of VAWG in Islington.

Most survivors who disclosed mental health support need have also disclosed multiple disadvantages and additional support needs around homelessness and substance use.

Survivors who disclosed disability supported by advocacy services (April 2017 – March 2021)



## High risk

Since April 2017, a total of 1,658 high risk referrals were heard by Islington MARAC and Islington Domestic Abuse Daily Safeguarding Meeting (the latter has replaced MARAC in January 2021).

Some of the insights into the kinds of cases that were referred and the kinds of survivors that were supported:



## 4.2. Our services and our approach

Tackling VAWG has long been a priority, not only for Islington Council and its partnership, but also for London as a whole. In March 2017, the Mayor of London published a Policing and Crime Plan which led to the development of a comprehensive, London-wide VAWG strategy, launched a year later. Islington's approach to tackling VAWG has taken a lead from the Mayor's Office, and the partnership published its current VAWG strategy for the borough in 2017. Since then, significant efforts have been made across the partnership to make Islington a safer place for women and girls. Specific initiatives include the development of a number of new services and initiatives, such as the Keel Multi Agency Team working with families affected by domestic abuse, the Domestic Abuse Health Pathfinder project, and the FGM Prevention toolkit for practitioners.

The progress of Islington's VAWG strategy 2017-21 has been reviewed regularly by the VAWG Board<sup>2</sup>. A formal partnership review of the strategy was undertaken in September 2019, by VAWG service providers, local stakeholders and survivors. Alongside recognition of the progress made, a number of gaps and areas for further improvement were identified. Islington agreed to address these by:

- Increasing the accountability and visibility of perpetrators in the multi-agency service response to individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse
- Enhancing IDVA and service provision in services working with women experiencing multiple disadvantage, and with families affected by child-to-parent abuse
- Expanding services and support for under-represented groups in Islington including Black Caribbean women and other minoritised groups, LGBTQ communities, older people and people with disabilities
- Expanding services to children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in their families and in their own relationships
- Increasing awareness of and commitment to the VAWG Practice priorities across statutory and voluntary and community services and the local community. These principles are: supporting and empowering victims; engaging with men using violence; safety planning and repair for survivors/children; and creating a community response to VAWG

In order to build upon the progress made in recent years and to enhance service delivery further still, the VAWG board has developed an ambitious Service Transformation Programme. This commenced in April 2020 and is supported by £600k additional per annum council funding, as well as funding from central government, the Mayor for London, Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health. This substantial new investment and service expansion has supported local VAWG services to respond to the unprecedented increase in demand and complexity of need prompted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

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<sup>2</sup>Islington VAWG Board is jointly chaired by the Executive Member for Community Safety and lived experience rep, and is attended by senior leads from statutory and specialist VAWG services

**Since April 2020 Islington council has worked with its partners to:**

- Increase the VAWG service provision to support survivors and their families. At the time of writing, Islington now had 13 IDVAs and 5 specialist VAWG posts. This has led to a 56% increase in number of survivors supported in 2020/2021 compared to 2019/2020.

| Year      | Service users supported |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| 2017/2018 | 859                     |
| 2018/2019 | 986 (15% increase)      |
| 2019/2020 | 1,002 (2% increase)     |
| 2020/2021 | 1,562 (56% increase)    |

- Increase investment in ‘By and For’ services working with Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities in Islington. As a result, the Samira project exceeded its annual support target by 68%.
- Develop Islington’s new in-house Intimate Partner Violence Service, ‘Journey to Change’ which supports abusers to change their behaviours and keep survivors safe. Two full time members of staff have been recruited with Journey to Change and have been piloting initial referrals and support since spring 2021.
- Fund the IRIS project with the Clinical Commissioning Group, working with GP surgeries across Islington to increase access to domestic abuse services and support:
  - 32 out of 34 GP surgeries had been fully IRIS trained as of October 2021 and GPs are now referring and presenting cases at the DSM.
- Improve services to women experiencing multiple disadvantages including risk of homelessness: The council has extended funding for the DA Housing First project and the Wiser service and funded a new Women’s Outreach Worker in the Street Population team
- Establish Family Support workers in Islington refuges:
  - 24 families were supported by the refuge family work team during 2020–2021
- Provide a specialist counselling service for survivors of VAWG:
  - 226 clients have been supported by the domestic abuse counselling service since 2018/2019
- Continue to develop the partnership’s work to prevent FGM and other harmful practices through training and awareness raising events
- Develop the Daily Safeguarding Meeting, which replaced the monthly MARAC in January 2021, in order to improve the multi-agency response to survivors and risk management of perpetrators

## 4.3. Islington’s DA Daily Safeguarding Meeting (DSM) January – June 2021

### DSM and innovation

### Why is DSM making a difference?

Islington Daily Safeguarding Meeting (DSM) replaced Islington MARAC on 4 January 2021. Islington Domestic Abuse Daily Safeguarding Meeting is a multi-agency led, fully integrated approach to needs management for victims of Domestic Abuse across Islington Council, embedding the DA MARAC process into the LBI Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The DSM aims to address the needs at the time the intervention will have the greatest impact and to maximise victim engagement using service user led feedback to monitor the DSM outcomes.

 **Decrease in repeat referrals**  
**10% decrease** in repeat referrals in the six months since the DSM commenced (compared to an average of 28% repeat referrals to MARAC in the year prior to the DSM commencing).

 **Better engagement with survivors**  
**88% of survivors engaged** with the DSM process to express their wishes and feelings, compared to 18% with the MARAC.

 **Quicker response**  
 Responses to high and medium referrals were **fifteen times quicker** when referred to the DSM (referrals heard at the DSM on average within 2 – 3 working days, compared to 40 – 45 working days when referred to monthly MARAC).

 **Improved referral pathway**  
 Non-core agencies (including A&E, Sexual and Mental Health Clinics, GPs, and education) were **three times** more likely to refer to the DSM than they had been to the MARAC. The proportion of total referrals from them rose from 3% to 10%.

 **Managing the risks from people using violence**  
**305% increase** in requests for civil and legal protection orders (138 requests through the DSM in the first six months, compared to 34 in the same period through the MARAC).

 **Increased risk management**  
**188% increase** in number of referrals heard through the DSM and pre-DSM (475 referrals heard through the DSM in the first six months compared to 165 in through the MARAC in the same period in 2020).

- Provide a specialist counselling service for survivors of VAWG:
  - 226 clients have been supported by the domestic abuse counselling service since 2018/2019
- Sunflower project providing therapeutic group work sessions for children affected by domestic abuse and for adult survivors:
  - 10 women have engaged with the Sunflower project since it commenced in late 2020
- Young People Using Violence and Abuse project working with families affected by child to parent violence, and Perpetrator service supporting professionals working with families experiencing domestic abuse:
  - 150+ consultations with children’s services staff working with fathers who are perpetrators of domestic abuse during 2020-2021
- Provide replacement and emergency smart phones to victims/survivors:
  - Over 80 mobile phones have been issued to survivors fleeing domestic abuse in an emergency and/or requested by police to collect evidence
- Islington council is committed to improving our response as an employer and will take action to support any staff member who is affected by domestic violence and abuse. The council updated its Domestic Abuse policy in 2020 and in 2021 and the VAWG team provided Domestic Abuse training for all staff working in Human Resources.
- Created the new VAWG Workforce Development Team providing training and case consultation to develop and embed the borough’s VAWG practice priorities

**VAWG Workforce Development Team offers case consultations to professionals, bespoke training, presentations, and group supervision:**

| VAWG consultation                                                                                     | Specialist support at the DSM                                                                                                                                           | VAWG training                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The VAWG Workforce Development Team has provided <b>165</b> case consultations since May 2020.</p> | <p>Almost <b>50%</b> of the consultations since January 2021 were for families who had been referred by practitioners as at high risk of domestic abuse to the DSM.</p> | <p><b>348</b> professionals including Police Officers, NHS, Housing and Social Care staff completed VAWG Development Training focused on supporting survivors and working with men using violence and abuse in their relationships.</p> |

## Our Learning

### 4.4. Learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews

- This year marks the tenth anniversary since Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) were introduced. DHRs review the circumstances and partnership response prior to and in the aftermath of a domestic abuse-related killing. These reviews help organisations learn lessons for the future and improve their response to domestic abuse. Nationally, more than 900 DHRs have now been completed which shows the scale of the problem. On average, there are 22 domestic homicides a year in London. Islington has had to undertake three DHRs since 2011.

#### **The most frequent issues identified in DHRs include:**

- **Lack of awareness of domestic abuse and its impacts**  
Some professionals still fail to realise that the ending of a relationship does not signal an end to abuse. Many professionals still view domestic abuse principally as a crime of physical violence, and there is a lack of awareness of the inherent high-risk posed by coercive controlling behaviours that are not physical or sexual. . Sometimes this means that survivors are being asked to do the impossible: manage violent and manipulative abusers on their own.
- **Lack of information sharing between agencies**  
Despite some very good examples of information sharing, persistent gaps remain. Professionals still do not share information with GPs and schools, and vice versa. It is critical that those who may only have contact with victim/survivors in a crisis situation share information routinely with those professionals who have frequent contact and are therefore better placed to provide support.
- **Missed opportunities to ask about victim's relationships**  
The increasing pressure on staff to 'do more for less' is impacting on the ability of many professionals to probe more deeply when presented with situations that don't seem 'quite right'. Sometimes there may be a lack of professional curiosity. Sometimes professionals may not recognise the less direct and more subtle ways in which survivors may disclose abuse. Even when clear and direct information is given about an abusive relationship, enquiries are not always made about who else may be at risk, the name and current location of the (alleged) perpetrator, the existence of any criminal justice measures (e.g. injunctions or bail conditions) or the involvement of other professionals. This may lead to lost opportunities to keep victims/survivors and families safe and hold perpetrators to account.
- **Lack of consistent assessments**  
All too often, a risk assessment focuses on the most recent incident and fails to identify patterns of abuse. Low levels of physical violence can often lead to an assessment that the situation is not serious and does not merit a MARAC referral isn't made. This is contradicted by what we know about coercive control. Domestic Homicide Reviews also found that other kinds of assessments, in particular carers' and mental health assessments were too often not completed.

- **A lack of focus on perpetrators and risk they pose to others**

Perpetrators are all but invisible to most professionals with the exception of Criminal Justice System agencies. All too often, the response to domestic abuse is to assess what the victim is doing or not doing and to encourage (and sometimes coerce) the victim into making further changes.

## 4.5. Learning from Research: supporting children and young people experiencing domestic abuse

National research and Islington council's own data show that childhood exposure to violence causes trauma and has a negative impact on physical and mental health. In 2018, Islington council carried out a study on the 25 most prolific and persistent young offenders of concern in the Youth Offending Service. Our research found that exposure to domestic abuse in early childhood was a common feature in the backgrounds of the cohort. It is also linked to other vulnerabilities in children.

Islington recognises the need for reparative interventions, to address the damage caused by neglect, trauma and loss, as well as by abusers who frequently deliberately undermine the bond between the child and the non-abusing parent. We are also committed to supporting children and young people to understand what healthy relationships look like and to develop skills and strategies to manage and regulate their feelings.

Below we describe some of the services and initiatives Islington has put in place to support children and families to repair and recover from domestic abuse:

- DART : Domestic Abuse Recovering Together programme – Working with non-abusive parents and children together
- Children's IDVA role based in Islington's Targeted Youth Support Service
- The Sunflower project supporting children in schools who have experienced domestic abuse in their families and offering therapeutic groups to survivors of domestic abuse
- The Journey to Chance Service is developing interventions with young people and families where there is child to parent violence. Awareness of this issue increased during Covid- 19

## 4.6. Learning from Survivors

Islington is committed to ensuring that the voices of survivors have a key role in shaping the services they engage with and this year staff from Islington's VAWG Team and local VAWG services engaged with survivors across local services as part of the preparation for this new VAWG strategy. A total of 17 teams/organisations were contacted with requests to help gather feedback from people with experience of VAWG services in Islington. In response to the issues highlighted, we produced a questionnaire and brief on-line survey. Different organisations used these survey tools in different ways. Some used them to structure group conversations, whereas others undertook 1-1 interviews.

### What we are doing right

We learnt that while survivors value and appreciate local VAWG services we need to do more to raise the visibility and awareness of the full range of services available to people experiencing VAWG in the borough.

Survivors felt that:

- Islington's VAWG advocacy services address individual needs well and helped them to overcome barriers in accessing housing and benefits including supporting survivors to fill application forms and navigate the services. For example, by offering intensive advocacy via specialist services including Housing First. "They help you understand how to pay bills and explain why you have to pay certain things"
- The services offered a wide range of services and support which was helpful including services supporting survivors of so called honour based violence.
- They were involved in decision making and felt like they had a choice
- They were able to access wide range of services with VAWG support through the one phone number and email contact for all VAWG services in Islington. This includes 1:1 advocacy and support, legal advice, as well as yoga, Zumba, ESOL, IT training and counselling. They are able to access emergency essentials/food vouchers and access Digital Devices schemes (especially during the Covid 19 pandemic) including a free tablet scheme and digital upskilling. "Without access to a smart phone you can't do half the things you need to do, everything's online, and if you do have access to the right technology after being on the street for a while you might not feel confident in how to use it."
- Services were inclusive: survivors were not judged or turned away because of immigration status or because of disability or mental health needs. Support workers went above and beyond to provide support and survivors trusted them enough to share information and disclose abuse. "Judgement, fear and trauma – that's why it's not reported"
- VAWG services also helped survivors to overcome mistrust towards social services and police.

### Challenges and areas for improvement

We received strong messages in the challenges survivors can face when trying to access key services and support including housing and counselling and that survivors were frustrated at the lack of communication between services. It is imperative that we improve how we work across all statutory and voluntary sector services if we are to achieve a properly coordinated community response that supports the diverse and intersectional needs of survivors and families within our borough.

Survivors felt that:

- Navigating housing services can still be very difficult and particularly challenging for people who experience multiple disadvantage
- Consent and information sharing processes between statutory services and VAWG caseworkers can be complicated.
- There are delays and waiting lists to access counselling services and a lack of specialist, culturally appropriate counselling services in community languages
- There are limited resources for survivors who require non-English speaking support/translation service
- There is a need for more work in schools to support children and young people.
- VAWG services need to be more visible

As part of our determination to tackle VAWG, the partnership has made a pledge to ensure that this learning is incorporated into our strategy to assist all women and girls who are in need of support and protection. We will do this by using the learning to develop tailored communication awareness raising campaigns that speak to all organisations and communities across Islington. We will also continue to listen to and empower survivors and their families to help us improve and develop our services and response to VAWG.

Thank you lots and lots, I will never forget the support you provided me at that difficult period of my life. [...] I have a lot of love for you and will never forget this throughout my life. My hopes are that I will be able to come back to you in an even better time of my life and give you more positive news.

**The Samira Project service user**

# 5. Strategic Context

This section of the strategy provides information on key priority areas for the local Islington partnership with a focus on challenging inequality and vulnerability. It includes the challenges caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, our approach to perpetrators and a specific focus on doing more to recognise and support young people who are experiencing intimate partner violence.

## 5.1 Challenging inequality and vulnerability

Islington's Fairer Together, For a Fairer Future strategy launched in 2021 and sets out the partnership's commitment to create a more equal Islington, where all residents have an equal chance to thrive. We are determined to challenge inequality throughout the delivery of our VAWG services, to prevent discrimination and to address the impacts of intersectionality.

This strategy acknowledges that some groups of victims have additional barriers to seeking help. This includes Black and Minoritised women, women with disabilities, older women and LGBTQ+ communities. While this is a gender informed strategy that recognises the disproportionate impact of VAWG on women and girls we recognise that boys and men can be affected also and we are working to end all forms of violence and we provide VAWG support services that work with all genders.

## Black and Minoritised women and intersectionality

We recognise that Black and Minoritised women's intersectional needs and experience of discrimination and oppression have existed for centuries. Addressing these matters has become even more critical in current times, as we face national economic crises such a reduced economy, the aftermath of Brexit, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the heightening of systemic racism as highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement. Black and Minoritised communities have been hit disproportionately hard by the pandemic, and women in those communities were hit hardest of all, as the health pandemic converged with the epidemic of violence against women and girls. Black and Minoritised women have been re-traumatised and re-victimised as they face structural racism and classism in their quest for a safer, violence-free life.

Therefore, Islington is committed to ensuring that Black and Minoritised women's needs are acknowledged and addressed through an intersectional lens, when providing support around the VAWG they face. Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc<sup>4</sup>. We are adopting an equitable approach towards Black and Minoritised women's needs, to deliver an inclusive journey to safety for all women and children.

The partnership is committed to ensuring that key agencies working with survivors should be fully trained in Black and Minoritised women's intersectional experiences/ needs and actively encouraged to adopt a more inclusive approach. This is particularly important for the statutory agencies who have the most impact and influence on those survivors and their children's lives. We also acknowledge that resources for addressing VAWG should be distributed more equally and recognise the need for specialist expertise in supporting women from these groups. Just as we adopt a zero tolerance approach to VAWG, so too we take a zero tolerance approach to racism and discrimination, and we call on all agencies to do the same.

## Women experiencing multiple disadvantage and trauma

VAWG survivors can face ongoing and challenging effects of abuse and the trauma they have experienced in their relationships, their childhood and throughout their lives. When looking at the occurrence of VAWG across the life course, it becomes apparent that some women experience multiple forms of VAWG, which embeds and entrenches their trauma. In turn, this can impact on their mental well-being: depression, anxiety, sleep problems and panic attacks are all common responses. Some may self-medicate with alcohol and legal or illegal drugs in an effort to feel 'normal' again and to escape the painful and intrusive memories.

There are many other ways in which women and girls' lives may involve disadvantage or negative experiences, resulting in yet more trauma. Sometimes this will be a consequence of discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics. For example, they may have experienced racism or have been discriminated against because of their disabilities. This is why it is so important for all public services to be gender- and trauma-informed. Trauma-informed responses seek to empower clients, build trust and them respectfully and with concern for their safety. This means not asking 'what is wrong with you?' but instead 'what has happened to you?' and 'how can we help you?' Trauma-informed services understand and respond to the high prevalence of trauma and its effects, as well as understanding that experiences of trauma can lead women to develop coping strategies and behaviours that may appear to be harmful or dangerous.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.womankind.org.uk/intersectionality-101-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important/>

## Women involved in prostitution/Sex working

Women at the Well is a Camden based organisation working with women involved in or at risk of being involved in prostitution/sex work across London. They estimate that 100% of the women they work with have 'experienced some form of control by another person or some form of coercion and/or exploitation. A high percentage of the women have experienced or continue to experience domestic violence'<sup>5</sup>. Islington will continue to work with women involved in prostitution/sex work through our main Domestic Abuse services and specialist services including Women at the Well, CLASH and other relevant organisations and agencies.

## Disabled women

Safe Lives research in 2016<sup>6</sup> found that disabled women experience higher rates of domestic abuse than non disabled people and suffer more severe and frequent abuse over longer periods of time than non-disabled victims. Disabled people also have additional barriers to seeking help and are less able to remove themselves from an abusive situation, and in many cases the abuser may also be the person's carer who controls access to sources of help. Islington will work with children's and adult safeguarding teams and other relevant organisations to develop and deliver training to improve identification and our service response to disabled women.

## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender + people



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender + (LGBT+) people experience high levels of domestic abuse, and also face distinct systemic and personal barriers in accessing help and support. Research by GALOP<sup>7</sup> in 2018 found that

- Lesbian women report similar rates of domestic abuse to that of heterosexual women.
- Bisexual women are twice as likely to disclose intimate partner violence compared to heterosexual women.
- Gay and bisexual men might be twice as likely to experience domestic abuse compared to heterosexual men.
- Prevalence rates of domestic abuse may be higher for transgender people than any other section of the population

However, in 2020-2021 only 3% of survivors using Islington VAWG services were recorded as LGBTQ and we are in discussion with GALOP to inform our approach and improve services and our reach into the LGBT+ community.

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<sup>5</sup>Women at the Well <https://watw.org.uk>

<sup>6</sup>Safe Lives. Disabled People and Domestic Abuse, 2016

<sup>7</sup>J. Magić and P. Kelley. LGBT+ People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse: a report on Galop's domestic abuse advocacy service. Galop, London, 2018

## 5.2 Young people experiencing domestic abuse

Research shows that significant numbers of teenagers and young adults are experiencing violence in their relationships. For example, an NSPCC study<sup>8</sup> found that 25% of girls and 18% of boys had experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner. And SafeLives Children's Insights data (2017)<sup>9</sup> found that nearly all (95%) of young people experiencing intimate partner violence were female. We recognise that young people experiencing abuse have distinctive experiences, challenges and needs and are committed to increasing our awareness and understanding of these. One of our key priorities is to work with the partnership and our practitioners to actively change how we support young people through our services.

Young people experiencing Domestic Abuse have sometimes also gone through harmful and traumatic experiences in early childhood, which can impact their understanding of healthy relationships and behaviour. Some do not have anyone around them who can talk to them or model what a healthy relationship looks like. At the same time, violence and intimidation may be regular features of the behaviour of their peer group. It is therefore vital that we develop well-informed and reasonable expectations of the young people we engage with. For example, we should recognise when talking to young people about their relationships that the term 'relationship' may not describe accurately what they have with another person. We must also recognise that young people's experiences cannot be improved by working with them alone. Rather, those young people using violence and abuse in their relationships (dating/sexual/peer/familial) must also be supported to recognise, understand and change their harmful behaviour.

Our efforts with young people experiencing abuse are also informed by our learning from Serious Case and Learning Reviews in this category. They tell us that too often practitioners have had a limited understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse and particularly coercive control. This leads practitioners to focus on addressing the behaviour of the victim/survivor of the abuse, rather than the person using abuse. It can also lead them to criticising or hold victim/survivors responsible for some or all of what has happened to them. This can inhibit victim/survivors from making disclosures, trusting services, and accessing help and support.

We believe that education, prevention and early intervention are crucial to changing the experiences of young people and this needs to start at an early age through teaching. Education environments can challenge what young people may be learning at home or online and teach them about healthy relationships, challenging

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<sup>8</sup>Barter et al Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships, London NSPCC, 2009

<sup>9</sup>SafeLives, 'Insights National Briefing 2017'

misogynistic attitudes and behaviours from an early stage. Teenage girls in Islington have shared that they want more learning to address the abuse and harassment girls and young women experience in schools, public transport and on the streets, but that this should not focus on how girls can stay safe but should be provided to boys in school to challenge their behaviours. Young people have also shared that they want professionals working with them to be knowledgeable about these issues and how they affect them. Islington recognises these concerns this is a key part of our strategy. Through work across the partnership, we aim to ensure that schools are supported to ensure girls and other victims are safe from harassment violence and abuse but also that professionals working with young people have access to adequate training and support to meet their needs.

### 5.3 Covid 19 pandemic

The conditions arising from the Covid 19 pandemic and the various lockdowns introduced from March 2020 exacerbated issues such as confinement, economic insecurity, fear of illness, increased substance use and mental health issues and this contributed to a widely anticipated increase in domestic abuse across the world. In the UK, ONS figures show that offences flagged as domestic abuse by police in the period March – June 2020 increased by 7% compared to the same period in 2019.

Nationally 90% of VAWG Services saw an increase in demand for services since the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>10</sup>. In Islington, reported domestic abuse offences rose by 4.2% in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. This is significantly less than the 7% increase across the Met Police Service for the same period. However, local VAWG services and in particular helplines were extremely busy as lockdown measures eased.

This does not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of people experiencing violence or abuse. However, there has been an increase in the severity of abuse reported to statutory and voluntary and community services. People experiencing abuse have also been less able to use coping strategies such as leaving the home to escape the abuse, and less able to access support services. The additional council investment in April 2020 meant that council-funded VAWG services increased their capacity to support victims by 56% in 2020-21.

The Domestic Homicide Project report<sup>11</sup> on the impact of the pandemic concluded that while Covid 'had not caused domestic abuse' it had 'been weaponised by some abusers both as a new tool of abuse or as an excuse for abuse'. The report warned that police and relevant agencies in the UK should be prepared for an increase in domestic abuse offences, homicides and suicides, as some abusers' control is taken away by the easing of Covid restrictions, and other abusers regain access to victims. With the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic likely to last for many years the need for a coordinated community response to VAWG has never been more critical. Achieving such a response is a key objective in this strategy.

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<sup>10</sup>SafeLives, Annual Practitioner Survey (2020).

<sup>11</sup>National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing, Domestic Homicide Project, Report on the impact of the pandemic (2021)

## 5.4 Working with perpetrators

The evidence pertaining to ‘what works’ and is effective with perpetrators is underdeveloped in the area of VAWG. This is not because of an absence of research, but due to the extremely poor conviction and/or treatment rates in relation to perpetrators in England and Wales (and beyond). For example, national statistics show a 50% drop in the number of convictions in cases where rape had been alleged between 2016–17 and 2019–20. At the time of drafting this strategy, the number of convictions in England and Wales was the lowest since tracking began in 2009. The picture is similar in domestic abuse cases. In June 2021 Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire Rescue services (HMICFRS) released a report showing that three in four domestic abuse cases are closed by police without a perpetrator being charged, a deterioration which is extremely concerning.

Islington welcomes the Home Office’s publication of the ‘Tackling Violence against Women and Girls strategy’, which provides some important ideas about how perpetrators can be rehabilitated through treatment programmes and dealt with through the criminal justice system. The latter is particularly significant for those perpetrators who do not want to receive treatment and/or are more persistent and violent offenders. The Home Office strategy lists a number of key points of focus for work in this area including changing perpetrator behaviour, the criminal justice system response, robust management of offenders and perpetrator programmes. In the next section we will look at the gaps that exist in addressing violence of perpetrators that exist across the UK.

## 5.5 Changing Perpetrator behaviour and Perpetrator programmes – what are the gaps?

### Key gaps include:

- **The invisibility of perpetrators**
  - When it comes to reports of men abusing and controlling women, the passive voice prevails. For example ‘Women are groped, Women are sexually harassed, Women are abused, raped and exploited’. In every single one of these statements, the perpetrator has disappeared. This absence makes it difficult to address perpetrators and hold them accountable. At the same time, by emphasising the role of the victim/survivor in their own abuse, this framing can encourage professionals to judge, blame, and shift responsibility for abuse onto their shoulders. Instead of asking what a victim/survivor was (not) doing / wearing / saying to invite the abuse, and instead of questioning why she does not leave, we must be asking why he does not stop.

- **One size does not fit all so a range of interventions is needed**

There are five 'levels' of intervention needed with VAWG perpetrators and gaps exist for all:

- **Identification and case Management:** In addition to the perpetrator interventions described below, there is a need for more support to help professionals identify and engage with perpetrators to encourage them to access specialist intervention.
- **Prevention and Awareness Raising:** This kind of intervention is likely to be short in duration and aimed at lower risk perpetrators who do not have an established history of violence or abuse.
- **Structured Intervention for Behaviour Change 1:** These will be aimed at perpetrators identified as posing a standard or moderate risk and who have limited personal/social needs. Interventions may be generalist in their approach or designed to work with specific offending types such as stalkers or rapists. Each will need to have appropriate assessment mechanisms. Any behaviour change intervention should use a recognised model of work.
- **Structured Intervention for Behaviour Change 2:** The Home Office is currently investing in innovative responses to perpetrators. This may include the development of interventions with perpetrators who have more extensive personal / social needs (e.g. substance abusing perpetrators) or the development of programmes for female abusers.
- **Intensive Risk Management:** Flexible in approach and almost exclusively one to one, these interventions will engage typically with high harm perpetrators many of whom will have multiple complex needs. Whilst the main focus of the intervention may initially be risk assessment and management, for some there may also be scope for structured behaviour change work.

- **A non-negotiable commitment to safety**

Any interventions with perpetrators must begin from a principle of 'first do no harm'. At its most basic, this means that any perpetrator intervention must have a dedicated and funded victim/survivor support element that meets their individual needs. This must be delivered by a specialist DA organisation and may be integrated within the specialist perpetrator service or provided in partnership with an external provider. It must work effectively alongside the appropriate range of women's support services. More broadly, it means development should take place within a framework of quality standards such as those developed by Respect.<sup>12</sup>

- **Interventions for all VAWG perpetrators**

Current interventions are disproportionately focused on perpetrators of intimate partner abuse, whereas many cases can involve adult child to parent and or siblings. We also need interventions that will work for rapists, sexual harassers and those who perpetrate so-called honour-based abuse or forced marriages.

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<sup>12</sup>See here for further details: <https://www.respect.uk.net/pages/20-accreditation>

## 5.6 Robust Management of Perpetrators

Holding perpetrators of VAWG accountable through the criminal justice system and inhibiting their ability to keep harming others is a vital aspect of prevention. Managing the risk posed by perpetrators is a key priority for the Probation Service and the partnership. The Probation Service provides advice to the Courts on the sentencing of domestic abuse cases and supervises perpetrators who are subject to community sentences or released from prison on licence. Perpetrators are placed on accredited programmes such as Building Better Relationships or they complete one-to-one interventions to address domestic abuse with their supervising officer. Referrals to appropriate multiagency risk management panels including MARAC and MAPPA and liaison with partnership agencies aims to safeguard victims/survivors and their families, and put in place robust risk management plans. Perpetrators released on licence may be subject to conditions including residence in approved premises, curfews, exclusion zones, non-contact conditions, a requirement to disclose developing relationships and GPS tagging. Failure to comply with those conditions can ultimately lead to recall back to prison. For example, where evidence is available, perhaps through a victim's statement, that an offender has breached a non-molestation order, this can be used by Probation services to send the offender back to custody to serve the remainder of his sentence

Probation practitioners continue to liaise with Islington's DSM meeting, IDVAs, women's safety officers, victim liaison officers and children's services to ensure the views of victims are heard and incorporated into risk management planning.

## The Criminal Justice System Response

In Islington we have strengthened the partnership working with criminal justice colleagues in recent years, as well as offering training to practitioners working with families experiencing domestic abuse to increase engagement with perpetrators. While it is positive that Islington police achieved the highest domestic abuse Sanction and Detection rate in the Metropolitan Police in 2020/2021 (at 18%), all partners including the police agree that this rate is still too low. In the 6 months following the introduction of the Daily Safeguarding Meeting in January 2021, we saw a 305% increase in requests for civil and legal protection orders, compared to the same period in the previous year. Islington council has also introduced the new Journey to Change Service working with people using abuse in their relationships to support behaviour change as part of the VAWG service transformation programme.

Despite this progress we remain realistic about the challenges that exist nationwide in relation to the criminal justice system response to domestic abuse offences and rape and sexual assaults. In June 2021, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services<sup>13</sup> inspection into the policing of domestic abuse during the pandemic found that the charging rate for DA offences in the UK dropped from 23.2%

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<sup>13</sup>HMICFRS, Review of policing Domestic Abuse during the pandemic (June 2021)

in 2016 to 9% in 2020 despite a 15% increase in arrests between April – June 2020. The report acknowledged that the ‘exceptionally low volume of domestic abuse cases resulting in a charge remains unacceptable’. It is estimated that approximately 85,000 women and 12,000 men (aged 16–59) experience rape or sexual assault by penetration each year in the UK<sup>14</sup>. The national ‘End to End rape review’<sup>15</sup> published in June led to a government admission that they were ‘deeply ashamed’ that only 1.7% of reported adult rape offences resulted in a prosecution in 2019/20, tens of thousands of victims are being let down.

At the same time it is important to recognise that Domestic Abuse is largely a hidden crime and while perpetrator services and responses tend to be focused on the criminal justice system or attached to children’s services statutory responsibilities. We know that many perpetrators do not come to the attention of criminal justice agencies or via other statutory interventions, and that leaves a worrying gap particularly in Domestic Abuse situations without children in the home, of which there are many. That is why making perpetrators visible and accountable is a key priority in this strategy and we will continue to work with our partners to improve criminal justice outcomes for survivors and to deploy the full range of civil and legal measures available to keep survivors/victims and families safe. At the same time, we will support local practitioners and services to do more to engage with all people who use violence and abuse in their relationships to increase the safety of, and reduce the risks to their partners and children.

I thought no one could even help me, I didn’t even know what had happened to me was happening to anyone else. The first day I spoke to my IDVA she told me she’d read my notes and she laid it all out...that was it, I felt like I was seeing it for the first time. She got it straight away. I don’t know what I would have done without her. And she wrote me that letter for the court, and it changed everything.

**Solace targeted IDVA service user**

<sup>14</sup>[www.Rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.Rapecrisis.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup>Ministry of Justice, End-to-End Rape Review Report, June 2021

## 5.7 Safety of women and girls in schools, workplaces, public transport and the Community

Women and girls have a right to be safe in public, at home, at work or in education and we are committed to doing everything we can to ensure this by building on existing initiatives and creating new resources and interventions through this strategy. Ultimately, we all have a shared responsibility to challenge behaviours and attitudes that enable VAWG and to create positive change for the benefit of us all. We recognise that often women do not feel safe in areas of our borough and that there are particular concerns about women's safety at night in or outside of venues. We also recognise that we need to increase the safety of women in the borough through measures that do not place responsibility on them alone. The council and our partners have a key role in this and have already been doing a lot in this space. Examples include the council and partnership's in promoting gender equality through the Challenging Discrimination Strategy, and communications campaigns e.g. 'Not in my Community' to make it clear that we will not tolerate violence and abuse of women or girls. Police in Islington have been working with licensed premises since the easing of the last lockdown to increase awareness of what they can do to keep women safe including the 'Ask Angela' campaign. As part of our approach Islington's Community Safety Team developed the Our Safer Spaces postcard campaign, encouraging residents to tell us where and why they feel unsafe locally that has attracted over 2000 responses.

### Safe Haven scheme

The Islington Safe Haven scheme has been running since 2017, providing a practical way of helping everyone in Islington enjoy their community knowing that support is easily available if someone is in danger, feels threatened or harassed on the street, and are in need of some help.



### Safe havens can help by:

- Letting someone come inside the premises to keep safe
- Calling the police or family or friends
- By giving directions or public transport information and signposting to VAWG services etc.

100+ premises are signed up to the Safe Havens scheme in Islington, a mixture of Council and statutory service buildings, including libraries and leisure centres, youth and community buildings, cafés and restaurants and other retail and service providers from corner shops to nail bars, taxi ranks and solicitors offices. Over 50% of these sites are open in the evening (between 5pm – 10am) some are 24 hours. The council is continuing to promote the scheme through the regular business networks and will be asking the Safer Neighbourhood Panel to work with us to check current premises and recruit new venues.

## Women's Safety Walks

This summer Islington4Women organised 6 neighbourhood walks where women have been able to come together to walk and talk and help improve safety after conversations that followed several highly publicised killings of women around the time this strategy was being written. The walks took place with police and crime safety officers to things out about how women feel about their local area providing an important opportunity to engage with women across Islington in identifying the issues and concerns as well as the solutions, and build relationships between the community and the police. The council is continuing to work with Islington4Women and other women's organisations and police in the borough to build on this work and discuss the findings from the Our Safer Spaces campaign and work together to develop practical initiatives that can make a difference

Issues of sexual harassment and violence in educational settings have been highlighted by thousands of young people in recent years on the Everyone's Invited Website. Islington's Children's Safeguarding Partnership is leading the response to VAWG in education and is developing comprehensive guidance and training for schools and support and interventions for young people. As part of our consultation for this strategy girls and young women told us that they reject the idea that it is solely their responsibility to keep themselves safe and that much more work must be done to educate boys and young men on what a healthy relationship looks like, especially in school settings. It is important to deliver this within a contextual safeguarding approach that recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Contextual safeguarding also entails understanding the ways in which young people's experience of domestic abuse may differ to that of adults, due to the increased use of social media within abusive behaviours and to pressure from peer and friendship groups.





# 6. Legislation and Strategy

## 6.1. The partnership response to legislative changes

The Domestic Abuse Act received royal assent in March 2021. At the time of writing, the Government is still notifying the public of when provisions will be enacted.

We expect that most of the new proposals will be in place in autumn 2022, with the likely exception of DAPOs (see below) which will be initially piloted before being rolled out more widely. The new legislative changes include amongst others:

- A new statutory definition of DA and the recognition of children as victims of DA in their own right for the first time
- Local authority statutory duty to provide support, secure tenancy and housing and to provide domestic abuse support to survivors and children e.g. counselling
- Prohibiting perpetrators of abuse from cross-examining their victims in person in the civil and family courts in England and Wales
- Other recent legislative changes of note include the Stalking Protection Act 2019 which introduced Stalking Protection Orders, and the 2015 criminalisation of coercive control in late 2015. The implementation of this latter change is still in progress, as Metropolitan Police have only begun to train their officers in 2021 due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Just to go ahead with it and speak to someone at Solace. They provide a lot of help and support which is really good. The external support systems that they give is really good so you're supported all the time e.g. the 24/7 DV helpline that you (worker) told me about.  
**Solace service user**

## Housing response

Islington council is committed to enabling residents to feel safe and well in their homes and communities.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and subsequent amendments to the Housing Act 1996 introduced the new category of 'priority need' for people who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse. The act also includes new duties on tier 1 local authorities in England relating to the provision of support for victims and their children residing within relevant safe accommodation and a duty on tier 2 authorities (i.e. Islington Council) to co-operate with tier 1 authorities.

In line with the wider objectives of the VAWG strategy, the council's Housing service has responded to the Domestic Abuse Act and amendments to the Housing Act by:

- developing a flexible approach to enable people experiencing domestic abuse to access homelessness services through multiple avenues as a means to ensure their safety including offering to be interviewed by an officer of the same sex if requested alongside the utilisation of translation services;
- employing Solace Women's Aid to advocate on behalf of residents experiencing domestic abuse, to ensure the Housing Needs and Strategy service provides a service empathetically and placing the resident at the heart of the service provision;
- providing services focussed on the needs of the individual and to ensure services provided go beyond the basic legal duties;
- developing a Rapid Rehousing and Housing First approach for people fleeing domestic abuse;
- ensuring homelessness assessments are focussed on the needs of the resident, underpinned by sensitivity and empathy, avoiding asking people experiencing domestic abuse to re-live their experience unnecessarily and where appropriate seeking information from independent domestic abuse advocates, social services, health professionals, MARAC etc;
- ensuring the provision of Sanctuary schemes to enable people experiencing domestic abuse can remain safely in their home where it is their choice, and it is safe to do so;

- ensuring flexibility for victims of domestic abuse to join the council's Housing Register to obtain permanent social housing including offering secure tenancies to victims of domestic abuse who previously held a secure tenancy in another local authority;
- reviewing the council's Housing Allocation Scheme by 2022 to strengthen the housing rights of people fleeing domestic abuse, clarify the council's position on how perpetrators will be managed;
- ensuring perpetrators of domestic abuse do not qualify to join the housing register
- providing specialist officers who are trained to support people fleeing domestic abuse to understand the housing options available to them once they are in safe accommodation;
- implementing an extensive programme to train domestic abuse champions across the Housing service, from front line officers to senior managers at all levels
- working closely with the neighbouring local authorities to develop a North London Domestic Abuse Reciprocal Agreement in addition to engaging with the Pan-London Reciprocal Agreement to facilitate out of area moves for victims of domestic abuse;
- aiming to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation by the April 2022;
- replacing references of domestic violence to that of domestic abuse as a result of the new widened definition specified in the Domestic Abuse Act;
- Providing housing accommodation services for people leaving prison to ensure they do not need to return to live with a perpetrator of Domestic Abuse once released from prison;
- Providing services to women who are forced to work within the sex industry to enable them to leave the sex industry with accommodation and support.

# 7. Our priorities, objectives, actions and governance arrangements

In order to ensure that we fulfil our responsibilities and duties to women and girls who are experiencing violence and abuse, or who are at risk of this, the partnership has set itself five key priorities. These are:

## 1) Create and deliver a coordinated community response

- Share the commitment to ending violence across organisations and communities so that no form of VAWG is tolerated and women and girls feel safe in their homes, schools, workplaces, public places and on public transport
- Ensure that all victims/survivors can be confident that they will be believed if they report VAWG and that their disclosure will trigger immediate actions to support their safety and the safety of their families whilst also holding the perpetrator accountable
- Develop education, training, awareness raising and communications campaigns to create a common language and understanding of VAWG and the services and support available to survivors, families and perpetrators

## **2) Prevent violence and abuse from happening**

- Develop public awareness campaigns to prevent harassment and sexual violence in private and public spaces, to include targeted age appropriate messages and messages specifically targeted at perpetrators
- Educate children and young people about VAWG and healthy relationships with specific focused interventions with boys and young men in schools as well as in other settings working with children and young people
- Develop a VAWG Community Champions scheme to empower local communities and provide a network of peer-to-peer support and community educators including information for perpetrators

## **3) Protect survivors and families and provide support to help them to repair and recover from the violence and abuse they have experienced**

- Deliver services across the Islington partnership that are both gender and trauma informed, victim and family centred, and which recognise the impacts of coercive and controlling behaviours
- Provide a prompt coordinated multi-agency safeguarding response to survivors and families at risk of serious harm and/or domestic homicide through Islington's DA Daily Safeguarding Meeting
- Support children, young people and families to help them to process what has happened and to recover through innovative recovery based services and counselling/therapeutic support

## **4) Challenge inequality throughout the delivery of or VAWG services and approach to prevent discrimination and address the impacts of intersectionality**

- Equip and support our services to be survivor voice led and able to recognise the impacts of intersectionality so that they are able to work with survivors experiencing discrimination and multiple disadvantage
- Work collectively to combat racism and all forms of discrimination recognising that a one size fits all approach doesn't work including the ring fencing of funding for specialist VAWG services working with Black and minoritised communities
- Provide targeted work and resources to improve engagement and increase provision for other under-represented groups including LGBTQ communities, older people and people with disabilities

## **5) Make perpetrators visible and accountable**

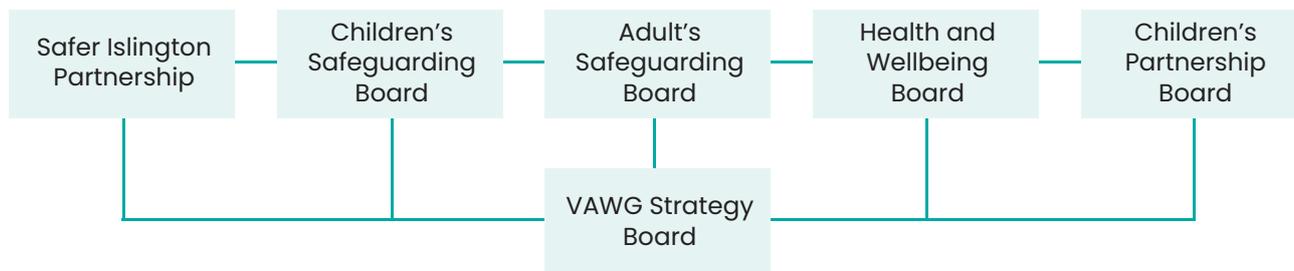
- Offer interventions and support to people using violence in their relationships where they have expressed a desire to change their behaviour and demonstrate self-awareness and insight in to what they have done
- Work together with our statutory partners to improve criminal justice outcomes for survivors of all forms of VAWG including rape and sexual violence where offences have been reported
- Perpetrators will be visible and accountable in safety planning and work with families and services will acknowledge that they pose the primary risk to children in child safeguarding arrangements

In order to demonstrate our commitment to these priorities, we have developed a multi-agency action plan which outlines the actions that key agencies, within the partnership, will deliver in order to keep women and girls safe.

## 7.1. Performance measures

The delivery of the VAWG strategy will be overseen by the VAWG Strategy Board, the Safer Islington Partnership and other key Islington governance boards as outlined and illustrated in the diagram below. Our aim is to eliminate all forms of Violence against Women and Girls, support survivors and to rehabilitate and make perpetrators accountable for their actions. This is a partnership effort and we have set out the performance measures below to ensure that we can robustly monitor our progress throughout the five years of the strategy.

### VAWG Strategy report



#### We will know if we have been successful if we have:

- No or reduced homicide cases
- Increased sanction and detection % rates for domestic abuse incidents reported to the police
- Increased the number of Clare's Law applications
- Increased the number of Stalking Protection notices
- Increased reporting of domestic abuse incidents across all services in Islington (not just to the police)
- Increased the number of survivors accessing VAWG services and support in Islington
- Increased the rape investigation % rate
- Increased the rape charge % rate
- Increased the accuracy of police referrals to Daily Safeguarding Meeting (DSM) / MARAC
- Decreased the number of repeat referrals to the DSM/MARAC
- Increased engagement of survivors in the DSM/MARAC process
- Increased survivor satisfaction in the DSM/MARAC
- Increased the identification of / and support offered to young survivors of DA
- Increased the number of FGM investigations and referrals
- For the profile of survivors to be demographically representative of Islington's population
- Increased support and services accessed by Black and Minoritised ethnic communities
- Increased engagement with other underrepresented groups: LGBTQ+ communities, older people and people with disabilities
- Increased engagement of perpetrators in services and interventions and achieve a sustained reduction in harmful behaviours

# 8. References and Acknowledgements

## **Consultation and support:**

- Davina James-Hanman OBE – Independent Advisor
- Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou – University of Essex

## **VAWG strategy leads:**

- Cllr Sue Lukes – Executive Member for Community Safety (VAWG Board Co-Chair)
- Cllr Michelline Ngongo – Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families
- Cllr Una O’Halloran – Executive Member for Community Development
- Curtis Ashton – Director of Young Islington, co-author
- Catherine Briody – Head of VAWG and Youth Safety Commissioning, co-author
- Maxine Holdsworth – Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods
- Jo Murphy – Director of Homes and Community Safety
- Ralph Coates – Detective Chief Inspector Central North Safeguarding, BCU
- Karolina Bober – VAWG Strategy and Commissioning Manager, co-author
- Grace Willsher – Solace Women’s Aid
- Tania Townsend – Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy
- Ramesh Logeswaran – Head of Housing Needs and Strategy
- Helena Stephenson – Head of Housing Partnerships
- Deborah Idris – Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance
- Elaine Oxley – Head of Safeguarding Adults and Mental Capacity
- Tanya Pinnock – Home Safe Practitioner and VAWG Board Co-Chair
- Baljinder Heer-Matiana – Assistant Director Public Health
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- Johnathon Gallagher – Acting Head of Community Safety
- Daniel White – Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Worker – Journey to Change

- Natalie Dartey – Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Worker – Journey to Change
- Rachel Reynolds – Project Officer VAWG Workforce Development
- Rupert Bagenal – Project Officer VAWG Workforce Development
- 3rd sector partner leads:
  - Sawsan Salim – Kurdish Middle Eastern Womens Organisation
  - Senay Dur – IMECE
  - Yenny Aude – Latin American Women’s Aid (LAWA)
  - Catarina Sousa – DVIP
  - Angie Herrera – LAWA
  - Aygul Ozdemir – KEMWO
  - Anita Grant – Islington Play Association & Isington4Women
  - Lauren Appleby – Solace Women’s Aid

**Health leads:**

- David Pennington – Clinical Commissioning Group
- Marie Fitzpatrick – Clinical Commissioning Group
- Emma Stubbs – Public Health

**Additional Police leads:**

- DI Matthew Hogg
- ADS Stacey Smith
- PC Kevin Nicholls

**Co-production feedback:**

A special thanks to all the survivors who contributed to the development of this strategy from the following organisations

- Solace
- Samira (IMECE, LAWA, and KMEWAO)
- The Sunflower Project
- DVIP
- Violence Reduction Unit Parental Support Project
- Pause Project
- Better Lives
- Galop
- SHP Single Homeless Project

**Do you need this information in another language or reading format such as Braille, large print, audio or Easy Read?**

**Please contact 020 7527 2000.**