

ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, DOMESTIC ABUSE AND WHITE RIBBON

Executive Summary

This report provides a brief update on the work the Council is doing to support the international campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls, as well as tackling domestic abuse locally by raising awareness and explain what everyone can do to make a difference.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) Woking Borough Council continues to resolve to raise awareness and understanding of risk posed by Violence Against Women and Girls across the Borough through its internal processes and external communications;
- (ii) Woking Borough Council works with partners and stakeholders in collaboration in achieving the greater awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls; and
- (iii) Woking Borough Council revisits its aim to be White Ribbon accredited annually, and undertakes to initiate this when the financial situation stabilises.

Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 22 November 2023

Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and White Ribbon

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a brief update on the Council's work around domestic abuse (DA) locally. There is background on the historical and current international position regarding the elimination of violence against women and girls and information on White Ribbon. At a local level, the authority has continued to work closely with the local support service, Your Sanctuary, as well as raising awareness about domestic abuse and the support that is available to staff, councillors and local residents. See Appendix 1 for a list of useful links.
- 1.2 There is also advice offered here for how everyone can help to call out abuse and support those who need it.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In 1993 the United Nations (UN) General Assembly issued the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. They defined violence against women as:

“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

- 2.2 Violence against women is one of the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world. Women are subjected to violence and abuse in their own homes, on the streets and during conflict and war.
- 2.3 The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is now held annually on 25th November. This year it will mark the launch of their UNiTE campaign from 25th November to 10th December. These 16 days of activism then concludes on the day that commemorates International Human Rights Day.
- 2.4 On the UN website they state:

‘This 2023 campaign Invest to Prevent Violence against Women & Girls will call on citizens to show how much they care about ending violence against women and girls and call on governments worldwide to share how they are investing in gender-based violence prevention. Join the global movement with the #NoExcuse slogan calling for urgent investments to prevent violence against women and girls.’
- 2.5 They go on to explain why we must eliminate violence against women:

‘Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma and shame surrounding it.

In general terms, it manifests itself in physical, sexual and psychological forms, encompassing:

- intimate partner violence (battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, femicide);
- sexual violence and harassment (rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber- harassment);
- human trafficking (slavery, sexual exploitation);
- female genital mutilation; and
- child marriage.’

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3.0 How Widespread is Violence and Abuse against Women and Girls?

3.1 There are some shocking statistics for this:

- 1 in 3 women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence
- 1 in 4 women in the UK experience domestic abuse at some point in their adult lives
- 2 women per week are killed by their partner/ex-partner on average every week in England and Wales
- 3 women per week take their own lives as a result of the domestic abuse they have experience.

4.0 What is currently in place to tackle this issue?

4.1 These are some of the current provisions:

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – bringing together legislation to protect survivors of DA, provide a definition, focus on support in safe accommodation settings and recognising children as survivors in their own right
- United Kingdom Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls strategy – a multi agency approach involving Local Authorities, Police, Health and Education
- Surrey Domestic Abuse Strategy – currently under review and will be refreshed for 2024
- Surrey Violence Against Women and Girl Strategy

5.0 Notice of Motion

5.1 In January 2022, there was a Notice of motion referred to the Executive from Council (see Appendix 2). This was accepted and officers have worked with councillors to consider how to implement this, including White Ribbon accreditation. Unfortunately, due to the current financial situation for the authority, not as much progress has been made as we would like to be reporting.

5.2 However, there has been the following:

- In both June 2022 and 2023, the Surrey Domestic Abuse Awareness Week was supported with social media campaigns, press releases and DA stickers in washrooms across the borough.
- To mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25th November 2022, Woking Borough Council placed 16 chairs in prominent locations around the borough. This was the 'A place for them' campaign. Shrouded in red, the empty chairs were in situ for the 16 days leading up to International Human Rights Day 10th December, to remind us that every 11 minutes, somewhere in the world, a woman or girl dies at the hands of an intimate partner or family member.
- Delivery of staff awareness sessions on Domestic Abuse, including coercive control.
- For International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 2023 and the 16 days of activism, Councillors and staff are being provided with awareness sessions and a social media campaign will be run.

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6.0 What to do if you suspect Domestic abuse or there is a disclosure

6.1 A survivor is unlikely to say 'I am a victim/survivor of domestic abuse', so:

- Listen out for verbal clues – 'my partner does not let me, we are in a lot of debt but I don't know how, I don't have anybody to turn to'. Other examples are that you may notice inappropriate clothing for the time of year.
- Use a trauma informed approach when speaking to a survivor – create a safe space, be transparent and honest, provide choices, work with the survivor, empower them.
- Place the responsibility for the abuse with the perpetrator.
- Think about their safety and that of their children. Consider a referral for safeguarding.
- Use the helpline – it's there for everyone, not just survivors. If you are supporting someone you can use this to ask for advice and help.

6.2 Thankfully in Surrey, help and support is available to anyone that needs it. Anyone who is concerned about a loved-one, friend or colleague, can call the Surrey Domestic Abuse Helpline, available 9am to 9pm seven days a week, on 01483 776822 to get some advice. We can only put a stop to domestic abuse, and prevent the tragic loss of life, if we all work together.

7.0 How you can help

7.1 Everyone can help and here are some suggestions:

- Break the silence. Start a conversation with your group of friends/work colleagues about violence against women and girls. The more we talk about it the more we break the silence.
- Listen to and believe survivors. It's on all of us to give survivors the safe space they need to speak up and be heard.
- Teach the next generation and learn from them. The examples we set for the younger generation shape the way they think about gender, respect and human rights.
- Understand consent. Freely given, enthusiastic consent is mandatory, every time.
- Hold each other accountable. Violence and abuse can take many forms, including sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces. Take a stand and call it out when you see it: catcalling, inappropriate sexual comments and sexist jokes are never okay.
- Learn the signs of domestic abuse and how you can help. There are many forms of abuse and all of them can have serious physical and emotional effects. Visit the [Surrey Against Domestic Abuse | Healthy Surrey](#) to find out more.

7.2 Our local domestic abuse support service is provided by Your Sanctuary [Home | YS Home \(yoursanctuary.org.uk\)](#).

8.0 White Ribbon

8.1 White Ribbon is the UK's leading charity engaging men and boys to end violence against women and girls.

8.2 The current 2023 campaign from White Ribbon states:

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'Ending violence against women and girls starts when we #ChangeTheStory. Culture change doesn't happen overnight, but we can end men's violence against women and girls in our lifetimes.

This year, we are encouraging individuals and organisations to make consistent choices and actions to #ChangeTheStory for women and girls, so that they may live their lives free from the fear of violence.

Violence experienced by women and girls takes many forms. Some behaviours and words may seem 'harmless' but normalising them ignores the short- and long-term effects on women and can lead to more extreme violence.

Being allies with women every day shouldn't be underestimated — even the smallest actions can affect big change.'

8.3 Violence against women and girls is not a women's issue:

- 1 in 4 girls in mixed-sex schools have had experiences of unwanted sexual touching in school.
- 6 in 10 women have felt harassed in the gym by a man.
- 1.7 million women experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022.

8.4 However, it's often portrayed as one. This is due to the way women have long been responsible for navigating threats to their own safety. The first step to take to #ChangeTheStory is to understand that women and girls live with a fear of violence – and a threat of this fear of violence — that men do not experience in the same way.

8.5 #ChangeTheStory is about reversing this narrative: #AllMenCan take an active role in stopping violence before it starts by recognising and calling out attitudes and behaviours that are harmful and constitute as violence, and lead to more extreme cases of violence.

8.6 These statistics convey the widespread nature of men's violence against women in our society. This is a sad reality — and one we can change.

Do you know what violence looks like?

8.7 Violence against women and girls can happen anywhere and takes many forms – from sexist jokes online to harassing behaviours on the train. Some behaviours may be dismissed as 'small' or 'low-level' acts: sharing sexist 'jokes' at work or in group chats; catcalling women in the street; or harassing women on a night out. These all contribute towards creating a culture of fear and misogyny that encourages violence and abuse against women. In spaces where these behaviours are normalised, it can lead to more extreme cases of violence.

8.8 Here are some of the ways you can #CHANGESTHESTORY for women and girls

8.9 We want to reach as many men and boys as possible this White Ribbon Day, 25 November, so that we can build a better future together.

- Start by making the White Ribbon Promise to never use, excuse or remain silent about men's violence against women and girls. Making the White Ribbon Promise takes 30 seconds and symbolises your personal commitment to #ChangeTheStory for women and girls. If you've already made the White Ribbon Promise, encourage others in your life to do so too.

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- Wear a White Ribbon, the international symbol of ending men's violence against women.'

8.10 The White Ribbon promise is:

- I promise to never use, excuse or remain silent about men's violence against women.

You can sign up to the promise by going to the White Ribbon website - [Make the White Ribbon Promise — White Ribbon UK](#)

9.0 Corporate Strategy

9.1 Domestic abuse is one of the key priorities of the current local Community Safety Partnership Plan. By tackling this and raising awareness, there is contribution to making communities safer.

10.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

10.1 The Notice of Motion had called for us to become White Ribbon accredited but due to the current financial situation this is not being currently formally progressed. It will be reconsidered when it is appropriate for both the finances and staff resources.

Equalities and Human Resources

10.2 There are no known equality implications.

10.3 However, it should be noted that domestic abuse is a gendered issue. Although both men and women experience it, more women are more adversely affected. However, services are available for all, including outreach, refuge and a local specialist men's service.

10.4 Due to the current limitations, any work is arranged so that it can be accommodated within existing staffing resources.

Legal

10.5 The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and various subsequent legislation, places a duty on the police and local authorities to work together to develop and implement three year strategies to tackle crime and disorder. One of the key priorities of the current strategy is to tackle domestic abuse so the Council needs to play its part in delivering on this by being proactive and raising awareness.

11.0 Engagement and Consultation

11.1 The community engagement platform was used to carry out a survey of residents on crime, anti social behaviour and community safety earlier this year, which supported the development of the Community Safety Partnership Plan. This was also taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2023.

REPORT ENDS

Useful Links

[International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women | United Nations](#)

[Home | YS Home \(yoursanctuary.org.uk\)](#)

[Surrey Against Domestic Abuse Strategy | Healthy Surrey](#)

[Surrey Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2025 | Healthy Surrey](#)

[White Ribbon Day 2023 — White Ribbon UK](#)

[Make the White Ribbon Promise — White Ribbon UK](#)

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Appendix 2

At its meeting on 2 December 2021, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive held on 20 January 2022.

Councillor E Nicholson

“That Woking Borough Council notes that violence against women is a serious, prevalent, and preventable issue in our society.

Male violence against women must be ended, once and for all. Simply agreeing with the principle is not enough.

As a responsible authority we have a moral obligation to stand against and work to end male violence against women.

MOTION

Council recognises the importance of White Ribbon and its contribution as part of a global campaign taking action to stop male violence against women and resolves to become an accredited authority.

Council commits to making White Ribbon Day part of the civic calendar with ambassador-led activities involving staff, members and the public.

Council agrees to raise awareness of the White Ribbon Campaign through regular updates and features in internal and external communications and provide opportunity to highlight the work of the Women’s Refuge and the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner.

Council will provide support to staff and members to take the pledge never to commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women and to become ambassadors and champions. Council will work closely with local partnership agencies and organisations involved in tackling male violence against women to work towards making Woking a White Ribbon Borough.

Council commits to hosting annual awareness training for all members.”

Officer comment

“Tackling domestic abuse and raising awareness is a key priority for the Safer Woking Partnership and has been for many years. As part of this, the Council already acknowledges White Ribbon and has supported the 16 days of activism over the last few years, including work with Woking Football Club in 2019, and we are currently supporting a social media campaign in support of White Ribbon 2021.

If the Council is to become an accredited authority there is a cost associated with that and a likely impact on resources to support an appropriate action plan to comply with the accreditation, which needs an allocation for budget and staff time. White Ribbon charge an annual fee on a sliding scale depending on the size of the organisation. Those staff or members who volunteer to be ambassadors (male) or champions (female) will need to understand the expectations for the commitment they need to make and be prepared to be proactive.

It is important that we highlight all the work around domestic abuse services in general, not just refuges, as many women access support in the community. Sadly violence against women and girls takes place in both public and private spaces and our approach needs to take account of that. We will also be linking in to the Surrey Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy once it is developed and will produce a local action plan to support that.

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Awareness training is offered locally – we have just provided three sessions for staff as part of the current White Ribbon campaign. Member training has been provided previously and we can look at providing this annually as appropriate”.