

**Sutton Domestic Abuse / Violence Against Women and  
Girls Strategy 2018 - 2020**

**June 2018**

**Agreed by the Safer Sutton Partnership Board**

## 1. Background

As set out in our Safe in Sutton Community Safety Strategy (2017-20), preventing domestic abuse (DA) and violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a key community safety priority in Sutton. No form of abuse of women is acceptable or inevitable, and we want Sutton to be a place where all women and girls feel safe and able to live their lives fully.

As part of the Sutton Plan, public service partners in Sutton have identified the ambition of “refocusing our energies on the victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse”. As part of a three year Domestic Abuse Transformation Programme (2017-20), the following organisations and groups have committed to transforming and improving the multi-agency response to domestic abuse in Sutton:

- London Borough of Sutton
- Metropolitan Police
- Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Sutton Primary and Secondary Headteachers’ Forums
- Community Action Sutton (on behalf of the voluntary and community sector)
- Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust
- London Fire Brigade
- Sutton Housing Partnership
- Sutton Clinical Commissioning Group

This strategy focuses in detail on our approach to domestic abuse over the next two years, but should be seen in the context of the broader work in Sutton to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls. Domestic abuse does not occur in a vacuum, and we recognise that addressing other forms of VAWG is vital to a successful coordinated community response to DA. Our approach to VAWG interventions is described in section 9 of this document and in the Sutton Crime Prevention and Community Safety Strategy 2017-20.

While we recognise that domestic abuse can and does also affect men and boys, it is important to acknowledge and treat this as a gendered issue as the vast majority of high risk and repeat victims are female, and the vast majority of perpetrators are male. As emphasised in the Mayor of London’s Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, it is vital that we acknowledge the extent to which these crimes can stem from broader societal attitudes to women and girls, and that we challenge and reject these misogynistic attitudes wherever we see them.

The plans referenced in this strategy are intended to benefit all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their gender, and we will recognise the distinct needs of different demographic groups and reflect these in the services we commission.

This strategy replaces the ‘Identifying, Preventing and Protecting’ Sutton Multi-Agency Domestic Violence and Abuse / Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2015-2018.

## 2. Vision and outcomes

Our vision for the DA Transformation Programme is that:

***“By 2020, Sutton will be known as a place where domestic abuse is not acceptable.***

***This means that:***

- ***People affected by DA will feel empowered to come forward early, knowing there is safe and effective support in place***
- ***Perpetrators will be held to account, managed effectively and supported to make lasting change***
- ***All public services will be working together with the community to prevent domestic abuse from happening.”***

The specific outcomes we are aiming to achieve by 2020 are:

- Outcome 1: All partners share a strategic vision for DA and all operational activity is coordinated to enable an effective response.
- Outcome 2: People in Sutton can identify DA and know what to do if they become a victim of or witness to DA, or are concerned about their own behaviour.
- Outcome 3: All public service providers understand their responsibility to identify, assess and respond to signs of DA in a way that meets need and reduces risk, and all are prioritising DA prevention.
- Outcome 4: Specialist services for victims are accessible, effective and sustainable, and interventions for perpetrators support them to make lasting change.
- Outcome 5: All crisis services are provided in a way which is sensitive to victims' needs and reduces the risk of repeat-victimisation and recidivism.

More detail on each of these outcomes and on how we aim to achieve them appears later in this strategy. As detailed in sections 5 and 6, the strategy has been informed by engagement with a variety of stakeholders - including residents, service users and sector specialists - as part of a Sutton-specific 'gap analysis' of domestic abuse services and a communications research project.

## 3. Policy and strategy context

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the following key documents, which set the context for tackling domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG in Sutton and London-wide:

- The London Domestic Violence Needs Assessment, commissioned by MOPAC in 2016.
- The Mayor of London's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2018-2021 and Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021.

- The government's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-2020 and accompanying National Statement of Expectations.
- The Safe in Sutton Crime Prevention and Community Safety Strategy 2017-2020
- The Sutton Community Safety Partnership Strategic Needs Assessment
- The Sutton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- The government's draft Domestic Abuse Bill, which is currently subject to consultation.

Together, these strategies and needs assessments provide the context for addressing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. Specifically, the Mayor's strategy cites the following broad aims for tackling DA/VAWG:

1. Encouraging more domestic abuse victims to come forward and reducing repeat victimisation.
2. Encouraging more victims of sexual violence to come forward and reducing repeat victimisation.
3. Reducing the rates of attrition in cases of violence against women and girls as they process through the criminal justice process.
4. Encouraging more victims of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), 'honour' based violence and forced marriage to come forward and report.

While the government's National Statement of Expectations states that DA/VAWG services should:

1. Put the victim at the centre of service delivery
2. Have a clear focus on perpetrators in order to keep victims safe
3. Take a strategic, system-wide approach to commissioning, acknowledging the gendered nature of VAWG
4. Be locally-led and safeguard individuals at every point
5. Raise local awareness of the issues and involve, engage and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions to prevent VAWG.

In Sutton, we will maintain a focus on these priorities and standards through our commissioning of DA/VAWG services over the next two years. We have also commissioned a Sutton-specific needs assessment, which has shown the specific strengths and weaknesses of DA service provision in Sutton and which we will use to inform our commissioning intentions through the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Transformation Programme. The findings of the needs assessment and corresponding delivery plan are detailed later in this strategy.

#### **4. Domestic abuse in Sutton**

We know that domestic abuse is a significantly underreported crime, with shame, stigma and fear often preventing reporting. Based on the information available, Sutton is 12th of 32 London boroughs in terms of reports of domestic abuse per 1000 people<sup>1</sup>. Reported figures suggest we have a higher rate of offences than Richmond, Merton and Wandsworth, but lower than Croydon. As a proportion of total violent crime, domestic abuse in Sutton stands at 35% which is higher than the London average (31%)<sup>2</sup>. We also know that domestic abuse

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<sup>1</sup> MOPAC Domestic and Sexual Violence Dashboard

<sup>2</sup> MPS Crime Reporting Information System

is a significant contributing factor in child protection issues - which have risen in the borough in recent years<sup>3</sup>.

We have a lot of good practice to be proud of in Sutton, with a high conviction rate for DA offences, a reducing repeat victimisation rate, and pioneering work in some schools. However, we have made domestic abuse a priority under the Sutton Plan because we are concerned that it represents a high proportion of violent incidents - and because it is unacceptable for any instance of this terrible crime to go undetected or unchallenged. Data from the recent consultation on the Mayor's strategy showed that 74% of female respondents were "worried about their safety some or all of the time". This is wrong, and it needs to change. We want Sutton to be a borough where everyone feels safe, especially in their own homes.

### **Who experiences domestic abuse?**

The most recent data available in Sutton shows that in 2017 73% of DA offences were reported by women, and 27% by men<sup>4</sup>. This is close to figures provided by Safe Lives<sup>5</sup> which suggest that, of the 1.9million people experiencing DA in the UK every year, 1.3million (68%) are female and 600k (32%) are male. However, we also know that women are significantly more likely to be victims of high risk or severe domestic abuse, with women representing 95% of all cases referred to the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) or accessing an independent domestic violence advocate (IDVA) service nationally.

The peak age for victims to report domestic abuse in Sutton is within the 25 to 31 age group, and has been showing a lowering trend year-on-year<sup>6</sup>. This is a notable change, which could suggest that victims in Sutton are reporting to police earlier. However, as set out in the Mayor's strategy<sup>7</sup>, we are also aware that younger people are more likely to be victims of high risk domestic abuse, and moreover that there are a lack of services across London targeted to young people. We will commit to ensuring a targeted approach to supporting young people through the Transformation Programme.

Data from Safe Lives tells us that there are several other risk factors for domestic abuse, including:

- having an income of less than £10,000
- pregnancy
- recent separation
- previous criminality of the perpetrator
- drug and alcohol abuse
- mental health issues.

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<sup>3</sup> Sutton Crime Prevention and Community Safety Strategy 2017-20

<sup>4</sup> MPS Crime Reporting Information System.

<sup>5</sup> Safe Lives is a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse and holds the largest national DA data set (<http://www.safelives.org.uk>).

<sup>6</sup> Sutton Crime Prevention and Community Safety Strategy 2017-20

<sup>7</sup> 'The London Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2018-2021' (p.25)

We also know from the London Domestic Violence Needs Assessment that “there are gaps in the provision of services for people with disabilities, BAME communities, LGBT victims and those with no recourse to public funds.” It is vital that these factors are taken into account in our commissioning, to ensure that the services we provide in Sutton reflect the wide range of needs of victims and survivors from different demographic groups.

More detail on the prevalence of domestic abuse across demographic groups in Sutton is set out in the Sutton Community Safety Partnership Strategic Needs Assessment.

## **5. Gap analysis and resident engagement**

The first year of the Domestic Abuse Transformation Programme (February 2017- March 2018) was the analysis phase, the aim of which was to form a strong evidence base for the programme, establishing the strengths and weaknesses of the current coordinated community response (CCR) in order to identify opportunities for improvement. The majority of this evidence has been drawn from two key activities, namely:

- A ‘mapping and gap analysis’ exercise, undertaken by Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (a national charity commissioned to support the programme in a consultancy role).
- A research project undertaken by the council’s communications team (with support from Standing Together). This included both qualitative and quantitative research activities, and resulted in a research report summarising respondents’ views and understanding about domestic abuse in Sutton.

The ‘mapping and gap analysis’ was informed by engagement with domestic abuse specialists and service users in Sutton (through channels including one to one interviews and consultation groups) as well as by detailed desktop research. The key issues identified and reported to the Domestic Abuse Transformation Board were as follows:

1. There is a need for clearer and more joined up senior leadership in relation to DA, supported by effective use of reliable data.
2. We must ensure sustainable funding for the specialist DA services (including IDVAs) that currently underpin the coordinated community response.
3. There are some significant strengths and innovative practice to celebrate, and we can build on good practice from a range of recognised interventions such as the PYRAMID Project (delivered by the Limes College with funding from the Home Office VAWG Transformation Fund).
4. There are some operational gaps, and the overall response to domestic abuse is not always coordinated.
5. There are opportunities to link domestic abuse public campaigns with local activity and work to increase awareness.

The communications research project included an online survey - which received 272 responses - and qualitative research with 31 participants via the ‘My Sutton’ online community platform (both of these pieces of research were based on self-completion, and the findings are best seen as a ‘snapshot’ of awareness of domestic abuse in Sutton). The

key insights identified through the communications research project were:

- 96% of survey respondents said that they were familiar with the concept of domestic abuse.
- Two-thirds of respondents said that domestic abuse is a problem in Sutton, and three in ten said that it is a very big problem.
- 44% said if they ever needed help from local domestic abuse services that they would know who to speak to:
  - About half were aware of the One Stop Shop
  - Two-thirds would speak with an independent DA advisor
  - The majority said they could speak to their GP
  - 49% said they would be able to discuss domestic abuse with a police officer.

These findings are being used to inform the DA Transformation Programme delivery plan, as set out in more detail below.

## 6. DA Transformation Programme approach and delivery plan

The DA Transformation Programme delivery plan will build on existing good practice in Sutton - including the MARAC, One Stop Stop and IDVA provision. Following the gap analysis undertaken by Standing Together, we recognise there is more preventative work that can be done to stop domestic abuse occurring or escalating, which in turn will reduce the pressure on these specialist services. The Sutton Plan partners taking part in the DA Transformation Programme have endorsed a five-tier approach to tackling domestic abuse; this is described below, with more detail available in the full delivery plan.

### Tier 1: Strategic and operational partnership work

This tier focuses on the effectiveness of partnership working in Sutton at both strategic and operational levels. Ultimately, we want to ensure that **all partners share a strategic vision for DA and all operational activity is coordinated to enable an effective response (Outcome 1)**. The gap analysis told us that there is a strong commitment across the borough at a strategic level to improve the coordinated community response to domestic abuse, supported by expert and experienced professionals and a well attended DA/VAWG consultation forum. However, it also told us that there is more to be done to ensure the voices of specialist service providers and of survivors - including children - reach decision makers in a consistent way.

It was noted that specialist services such as Sutton Women's Centre and Women's Aid are held in high regard by service users and a range of professionals and that it is important to harness their knowledge and expertise as effectively as possible (for example, through training programmes). We were also advised to consolidate and clarify our governance structures, and to ensure a consistent approach to data collection and analysis.

To address these findings, we will:

- Refresh the governance structures for DA in Sutton, ensuring clear mechanisms for specialist service providers and survivors to be heard (see more detail in section 7 below).
- Review the use of data within and between organisations, and implement an improvement plan.
- Ensure that DA is embedded in all relevant commissioning and contract management activities across the DA Transformation Programme partners.
- Create thematic 'operational groups' to manage various strands of work, and ensure the appropriate resource to coordinate these.
- Create a multi-agency workforce development plan in relation to DA.
- Review all employment policies, protocols and processes across the partnership to ensure that they address DA appropriately and are clear, accessible and meaningfully embedded in each organisation.

### Tier 2: Universal response

An effective universal response to domestic abuse should mean that **people in Sutton can identify DA, and know what to do if they become a victim of or witness to DA, or are concerned about their own behaviour (Outcome 2)**. The gap analysis told us that we have a committed communications team who consult meaningfully with residents, and that DA experts are working determinedly across Sutton, especially in health settings and in some schools. In terms of improvements, we need to ensure this good practice is consistent across all resident-facing services, and that support is clearly signposted and easy for residents to access.

We will:

- Implement a cross-borough communications plan to ensure all residents are aware of different kinds of domestic abuse and how they can access support.
- Create a single point of access for service information.
- Create a 'champions' network with community and voluntary sector groups.
- Building on outstanding practice at the Limes College, set a clear standard for schools to identify and deal with DA and support all schools to achieve or exceed this.
- Explore the use of new technology, particularly to reach younger victims of DA.
- Focus on building best practice within community-based health settings such as GP practices, ensuring referral pathways are clear and effective.

### Tier 3: Targeted response

Targeted services are activities targeted to individuals or groups who exhibit early signs of being subject to or perpetrators of abuse. We want to ensure that **all public service providers understand their responsibility to identify, assess and respond to signs of DA in a way that meets need and reduces risk, and all are prioritising DA prevention (Outcome 3)**. Standing Together's gap analysis commended the service offer from the One Stop Shop in Sutton, and recognised other areas of emerging good practice - particularly in social housing. To improve the targeted response to domestic abuse in Sutton,



we need to ensure that information gathered in dispersed service areas is systematically reported and fed into strategic decision making. We also need to implement a consistent 'whole family' approach to domestic abuse, and in particular to ensure appropriate support is available for young people - whether they are children growing up in abusive environments or are victims or perpetrators of abuse themselves.

We will:

- Create a steering group for all (public and private sector) housing providers, to build on the existing good practice at Sutton Housing Partnership and ensure consistency and knowledge transfer.
- Set a clear standard for health providers to identify and deal with DA and implement a 'whole health approach' to support all providers to achieve or exceed this.
- Work alongside the Children and Adult Safeguarding Boards and Adults / Children's Transformation Programmes, with a particular focus on ensuring appropriate targeted services for young people.

#### Tier 4: Specialist response

Specialist services include secondary/crisis intervention and tertiary or longer term intervention services for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. The gap analysis told us that in Sutton our MARAC functions effectively and that the council, police and IDVA services are working well together to support victims. Sutton also benefits from the expertise of charities such as Sutton Women's Centre and Women's Aid. We want to ensure that **specialist services for victims are accessible, effective and sustainable, and interventions for perpetrators support them to make lasting change (Outcome 4)**. In line with Safe Lives and as set out in the Mayor's strategy and the government's National Statement of Expectations, we believe in focusing on changing perpetrators' behaviour rather than expecting victims and survivors to change theirs; simply put, we should be asking "why doesn't he stop?" rather than "why doesn't she leave?"

The gap analysis emphasised the need to ensure sustainable funding for all specialist services and, as set out above, also highlighted the need for improved services for young people (noting that this is an issue nationally rather than specific to Sutton).

We will:

- Establish a working group to analyse core budgets and the resources needed to ensure sustainable specialist service provision.
- Develop close links with the council's Specialist Safeguarding Lead (a new role within the People directorate), including developing a multi-agency DA threshold and protocol for responding to DA.
- Following more detailed analysis and an evaluation of best practice, develop a commissioning plan which addresses the identified gaps in:
  - Interventions for perpetrators
  - Services for young victims and perpetrators
  - Counselling and other mental health services, especially for children and

teens.

#### Tier 5: Crisis response

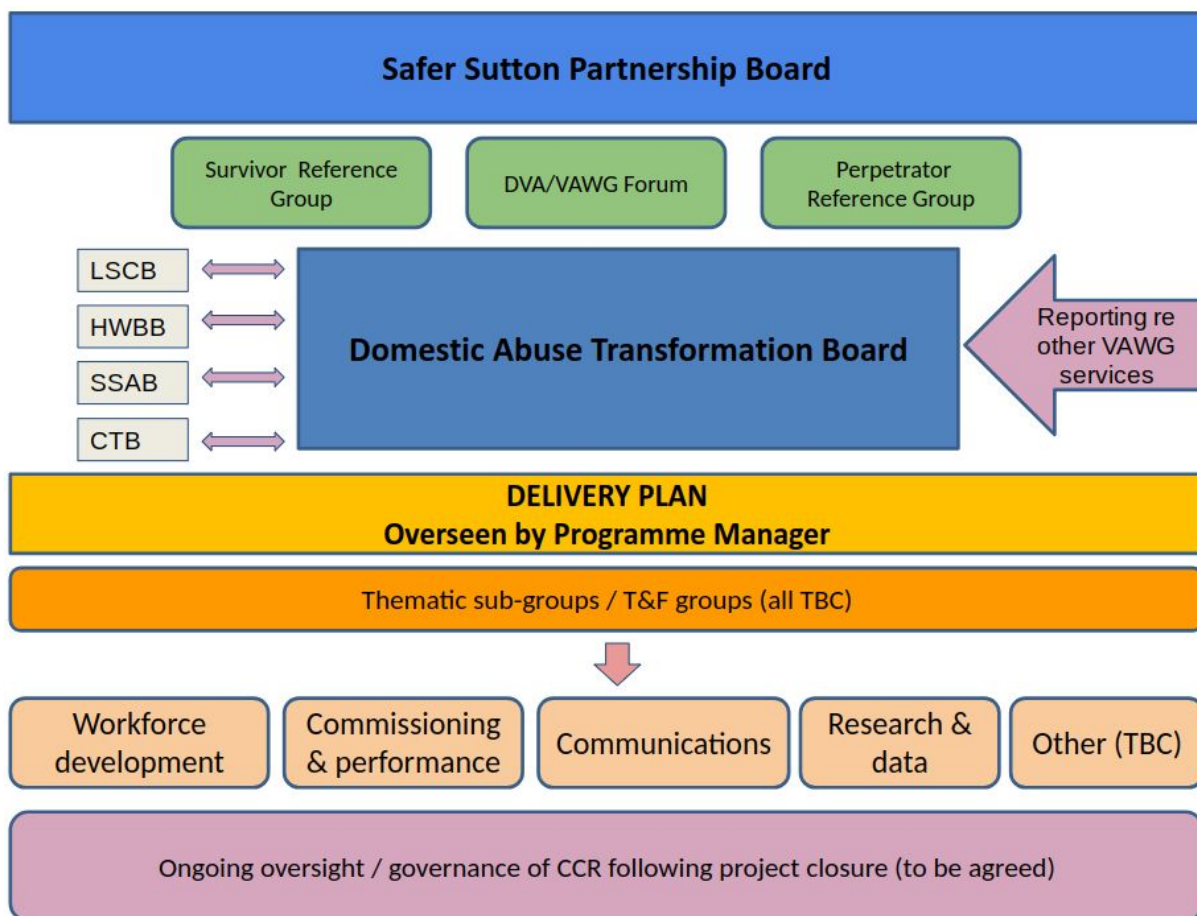
In terms of our crisis services - ie. the police, as well as specialist services including sexual assault referral centres and IDVAs - the gap analysis identified few systemic weaknesses. It was, however, recommended that we introduce a specialist court model, which has been shown elsewhere to improve survivors' confidence in the criminal justice system as well as increasing conviction rates. This supports our ambition to ensure that **all crisis services are provided in a way which is sensitive to victims' needs and reduces the risk of repeat-victimisation / recidivism (Outcome 5).**

We will:

- Explore the specialist court model in place at Croydon Magistrates Court and / or establish a criminal justice task and finish group with the mandate to ensure a focus on survivors' safety and confidence in the criminal justice system.

## **7. Governance and leadership**

The Safer Sutton Partnership Board (SSPB) is the statutory board with responsibility for tackling domestic abuse. The DA Transformation Programme is lead by a multi-agency Transformation Board which is chaired by the council's Strategic Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration and reports to the SSPB. The programme will continue to be informed by engagement with stakeholders and other governing bodies as set out below:



This governance model involves suspending the current DA Strategic Board for the duration of the programme, with reporting of other work in relation to VAWG to come to the Transformation Board for information (or for decision on an 'exception' basis). Ongoing governance will be agreed as part of the programme closure.

## 8. Commissioning approach and measures of success

The DA Transformation Board will deliver this strategy in line with the council's commissioning framework (Analyse, Plan, Do, Review). This means interventions will be based on an understanding of need and an evaluation of potential service delivery models, and performance managed and evaluated against performance indicators based on the outcomes identified above, namely:

- Outcome 1: All partners share a strategic vision for DA and all operational activity is coordinated to enable an effective response.
- Outcome 2: People in Sutton can identify DA and know what to do if they become a victim of or witness to DA, or are concerned about their own behaviour.
- Outcome 3: All public service providers understand their responsibility to identify, assess and respond to signs of DA in a way that meets need and reduces risk, and all are prioritising DA prevention.
- Outcome 4: Specialist services for victims are accessible, effective and sustainable, and interventions for perpetrators support them to make lasting change.
- Outcome 5: All crisis services are provided in a way which is sensitive to victims'

needs and reduces the risk of repeat-victimisation and recidivism.

The issues outlined in this strategy will also be fed into all relevant needs assessments.

As set out under 'Tier 1: Strategic and operational partnership work', a review of available data is currently underway, which will identify the most appropriate data to measure success against these outcomes. All agencies will then commit to monitoring the performance of their services against impact measures and in a coordinated way to ensure we understand the whole picture of domestic abuse in Sutton.

## **9. Tackling other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Sutton**

While this strategy focuses in detail on our multi-agency approach to tackling domestic abuse, we recognise that this issue must be addressed within the wider context of violence against women and girls (VAWG) - and moreover that cases of domestic abuse often include other forms of VAWG.

The United Nations defines violence against women and girls as "as any act of gender-based violence that results or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or acts of violence which are suffered disproportionately by women." As well as domestic abuse, these acts include the following:

- Sexual violence and rape
- Stalking and harassment
- 'Honour-based' violence
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation
- Prostitution and trafficking
- Sexual exploitation

There are a variety of awareness-raising initiatives and targeted responses to VAWG issues in Sutton, which are progressed on a multi agency basis with specific agencies taking the lead as appropriate. These currently include:

- FGM task and finish group
- Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel, overseen by a strategic group

We will continue to promote awareness-raising and development of appropriate and proportionate responses to all VAWG strands, ensuring they are integrated within Sutton's coordinated community response.

## **10. Review date**

This is a two year strategy and will be reviewed and refreshed in 2020/21.

