

London Borough of Merton

Violence against women  
and girls strategic aims

2016 - 2018

September 2015

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Vision

Merton's violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategic aims seek to engender an integrated, evidence-based and outcomes-focused approach to tackling VAWG and domestic abuse in the borough. The strategic aims foster an approach which coordinates strategic and operational planning and activity by the wide range of agencies involved in the VAWG and domestic abuse agendas.

The strategic aims promote closer coordination in the areas of: identification and reporting of VAWG and domestic abuse; strategic planning; commissioning; delivery of interventions and services; and monitoring of outputs and outcomes. In so doing, they strive to create effective and efficient responses to VAWG and domestic abuse, which build on good practice. They aim to meet the needs of all those who are victims/survivors and/or perpetrators of VAWG and domestic abuse, as well as those who are at risk of becoming victims/survivors and/or perpetrators.

The strategic aims outline four priority areas in tackling VAWG and domestic abuse, which are:

- **Preventing VAWG and domestic abuse, and intervening early when people have experienced or are at risk of VAWG or domestic abuse.** Prevention work should operate at a community, family and individual level. It should focus on awareness raising and attitudinal change to reduce acceptance of VAWG and domestic abuse. Early intervention work should provide opportunities to prevent further VAWG and domestic abuse, and to reduce its negative consequences. It should focus on raising awareness of the risk factors and indicators of VAWG and domestic abuse, as well as how and where victims/survivors and those at risk can be supported. A key purpose of prevention and early intervention work is to break the cycle of violence in which patterns of victimisation and perpetration are repeated by generations of the same family and/or community. Universal services, such as healthcare and children's centres, should play a significant role in delivering prevention and early intervention work.
- **Providing accessible, evidence-based, holistic support to people who have experienced or are at risk of VAWG or domestic abuse.** This support should deliver improved outcomes for individuals, families and communities by enabling people to access support to address the risk factors for and consequences of VAWG and domestic abuse.
- **Implementing effective systems and interventions for working with perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators.** These systems and interventions should seek to identify perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators, hold them accountable for their actions and support them to change their behaviour. They should aim to maximise the safety of victims/survivors and reduce repeat victimisation and perpetration.

- **Fostering an integrated and coordinated approach to tackling VAWG and domestic abuse.** This approach should seek to improve on or introduce multi-agency models of working at all levels from strategic planning to frontline delivery. Progress in this priority area is likely to support positive developments in the other three priority areas.

In addressing these four priority areas, Merton seeks to establish an appropriate balance between the promotion of a universal message about the unacceptability of VAWG and domestic abuse (i.e. prevention) and delivery of interventions to support those who experience or are at risk of VAWG or domestic abuse (i.e. provision).

The strategic aims will be translated into a detailed action plan and the level of activity within each priority area will be dictated by the finances and resources available.

## 1.2 Scope

### 1.2.1 Types of VAWG

Merton's VAWG strategic aims guide the borough's response to:

- Child sexual exploitation.
- Domestic abuse.
- Female genital mutilation.
- Forced marriage.
- Violence committed in the name of "honour".
- Prostitution.
- Sexual exploitation.
- Sexual harassment.
- Sexual violence, including rape.
- Stalking.
- Trafficking.

Merton has chosen to centre the strategic aims on VAWG to ensure that the borough's approach is aligned with mayoral priorities and promotes a strategic response to tackling the risk factors for and consequences of all forms of VAWG in the borough.

One of the most prevalent forms of VAWG is domestic abuse and tackling this is a priority within the strategic aims.

### 1.2.2 Child victim/survivors of VAWG

Merton wishes to ensure that the VAWG strategic aims address the needs of children who are victims/survivors of VAWG, including domestic abuse, or who are at risk of becoming victims/survivors. Child victims/survivors could be female or male and they could be victimised because:

- VAWG or domestic abuse is perpetrated against them directly.
- They witness VAWG or domestic abuse taking place within their families or communities.
- They experience the consequences of VAWG or domestic abuse perpetrated against others.

Merton recognises that childhood experiences of VAWG or domestic abuse can contribute to a pattern of victimisation and perpetration that is repeated across generations of the same family and/or community.

As such, these VAWG strategic aims also cover forms and incidences of VAWG and domestic abuse of which children are or may become victims/survivors.

### 1.2.3 Male victims/survivors of domestic abuse

Although domestic abuse is primarily committed against women, Merton recognises that men are also frequently victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Merton wishes to address the needs of these male victims/survivors and prevent further domestic abuse against men. Therefore the scope of these VAWG strategic aims extends to domestic abuse against men, whether this is committed by male or female perpetrators. It does not, however, extend to adult male victims/survivors of other types of violence covered by this strategy (e.g. sexual violence, sexual exploitation and/or trafficking). These victims/survivors are supported within wider statutory duties and processes, including:

- Adult safeguarding.
- Police.
- Victim support services.
- Housing and homelessness services.

The VAWG Board will have strategic oversight of relevant data in relation to male victims/survivors of offences that are categorised as VAWG when the victim is female. The Board is committed to reviewing the implications of VAWG and domestic abuse strategy and delivery for male victims/survivors (including those not covered by this strategy) at least once every four months.

#### 1.2.4 Domestic homicide reviews

The findings of domestic homicide reviews will be reported to the VAWG Board. The Board is responsible for ensuring that any action plans resulting from these reviews are implemented in full. In addition, the Board is responsible for reflecting on what can be learned from these reviews and acting on this learning to make systematic strategic and operational improvements where necessary<sup>1</sup>.

#### 1.3 Timeframe

Merton's VAWG strategic aims were produced in September 2015. They cover the period from January 2016 – December 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> A domestic homicide review is taking place in September 2015 and its findings are not yet known, during the drafting phase of these strategic aims. Any learning and action plans resulting from this review will inform the development of the action plan to accompany these strategic aims.

## 2 Prevalence of VAWG and domestic abuse in Merton

### 2.1 Difficulties in assessing prevalence

It is widely-acknowledged that it is extremely difficult to gather reliable data regarding the prevalence of VAWG and domestic abuse. This is a national and international difficulty, which is reflected in the data available in Merton.

Many incidences of VAWG and domestic abuse are hidden and not reported. These issues are compounded by the sometimes high levels of cultural/community acceptance of types of VAWG and domestic abuse. There are also sometimes corresponding low levels of awareness among communities and relevant professionals about how to identify victims/survivors and perpetrators of VAWG and domestic abuse, or those at risk of becoming victims/survivors or perpetrators, and how to ensure that these individuals and families access support.

In addition, the way in which many types of alleged offence are recorded does not always allow easy differentiation between female and male victim/survivors or between categories of VAWG and domestic abuse.

Furthermore, prevalence data does not capture information about people at risk of VAWG or domestic abuse (who may never become victims/survivors). It is also likely to under-estimate the numbers of repeat victims and how often individuals are repeatedly victimised, as well as the numbers of witnesses of VAWG or domestic abuse.

Despite these difficulties, data are available that offer an indication of the scale of some types of VAWG and domestic abuse in Merton. These are presented below.

### 2.2 Prevalence of different types of VAWG

#### *Child sexual exploitation*

In the twelve months to September 2014, Merton Children, Schools and Families worked with 67 children aged between 11 and 17 at risk of or involved in child sexual exploitation. This figure includes girls and boys.

### *Domestic abuse*

In Merton, in the last year: 4,760 women and 3,225 men<sup>2</sup> may have experienced some form of domestic abuse (including partner or family non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking)<sup>3</sup>.

19% of single assessments with girls aged 0-17 by Merton Children, Schools and Families identified domestic violence as a factor (157 single assessments).

### *Prostitution*

One case of prostitution was reported to Merton Police in the twelve-month period to March 2015.

### *Sexual violence including rape*

In the twelve months to January 2015, 72 rapes were reported to Merton Police. 137 other sexual violence offences were reported to Merton Police in the same period. These figures do not offer a breakdown of the alleged victim's gender.

### *Stalking*

In Merton, in the last year, 2,738 women may have experienced stalking<sup>4</sup>.

### *Trafficking*

Four cases of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation were reported to Merton Police in the twelve-month period to March 2015.

## **2.3 Trends over time**

Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) data and findings from Merton's joint strategic needs assessment suggest that the reported number of domestic violence offences in the borough has been reasonably stable at somewhere between 750 and 900 for the last three years. This data also suggests that the number of reported sexual offences in Merton has been relatively stable at just under 150 per year for the last 5 years.

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates calculated using data from the ONS statistical bulletin (2013) *Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2011-12* and the 2011-12 Crime Survey for England and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Local data suggest that a significant proportion of domestic abuse cases in Merton are intra-familial (i.e. perpetrated by a family member other than a partner, and often by a son/daughter on his/her parent). Merton is committed to monitoring this type of abuse and the local response to it via the VAWG Board.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates calculated using data from the ONS statistical bulletin (2013) *Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2011-12* and the 2011-12 Crime Survey for England and Wales.

## 2.4 Comparison with similar boroughs

Merton has fewer reported domestic violence incidents and offences than almost any other London Borough. (Only Kingston, Kensington & Chelsea and Richmond have fewer).

Merton has a similar number of reported sexual offences to similarly-sized Sutton, but a somewhat higher number than Richmond.

However, MPS data suggests that there may have been an increase in rape cases in 2012-2013 in Merton, taking the total number of cases to around 80. This is slightly higher than similarly-sized Sutton and Richmond.

## 3 Definitions

### 3.1 Violence against women and girls

Merton is working to the definition of VAWG that is endorsed by the *Mayoral Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls 2013-17*<sup>5</sup>. This is as follows:

*“The UN defines violence against women as ‘any act of gender-based violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or acts of violence which are suffered disproportionately by women’. This includes physical, sexual, and psychological/emotional violence, economic abuse and sexual exploitation. VAWG can take place at home, work or in public places such as on the street or public transport.”*

Source: Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime, 2013

### 3.2 Specific forms of VAWG covered by the VAWG strategic aims

Figure 1 gives the definition to which Merton is working for each type of VAWG addressed by the VAWG strategic aims and indicates the source of this definition.

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<sup>5</sup> Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime (2013). *Mayoral Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls 2013-17*. Merton also acknowledges the UN definition adopted by HM Government in *Call to End Violence against Women and Girls* (2010), which is: “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.”

Figure 1: Definitions of different types of VAWG and their sources<sup>6</sup>

Type of VAWG	Definition	Source
Child sexual exploitation	Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person’s limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.	Department for Education (2009)
Domestic abuse	Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• psychological</li> <li>• physical</li> <li>• sexual</li> <li>• financial</li> <li>• emotional</li> </ul> Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent	Home Office (2013)

<sup>6</sup> Sources: Department for Education (2009). *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation: supplementary guidance*; Home Office (2013). *Guidance: Domestic abuse*; Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime (2013). *Mayoral Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls 2013-17*.

Type of VAWG	Definition	Source
	by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.	
Female Genital Mutilation	Involves the complete or partial removal or alteration of external genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is mostly carried out on young girls at some time between infancy and the age of 15. Unlike male circumcision, which is legal in many countries, it is now illegal across much of the globe, and its extensive harmful health consequences are widely recognised.	MOPAC (2013)
Forced marriage	A marriage conducted without valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor.	MOPAC (2013)
Violence committed in the name of "honour"	Violence committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family and/or community. Women, especially young women, are the most common targets, often where they have acted outside community boundaries of perceived acceptable feminine/sexual behaviour. In extreme cases, the woman may be killed.	MOPAC (2013)
Prostitution	Women and girls are forced, coerced or deceived to enter into prostitution and/or to keep them there.	MOPAC (2013)
Sexual exploitation	Involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where someone receives 'something' (e.g. food, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, protection money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability. Girls involved in or connected to gangs are at risk of sexual exploitation by gang members.	MOPAC (2013)

Type of VAWG	Definition	Source
Sexual harassment	Unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It can take place anywhere, including the workplace, schools, streets, public transport and social situations. It includes flashing, obscene and threatening calls, and online harassment.	MOPAC (2013)
Sexual violence, including rape	Sexual contact without the consent of the woman/girl. Perpetrators range from total strangers to relatives and intimate partners, but most are known in some way. It can happen anywhere – in the family/household, workplace, public spaces, social settings, during war/conflict situations.	MOPAC (2013)
Stalking	Repeated (i.e. on at least two occasions) harassment causing fear, alarm or distress. It can include threatening phone calls, texts or letters; damaging property; spying on and following the victim.	MOPAC (2013)
Trafficking	Involves the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of women and children for the purposes of prostitution and domestic servitude across international borders and within countries ('internal trafficking'). <sup>7</sup>	MOPAC (2013)

<sup>7</sup> Merton recognises that this definition does not extend to trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation. This type of trafficking is, however, recognised in the definition of modern slavery adopted by adult safeguarding in Merton and victims of trafficking for labour exploitation are supported under adult safeguarding processes.

## 4 Strategic priorities

### 4.1 Preventing VAWG and domestic abuse, and intervening early when people have experienced or are at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse

#### 4.1.1 Focus

Prevention work should operate at a community, family and individual level. It should focus on awareness raising and attitudinal change to reduce acceptance of VAWG and domestic abuse.

Early intervention work should provide opportunities to prevent further VAWG and domestic abuse, and to reduce its negative consequences. It should focus on raising awareness of the risk factors and indicators of VAWG and domestic abuse, as well as how and where victims/survivors and those at risk can be supported.

A key purpose of prevention and early intervention work is to break the cycle of violence in which patterns of victimisation and perpetration are repeated by generations of the same family and/or community. Universal services, such as healthcare and children's centres, should play a significant role in delivering prevention and early intervention work.

#### 4.1.2 Intended outcomes

- Community expertise, capacity and resilience in tackling VAWG and domestic abuse are increased.
- Attitudes and behaviours that promote or support VAWG and domestic abuse become less prevalent in Merton.
- Attitudes and behaviours that promote or support VAWG and domestic abuse are challenged by communities, families, professionals and individuals.
- People who are at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse are identified and supported so that they do not become victims/survivors.
- People who have experienced VAWG and domestic abuse access support more quickly and repeat incidents, potential escalation and/or the negative consequences of VAWG and domestic abuse are reduced.

#### 4.1.3 Intended outcome measures

- Pre- and post-training questionnaires measuring awareness, acceptance, confidence and ability to challenge (ideally including follow-up questionnaires to gather data on sustained change).
- Levels and nature of enquiries to VAWG and domestic abuse champions.

- Reporting levels of VAWG and domestic abuse to the police.
- Referral rates of VAWG and domestic abuse related cases (including those who are at risk but have not become victims/survivors) to adult safeguarding, children, schools and families and other agencies providing support (such as alcohol and drug services). It will be helpful to examine referral rates from services supporting people who may be particularly vulnerable to VAWG and domestic abuse (such as services for people with learning difficulties/disabilities, mental health services, alcohol and substance misuse services, services for sex workers, services supporting people from communities where particular types of VAWG are believed to be more common).
- Response times from police and other relevant agencies.
- Victim/survivors' reports/estimates of the length of time between their first experience of VAWG and domestic abuse and their referral for support.

#### 4.1.4 Intended outputs

- Ongoing public awareness campaign, including: generic borough-wide materials; materials aimed at children and young people; materials targeting people who might be more likely to experience, perpetrate or tolerate VAWG or domestic abuse; and materials targeting people who might be less likely to report and/or access support around VAWG or domestic abuse. Examples of groups who might benefit from specialist materials are: people with learning difficulties/disabilities, people with mental health issues, people who misuse alcohol and/or other substances, people who are sex workers and people from communities where particular types of VAWG are believed to be more common.
- Delivery of VAWG and domestic abuse awareness training to a range of audiences, including: information on what constitutes VAWG and domestic abuse, risk factors and indicators, and how and where to refer people for support. Target audiences could include: professionals who might encounter VAWG and domestic abuse in their work, children and young people, community leaders, community groups, groups at higher risk of experiencing VAWG and domestic abuse (such as vulnerable children, young people and adults). It will be particularly important to target training to professionals working in services for people whose circumstances or behaviour place them at increased risk of being victims/perpetrators of VAWG and domestic abuse. Examples include professionals in services for people who are homeless or in unstable accommodation, people with learning difficulties/disabilities, people with mental health issues, people who misuse alcohol and/or other substances, people who are sex workers and people from communities where particular types of VAWG are believed to be more common.
- Provision of materials to enable others to deliver awareness-raising training or workshops to others. This could include, for example: materials for community

leaders to deliver training to their members; materials for professionals in services to deliver awareness-raising to their service users.

- Delivery of training to professionals who might work with victims/survivors of domestic abuse to enable them to: feel more confident to raise the issue of alcohol and drug use (by either the perpetrator or the victim/survivor) at an early stage of contact; to discuss how this relates to their experiences of domestic abuse; to offer onward referrals to more specialist alcohol and/or drug services; to deliver basic interventions around alcohol and drug use to those who are engaging with support around domestic abuse but are resistant to engagement with alcohol and/or drug services.
- Development of a network of VAWG and domestic abuse champions who offer information, advice and guidance in their communities or places of work.

#### 4.1.5 Intended output measures

- Public awareness materials produced, and information about where/how the materials have been distributed.
- Numbers of individuals who have completed awareness-raising training on VAWG and domestic abuse.
- Numbers of professionals working with victims/survivors of domestic abuse who receive training in relation to addressing alcohol and/or drug use.
- Number of enquiries received by VAWG and domestic abuse champions, and nature of advice/support offered.

## 4.2 Providing accessible, evidence-based, holistic support to people who have experienced or are at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse

### 4.2.1 Focus

This support should deliver improved outcomes for individuals, families and communities by enabling people to access support to address the risk factors for and consequences of VAWG and domestic abuse.

### 4.2.2 Intended outcomes

- People who have experienced or are at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse access effective support which meets their needs and delivers positive outcomes.
- Repeat incidents, escalation and negative consequences arising from VAWG and domestic abuse are reduced.
- Support is delivered in a holistic, multi-agency, family-centred manner which focuses on the full range of needs experienced by each victim/survivor or person at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse.

- Higher numbers of victims/survivors and those at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse who require support access this support.
- Interventions which have a strong evidence base are prioritised. Services are designed and/or commissioned based on evidence of what works in tackling VAWG and domestic abuse, where this evidence is available.

#### 4.2.3 Intended outcome measures

- Performance monitoring data for statutory and commissioned services, indicating that they are identifying individual's needs and the needs of their family members, tailoring interventions to meet these needs (including working in partnership to meet multiple or complex needs if required), engaging individuals and families in these interventions and delivering positive outcomes with victims/survivors and those at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse.
- Feedback from victims/survivors and those at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse who have accessed support and services, indicating that the support/services identified their needs and met them, delivered positive outcomes and that their experiences of support/services were positive.
- Referral rates of VAWG and domestic abuse related cases (including those who are at risk but have not become victims/survivors) to agencies providing support, indicating an increase in the numbers of referrals.
- Commissioning plans and service specifications, demonstrating an evidence-led approach to service design and commissioning.

#### 4.2.4 Intended outputs

- A suite of services to meet the needs of all victims/survivors of VAWG and domestic abuse, and all those at risk. This will include:
  - Statutory criminal justice provision.
  - Statutory provision for children and young people and vulnerable adults.
  - An IDVA service.
  - A MARAC.

It could also include:

- Specialist provision for specific types of VAWG and domestic abuse.
- Specialist provision for victims/survivors and those at risk who are ineligible for/do not access more universal services, such as people from minority groups and lower risk victims/survivors.
- Accommodation for those fleeing their homes due to VAWG and domestic abuse.
- An open access, universal information, advice and guidance service.

- Register of “at risk” families/individuals maintained and actioned, based on known risk factors.
- Clear mechanisms for identifying multiple needs of victims/survivors and those at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse. This will entail robust assessments at all possible entry routes into support, which explore areas such as: physical health, mental health, capacity, alcohol and substance misuse, housing, family and social networks.
- Clear mechanisms for identifying and supporting multiple victims/survivors or individuals at risk from the same perpetrator of VAWG and domestic abuse.
- Clear and well-publicised referral routes and pathways into and between services. This should include services whose focus may not be VAWG and domestic abuse, but which may be able to contribute to holistic support for individuals (such as primary and secondary healthcare, housing/homelessness services, mental health services, alcohol and substance misuse services and ETE services).
- Annual review of the evidence base for interventions to tackle VAWG and domestic abuse.
- Development of an outcomes-focused performance monitoring framework for services, which enables commissioners and providers to make judgements about the relative efficacy of different providers and types of support. This should include:
  - Indicators and outcomes on which services have to report.
  - Mechanisms by which these outcomes are expected to be measured and captured.
  - Mechanisms to consult and report on service users’ experiences of accessing support and using services.

#### 4.2.5 Intended output measures

- Commissioning plans, service specifications/contracts/service level agreements and performance monitoring data reported by services, demonstrating that the required outputs have been prioritised.
- Written register of “at risk” families, including evidence that this has been updated and what actions have been taken.
- Any local guidance/service directories produced for professionals.
- Structured feedback from professionals involved in delivering support (likely to include baseline survey and later survey to assess change in delivery mechanisms and/or understanding of these).
- Document summarising findings of annual review of evidence base.

- Performance monitoring data from services, demonstrating a systematic focus on outcomes and service user consultation.
- Structured feedback from service user representatives at services and on the VAWG Board.

#### **4.3 Implementing effective systems and interventions for working with perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators**

##### **4.3.1 Focus**

These systems and interventions should seek to identify perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators, hold them accountable for their actions and support them to change their behaviour. They should aim to maximise the safety of victims/survivors and reduce repeat victimisation and perpetration.

##### **4.3.2 Intended outcomes**

- Relevant professionals are more confident and able to identify perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators and to report them and/or refer them for support.
- Perpetrators are held accountable for their actions through appropriate criminal justice processes.
- Higher numbers of perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators access interventions to address their behaviour and factors contributing to it, and successfully change their behaviour to avoid repeat perpetration. This includes addressing risk factors that may contribute to committing domestic abuse, such as alcohol and/or drug use. Where appropriate, it may also include family-centred approaches to work around perpetration.
- Risks posed by perpetrators to former, current or potential victims/survivors are reduced or managed to reduce perpetration and/or repeat perpetration.
- Interventions which have a strong evidence base are prioritised. Services are designed and/or commissioned based on evidence of what works in tackling perpetration of VAWG and domestic abuse, where this evidence is available.

##### **4.3.3 Intended outcome measures**

- Structured feedback from professionals regarding risk assessment and management approach and impact of interventions on perpetrator behaviours.
- Pre- and post-training questionnaires measuring professionals' awareness, acceptance, confidence and ability to challenge (ideally including follow-up questionnaires to gather data on sustained change).
- Data on prosecutions.

- Referral rates to services working with perpetrators, indicating an increase in the number of referrals.
- Performance monitoring data for services working with perpetrators, indicating that they are identifying individual's needs and the needs of their family members, tailoring interventions to meet these needs (including working in partnership to meet multiple or complex needs if required), engaging individuals and families in these interventions and delivering positive outcomes with perpetrators and those at risk of becoming perpetrators.
- Feedback from perpetrators, former perpetrators and those at risk of becoming perpetrators who have accessed support and services, indicating that the support/services identified their needs and met them, delivered positive outcomes and that their experiences of support/services were positive.
- Repeat victimisation and repeat perpetration data from the police, MARAC and MAPPA.
- Commissioning plans and service specifications, demonstrating an evidence-led approach to service design and commissioning.

#### 4.3.4 Intended outputs

- Provision of an outcomes-focused service to support perpetrators to change their behaviour.
- Perpetrator awareness training for professionals who might encounter perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators. This should include information on risk factors, indicators and how and where to report or refer perpetrators, suspected perpetrators and those at risk of becoming perpetrators.
- Delivery of training to professionals who might work with perpetrators of domestic abuse to enable them to: feel more confident to raise the issue of alcohol and drug use (by either the perpetrator or the victim/survivor) at an early stage of contact; to discuss how this relates to their experiences of domestic violence; to offer onward referrals to more specialist alcohol and/or drug services; to deliver basic interventions around alcohol and drug use to those who are engaging with support around domestic abuse but are resistant to engagement with alcohol and/or drug services.
- Mechanisms are in place to identify perpetrators and those at risk of being perpetrators at an early stage.
- Robust risk assessment and management procedures are developed and reviewed regularly. Relevant professionals receive training in the effective use of these procedures.

- Risks are robustly assessed and actions are taken to reduce or obviate identified risks.
- Annual review of the evidence base for interventions with perpetrators of VAWG and domestic abuse, and those at risk of becoming perpetrators.

#### 4.3.5 Intended output measures

- Performance monitoring data from perpetrator services, demonstrating a systematic focus on outcomes and service user feedback.
- Numbers of professionals who have completed awareness-raising training on perpetrators of VAWG and domestic abuse and those at risk of becoming perpetrators.
- Numbers of professionals working with perpetrators of domestic abuse who receive training in relation to addressing alcohol and/or drug use.
- Structured feedback from professionals involved in delivering support (likely to include baseline survey and later survey to assess change in identification and delivery mechanisms and/or understanding of these).
- Structured feedback from service user representatives at services and on the VAWG Board.
- Commissioning plans, service specifications/contracts/service level agreements and performance monitoring data reported by services, demonstrating that the required outputs have been prioritised.
- Any local guidance/service directories produced for professionals.
- Risk assessment documentation and risk management plans, including evidence that these have been updated and what actions have been taken.
- Numbers of professionals who have completed risk assessment and management training.
- Document summarising findings of annual review of evidence base.

#### 4.4 Fostering an integrated and coordinated approach to tackling VAWG and domestic abuse

##### 4.4.1 Focus

This approach should seek to improve on or introduce multi-agency models of working at all levels from strategic planning to frontline delivery. Progress in this priority area is likely to support positive developments in the other priority areas.

##### 4.4.2 Intended outcomes

- Merton takes a well-integrated and well-coordinated approach to tackling VAWG and domestic abuse at both strategic and operational levels.
- Merton identifies and draws on the resources of all sectors, departments and agencies who can contribute to tackling VAWG and domestic abuse.
- Merton's approach maximises efficiencies and cost-effectiveness.
- Merton ensures that the approach to tackling VAWG and domestic abuse joins up with other relevant areas of strategy and operation.

#### 4.4.3 Intended outcome measures

- Structured feedback from professionals involved in delivering the VAWG agenda in Merton, including those at an operational and strategic level.
- Feedback from services users and perpetrators suggest that they experience swift and integrated support.

#### 4.4.4 Intended outputs

- Bi-monthly meetings of VAWG Board to bring together senior stakeholders from all key relevant agencies and groups, with a focus on strategic planning and decisions.
- Production, monitoring and delivery by the VAWG Board of an annual action plan with SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) to deliver the VAWG strategic aims.
- Regular meetings of a VAWG Commissioning Working Group to promote integrated commissioning decisions and practices.
- Bi-monthly meetings of a VAWG Practitioners Forum to bring together all agencies involved in the delivery of services for those who experience or are at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse, with a focus on operational issues and improving multi-agency working practices.

#### 4.4.5 Intended output measures

- Minutes, agendas and other documentation arising from these meetings.

## 5 Governance and review

Figure 2 outlines the governance structure for delivery of the VAWG strategic aims. More detail about the key groups involved in the delivery is provided below.

### 5.1 VAWG Board

The delivery of the VAWG strategic aims is overseen by the VAWG Board, a cross-sector, multi-agency partnership of senior stakeholders from all key relevant agencies and groups. The Board has been established with a view to improving partnership working between departments and agencies who are involved in the VAWG agenda. It meets bi-monthly and is responsible for:

- Translating the VAWG strategic aims into annual action plans with SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound).
- Identifying partnership leads for specific strands of activity within the action plan and holding them to account for delivery of actions related to these strands.
- Incorporating learning from domestic homicide reviews and ensuring that this informs future strategic and operational activity as appropriate.
- Reviewing the implications of VAWG and domestic abuse strategy and delivery for male victims/survivors (including those not covered by this strategy) at least once every four months.
- Reviewing the annual action plans at each meeting of the VAWG Board.
- Reviewing the VAWG strategic aims annually to ensure their continued relevance and suitability.

### 5.2 VAWG Commissioning Working Group

The VAWG Commissioning Working Group reports to the VAWG Board. The Group is tasked with:

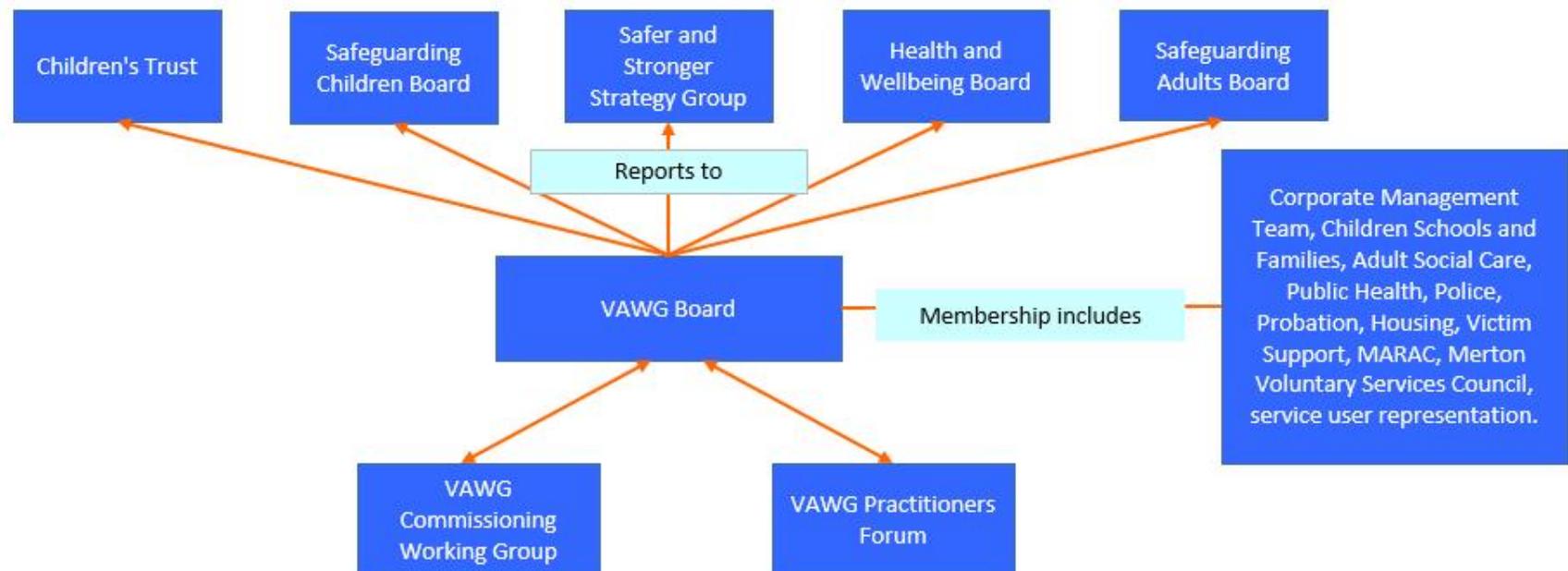
- Reviewing commissioned services and commissioning processes.
- Making suggestions for more effective commissioning in the future.

### 5.3 VAWG Practitioners Forum

Membership of the VAWG Practitioners Forum includes all agencies involved in the delivery of services for those who experience or are at risk of VAWG and domestic abuse. The VAWG Practitioners Forum meets bi-monthly and its purpose is:

- To receive strategic direction and updates from the VAWG Board.
- To discuss operational issues and partnership working with the aim of identifying and resolving problems in delivery and improving partnership working within Merton.
- To provide feedback to the VAWG Board on strategic and operational issues from the perspective of those delivering services.

Figure 2: Governance structure for violence against women and girls in Merton



## 6 Legal frameworks governing Merton's response to VAWG

### 6.1 All victims/survivors or people at risk of VAWG

The Equalities Act 2010 governs the response to VAWG by the local authority and other public bodies because it places a duty upon them to eliminate unlawful victimisation, harassment and discrimination on the grounds of gender.

In addition, local Community Safety Partnerships are required under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004) to establish a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) of the circumstances surrounding the death of any person aged 16 or over whose death was or appears to be a domestic homicide. Specifically, this is defined as the death of a person aged 16 or over which:

*“has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by –*

- a) a person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or*
- b) a member of the same household as himself”*

The statutory guidance on DHRs states that their purpose is to:

- “a) establish what lessons are to be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims;*
- b) identify clearly what those lessons are both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result;*
- c) apply these lessons to service responses including changes to policies and procedures as appropriate; and*
- d) prevent domestic violence and abuse homicide and improve service responses for all domestic violence and abuse victims and their children through improved intra and inter-agency working.”*

### 6.2 Adult victims/survivors and adults at risk of VAWG

The Care Act 2014 recognises freedom from abuse and neglect as a key element of a person's wellbeing. The Act places adult safeguarding on a legal footing and establishes more systematic mechanisms via which adult safeguarding must be ensured. Therefore a local authority is required to:

- Make enquiries, or ensure others do so, about any adult it believes is subject to abuse or neglect, or at risk of it.
- Establish via these enquiries whether any action needs to be taken to prevent abuse or neglect, and who needs to take this action.
- Have a Safeguarding Adults Board with core membership from the local authority, the police and the local Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- Use the Safeguarding Adults Board as a mechanism to protect adults experiencing abuse or neglect, or at risk of it.

The Act details a number of different types of abuse, many of which could come under the heading of VAWG. These include: physical abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial or material abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational abuse, neglect and acts of omission, and self-neglect.

Safeguarding duties apply to an adult who:

- Has needs for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting these needs).
- Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse and neglect.
- As a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.

The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 require local authorities to offer housing advice to any person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. This includes people who are living in refuges or who are likely to experience violence or threats of violence if they return to their home.

Under the Act, victims/survivors of domestic abuse who are believed to be homeless or threatened with homelessness would be found in priority need if they were believed to be vulnerable to domestic abuse. This means that these victims/survivors must be provided with immediate temporary accommodation whilst their housing needs and eligibility are assessed.

### **6.3 Child victims/survivors and children at risk of VAWG**

Local authority duties are outlined in the Children Act 1989, which states that:

*“where a local authority... has reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in the area and is suffering, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm, the authority shall make, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child’s welfare.”*

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 amends the 1989 Act's definition of harm to include harm suffered by children who witness or are aware of domestic violence in their home environment. As a result, harm is defined as:

*“ill-treatment or impairment of health or development including for example impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another.”*

Therefore where adult victims/survivors and/or perpetrators of VAWG and domestic abuse are identified and children are present or involved, professionals have a duty to refer these children to children's services.

The local authority is required to commence enquiries on any child referred to children's services within 48 hours and to carry out an initial assessment on any child where concerns raised are sufficiently serious.

Following assessment, the local authority must determine whether to provide accommodation or other services to the child.

#### **6.4 Perpetrators of VAWG**

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps to prevent crime and disorder in their area.

Perpetrators are dealt with under Criminal Law, if a crime is reported and this is taken forward by police. Many forms of VAWG and domestic abuse are crimes (although there is no specific offence of domestic violence or abuse). Examples include: assault, false imprisonment, criminal damage, theft, fraud, harassment, murder and attempted murder, rape, forced marriage, causing or allowing a child or vulnerable adult to die or to suffer serious physical harm, ill treatment and/or wilful neglect of a mentally incapacitated adult.

In addition, police have powers to serve the perpetrator with a Domestic Violence Protection Notice as the first stage in obtaining a Domestic Violence Protection Order, where they have reasonable grounds to believe domestic violence or abuse has taken place. Orders last between 14 and 28 days and may: prevent the perpetrator from entering and being within a certain distance of the home of the person at risk; prevent the perpetrator from forcing the person at risk to leave their home; and/or require the perpetrator to leave the home of the person at risk.

## 7 Evidence base for the VAWG strategic aims

Merton's VAWG strategic aims were developed based on Merton's domestic abuse strategic needs assessment, which was completed in September 2014 by Cordis Bright, an independent research and consultancy organisation.

The needs assessment also covered other types of VAWG. It included:

- A literature review of strategic guidance and good practice, including national, regional and local strategies.
- A desktop review of strategic, operational, financial and monitoring information from Merton in relation to domestic abuse, VAWG and the local response to it. This enabled:
  - Estimates of prevalence and demand for services in Merton.
  - Mapping of existing services and analysis of gaps.
- Consultation with key stakeholders from a variety of agencies and departments who are involved in the domestic abuse and VAWG agendas in Merton. This was comprised of: in-depth interviews with 22 stakeholders to gather data to inform the needs assessment; and a workshop with 13 stakeholders to discuss and refine the findings and emerging recommendations of the needs assessment.
- Consultation with 4 victims/survivors and frontline practitioners on people's experiences of accessing local support and services relating to domestic abuse and VAWG.

Findings from the needs assessment were supplemented by a review of additional data and documentation available as at August 2015. This included: publications available since September 2014; VAWG performance data up to March 2015; Terms of Reference and minutes from Merton's VAWG Board; and the domestic abuse needs assessment recommendations action plan.

The strategic priorities for Merton for the next three years are aligned with the intended outcomes and areas of action in the government's VAWG action plan for 2014 (i.e. the most up-to-date action plan available) and the *Mayoral Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls 2013-17*<sup>8</sup>.

The strategic aims were developed by Cordis Bright. Members of Merton's VAWG Board and VAWG Forum were consulted on a draft version. Their comments and recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the strategic aims.

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<sup>8</sup> Home Office (2014). A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls: Action Plan 2014; Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime (2013). *Mayoral Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls 2013-17*.

## Appendix 1: Review of literature published since Merton's strategic needs assessment

### Bibliography

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence, Women's Aid and Rape Crisis (2015). *The Changing Landscape of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services*.

Bloomfield, S. and Dixon, L. (2015). *An outcome evaluation of the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) and Community Domestic Violence Programme (CDVP)*. National Offender Management Service.

CAADA (2014a). *Identifying and engaging with young people at risk of forced marriage*.

CAADA (2014b). *In plain sight: Effective help for children exposed to domestic abuse. CAADA's 2nd National Policy Report*.

Feinstein, L. Griffiths, A. and Guy, J. (2014). *Early Intervention in Domestic Violence & Abuse*. Early Intervention Foundation.

HM Government (2014a). *Female Genital Mutilation Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines*.

HM Government (2014b). *Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage*.

Home Office (2015). *A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls: Progress Report 2010-15*.

Kelly, L. Klein, R. and Sharp, N (2014). *Finding the costs of Freedom How women and Children rebuild their lives after domestic violence*. Solace Women's Aid.

Local Government Association (2015). *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): A Councillor's Guide*.

Ministry of Justice/Home Office (2015). *Serious Crime Act 2015: Factsheet – Female Genital Mutilation*. Available at:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/416323/Fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_FGM\\_-\\_Act.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416323/Fact_sheet_-_FGM_-_Act.pdf) (Accessed 17 August 2015).

## Summary of significant evidence

### All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence, Women's Aid and Rape Crisis (2015). *The Changing Landscape of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services*

This report outlines five key recommendations for developing strategies for addressing domestic and sexual violence:

- **Data collection:** The report finds that, whilst data collection has in the past been unreliable and inaccurate, the development and dissemination of an established and effective means of collecting and categorising data relating to domestic and sexual violence is integral to improving outcomes for victims/survivors.
- **Sustainable funding:** Arguing that current funding arrangements, which operate on a hand-to-mouth basis, have put many services under huge financial pressure and are unsustainable. The report recommends that the government introduce a sustainable and secure funding model that will ring-fence funds for specialist services.
- **Ministerial leadership:** Effective leadership emerges as a recommendation for ensuring domestic and sexual violence services are coordinated in a way which ensures delivery is needs-led and sustainably funded. The report suggests that this leadership must come from central government, arguing for the creation of a new Minister of State within the Cabinet Office dedicated to the prevention of VAWG.
- **Needs-led approach:** The report finds that both services users and practitioners have expressed concerns that services are being allocated using a one-size-fits-all approach, based purely on financial criteria. This neglects to take into account the specific needs of the individual service user. As a result, the report recommends that services are allocated using a needs-led approach.

**Joint guidance:** The report recommends that joint guidance should be issued by a coalition of government departments. This will ensure that local authorities and health commissioners are better informed about their obligations to provide domestic and sexual violence services, and that service provision across the country is equal.

### Bloomfield, S. and Dixon, L. (2015). *An outcome evaluation of the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) and Community Domestic Violence Programme (CDVP). National Offender Management Service.*

This study reviewed two accredited domestic violence interventions for perpetrators, which were delivered by the National Probation Service until 2013. Both interventions were cognitive-behavioural programmes for heterosexual male domestic violence offenders who posed a medium to high risk of harm towards their partner. Both involved a combination of group work sessions and individual

sessions. One (IDAP) was a modular rolling programme and one (CDVP) was a closed programme.

The study evaluated the effectiveness of the programmes in reducing future reoffending (in a two-year follow-up period) using Propensity Score Matching. Its findings indicated that engaging with either programme reduced the likelihood of committing any offence, a core violent offence and a domestic violence offence. They also suggest that IDAP was more effective than CDAP in reducing the likelihood of re-offending. In addition, they show that those who engaged with a programme but did re-offend took longer to commit their first re-offence than those who did not engage with a programme.

However, the control group for this study was convicted domestic violence offenders who were referred to one of the two programmes but did not engage with it. As a result, it may be likely that this less-engaged group were less ready or able to address their offending behaviour than the treatment group. The methods used in the study do not account for this and therefore the findings may over-estimate the impact of the programmes.

**Feinstein, L. Griffiths, A. and Guy, J. (2014). Early Intervention in Domestic Violence & Abuse. Early Intervention Foundation**

This is an evidence report on effectively delivering early intervention to tackle domestic abuse. The report makes a number of recommendations relating to local and national government strategies, which are summarised in Figure 3:

*Figure 3: Recommendations for local and national government strategies*

Local Government	National Government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on prevention and early intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on prevention and early intervention</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of partnership and multi-agency working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly named leadership and accountability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of strategies to combat VAWG into crime prevention, health, and children and young people strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance monitoring systems embedding into strategic action plans</li> </ul>

*Source: Feinstein et al. 2014*

**Kelly, L. Klein, R. and Sharp, N (2014). Finding the costs of Freedom: How women and Children rebuild their lives after domestic violence. Solace Women's Aid**

This report into the impact of domestic abuse on women and children highlights a number of areas in which service provision has been ineffective in the past. Drawing upon this research, it makes a series of recommendations for how future strategies for tackling domestic abuse can be tailored to ensure they effectively meet the needs of women and children affected:

- **Continuing support:** The report recommends that victims/survivors of domestic abuse are given access to support for a minimum of two years after separation from their partner. This support should be holistic, encompassing areas such as: refuge and floating support; legal advice and advocacy; short courses on understanding domestic violence; specialist counselling and group work; skills and confidence-building workshops; support orientated to (re)entering employment.
- **Increased awareness in statutory agencies:** The report finds that understanding of domestic abuse in statutory agencies is poor, and as a result the progress of victims/survivors is sometimes hindered rather than supported. It suggests that basic training in aspects of domestic abuse beyond physical violence would go some way to addressing this.
- **Focus on housing:** The report highlights the crucial role played by having a safe home in the rebuilding process for victims/survivors of domestic abuse. It suggests that refuges should be considered a national resource, and be promoted and funded as such.
- **Promotion of community resources:** The report finds that support from within the community, such as from neighbours, work colleagues and faith communities, can be extremely valuable to victims/survivors of domestic abuse. It suggests that these community resources can be enhanced through increasing public awareness of abuse in its various forms.

#### *Ministry of Justice/Home Office (2015). Serious Crime Act 2015: Factsheet – Female Genital Mutilation*

This factsheet summarises changes to the law in relation to FGM, as introduced by the Serious Crime Act 2015. The main changes are as follows:

- It is now possible to prosecute for offences of FGM committed abroad by or against those who are at the time are habitually resident in the UK irrespective of whether they are subject to immigration restrictions.
- The anonymity of the person against whom an FGM offence is alleged to have been committed is now protected.
- It is now an offence to fail to protect a girl from FGM. This means that if an offence of FGM is committed against a girl under the age of 16, each person who is responsible for the girl at the time the FGM occurred will be liable under this new offence, which carries a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment.
- Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders can now be issued by the courts. Such orders protect a girl against whom an FGM offence has been committed or may be committed. An order could include, for example, provisions to surrender a person's passport or any other travel document; and not to enter into any arrangements, in the UK or abroad, for FGM to be performed on the person to be protected.

- There is now a new mandatory reporting duty requiring doctors, nurses, midwives, social workers and teachers to make a report to the police where, in the course of their professional duties, they discover that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl aged under 18 (at the time of the discovery).

In addition to presenting information on the changes to the law, the factsheet also summarises other measures in place to tackle FGM. These include:

- Improving the police response to FGM.
- Introducing a national FGM Prevention Programme, working in partnership with NHS England.
- Developing a new briefing for schools on FGM and forced marriage commissioned by the Department for Education.
- Increasing funding available to help charities raise awareness and a network of community champions with the cultural knowledge and connections necessary to challenge beliefs and change behaviour.
- Launching a new cross-government specialist FGM unit working with criminal justice partners, children's services, healthcare professionals and affected communities.
- Close working between the Crown Prosecution Service and the police to identify girls and women at risk of, or who have been subjected to, FGM.
- Supporting the Africa-led movement to end FGM in Africa, including supporting work in 17 countries.



**Cordis**Bright Limited

23/24 Smithfield Street, London EC1A 9LF

<b>Telephone</b>	020 7330 9170
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:info@cordisbright.co.uk">info@cordisbright.co.uk</a>
<b>Internet</b>	<a href="http://www.cordisbright.co.uk">www.cordisbright.co.uk</a>