

Meeting: Cabinet **Date:** 23 February 2023

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy

When does the decision need to be implemented? N/A

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet's approval for the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2023 to 2023.
- 1.2 The Strategy has been updated following a 6 week public consultation on the draft Strategy which took place during October and November 2022, as approved by Cabinet on 18th October 2022.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The proposals in this report help us to deliver this ambition by creating safe spaces, supporting victims, and addressing the behaviours of those causing harm, so that our vulnerable residents and their children can thrive.

- 2.2 The reasons for the decision are that the previous Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy is due to end early in 2023. The new Strategy has been developed following a strategic review of the system response in 2021, and with the approval of the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) that the new strategy would continue to address both domestic abuse and sexual violence, however with an increased focus on sexual violence.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

That Cabinet recommends to Council:

That the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be approved.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy

Appendix 2: Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Background Documents

None

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy ends in March 2023. In preparation a strategic review of the domestic abuse response in Torbay was undertaken in 2021. The review incorporated a review of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (DAA21) and a lived experience listening exercise. All the recommendations have been incorporated into the findings to inform the direction and focus of the new Strategy.
- 1.2 The findings from the Call to Action sexual violence project that Torbay Council participated in during 2021 (with people with lived experience of sexual violence, Devon, Plymouth, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Devon CCG and the Innovation Unit); have been used to inform the focus and direction for sexual violence. In addition data about sexual violence services and demand has been gathered to inform a local position statement on sexual violence in Torbay.
- 1.3 A theory of change was devised following analysis of all the review findings, which has informed what change needs to happen, what outcomes have been identified and how we deliver them. This revealed a commonality of themes between both domestic abuse and sexual violence that are a focus for the strategy. A small number of themes specific to domestic or sexual violence are also included.
- 1.4 The Strategy focuses on lived experience, prevention, identification, disruption, evidence and understanding; aiming to:
 - a) Elevate responses to sexual violence to achieve parity with domestic violence over the lifetime of the Strategy
 - b) Ensure that all victims disclosing Domestic Abuse and/or Sexual Violence feel that they are believed
 - c) Hold those who harm accountable and not their victims
 - d) Change the narrative and address myths and victim blaming language and practice
 - e) Embed trauma informed practice and improve understanding of how trauma frames victims' responses
 - f) Develop a robust evidence base and consistent monitoring
 - g) Broaden knowledge and understanding of what constitutes domestic and sexual violence and abuse both in the workforce and across the general public, framed in the context of relationships.

1.5 Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence needs to be considered as a whole system response across the life course. There is a risk that separating out various themes can lead to fragmentation and poor oversight of the overall strategic response. However, this is necessary as some areas of activity fit more appropriately with, for example, children's safeguarding. It will be the responsibility of the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group to ensure connectivity and line of sight between the main Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy and related strategies or workstreams so that everything is aligned to the overall strategic direction. Changes to direction or focus resulting from legislative or policy changes will be incorporated into reviews of the strategy which will take place at regular intervals.

1.6 The Strategy has been updated to incorporate feedback from the public consultation, as outlined in 5 below.

1.7 The Delivery Plan that will sit below this Strategy will necessarily be a multi-agency, partnership document. In keeping with the Strategy principles it will be co-produced with people with lived experience as well as services and practitioners working with people experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence. For this reason, the Delivery Plan is not yet in place however will be overseen by the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group.

2. Options under consideration

2.1 An alternative option would be to do nothing. However this was discounted as the current policy was set to expire this year and would not take account of the information gathered from the review and the high profile nature of domestic abuse and sexual violence in Torbay.

2.2 An option of having two individual strategies for domestic violence and abuse, and sexual violence was discounted by the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) as this would fragment the strategic response, create areas of overlap and duplication and ineffective use of resources.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

3.1 None

4. Legal Implications

4.1 The Strategy sits above the statutory Safe Accommodation Strategy that is required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and which was approved by Cabinet on 14 December 2021.

5. Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 The draft Strategy was published for public consultation between 19 October 2022 and 30th November 2022. It was published on the Council's website and a link to the consultation was added to the Torbay Community Safety Partnership Are You OK website, which serves as a repository and resource for public information on domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
- 5.2 The draft Strategy and link to the consultation page was widely circulated by email to partner agencies and stakeholders, including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Devon and Cornwall Police, NHS Devon, internal Council stakeholders, the Standing Tall Community and Voluntary Sector Partnership, and commissioned and non-commissioned provider services and charities including the Sexual Assault Referral Centre and Devon Rape Crisis. The consultation was also promoted via social media and during the latter part of the consultation period, promotion was linked to the annual international 16 Days of Action campaign which raises awareness of domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- 5.3 There were 50 responses to the survey. The page was visited 397 times during the consultation period and related documents on the page were downloaded 170 times. The survey itself was viewed 159 times. Responses to the survey show that:
- 92.0% of respondents either agree or strongly agree with the areas for change identified in the draft strategy.
 - 88.0% either agree or strongly agree with the outcomes we want to achieve.
 - 84.0% either agree or strongly agree with the five key activities we will do to deliver the outcomes.
 - 86.0% either agree or strongly agree with the principles we will work to.
 - Most respondents to the survey live in Torbay (70.0%). The highest proportion of respondents live in Torquay (32.0%)
 - 72.0% of respondents were female.
 - The majority of respondents are aged between 35 and 64 (84.0%). There were no responses from people aged under 25.
 - 82.0% of respondents did not consider themselves to be disabled in any way.
- 5.4 The draft Strategy was also presented to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 9th November 2022 and provoked interest and discussion. The Board acknowledged that training was provided to Council staff and Councillors on safeguarding, bystander and domestic abuse but felt that more could be done to challenge our partners and our communities to encourage everyone to report any areas of concern. The Board unanimously approved that Cabinet be recommended to support the draft Strategy, subject to the inclusion of a glossary of terms and acronyms, which has now been added. The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board is set out in Appendix 2 to the submitted report.

5.5 The demographic profile of the consultation responses revealed an absence of responses from people aged 16 to 25. To address this, steps are being taken to ensure involvement of this age group in co-producing the Strategy Delivery Plan, which will set out the actions and workstreams to delivering the Strategy outcomes.

5.6 The main themes from the survey feedback concerned:

- More emphasis required on addressing impacts on children and taking a whole family approach
- Education for children and young people on healthy relationships
- The need for a more systemic approach
- Community and Voluntary Sector is part of the solution
- Family court
- How the outcomes will be achieved

5.7 The Strategy has been updated to include taking a whole family approach, learning and education, challenging social norms, using existing resources more effectively, collaboration, and maximising funding opportunities to develop local support for those experiencing sexual violence; as fundamental to the approach to achieve culture change and parity for those experiencing sexual violence in Torbay.

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

6.1 Not applicable

7. Tackling Climate Change

7.1 Not applicable

8. Associated Risks

8.1 Domestic abuse and sexual violence rates are disproportionately high in Torbay and can have life-changing effects for those directly and indirectly victimised, it has been and continues to be a strategic priority for these reasons. An effective response can only come from coordinated efforts across the system, inclusive of our communities and the voluntary sector. Not having a strategy that unites, challenges and drives these efforts risks ineffective and inadequate responses, which ultimately would leave people at heightened risk, the perpetuation of all the harms associated which are significant and in worse case scenarios deaths.

9. Equality Impacts - Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups

	Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
Older or younger people	DA and SV are generally under-reported. Prevalence across older people is recognised but requires more insight and response. Younger people form part of a priority group as a preventative measure to stop any abuse from happening, but also to prevent chances of repeat victimisation and negative outcomes across the lifecycle.		
People with caring Responsibilities			Impact is neutral (although may link to other groups)
People with a disability	Having a disability is a known risk factor associated with being vulnerable to DA and or SV		
Women or men	Women are more likely to experience DA and or SV than men. Although men are also victims too.		
People who are black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) (Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community)	The strategy seeks to be more responsive to Torbay's diversity, in doing so will seek to ensure that people can identify with service responses and resources available		
Religion or belief (including lack of belief)			Neutral

People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual	Services offers have historically been less visible and responsive to LGBTQ community – Strategy seeks to address		
People who are transgendered	Services offers have historically been less visible and responsive to LGBTQ community – Strategy seeks to address		
People who are in a marriage or civil partnership			Neutral
Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave	Pregnancy is an identified risk factor for occurrence of DVA		
Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)	DA and SV cuts across socio-economic boundaries, although there is a correlation with Torbay's more deprived areas (in terms of reporting)		
Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)	Domestic Abuse and sexual violence are determinants of a range of social, economic, mental and physical ills – this strategy contributes very directly to promoting the general health of Torbay, including sexual health.		

10. Cumulative Council Impact

10.1 None

11. Cumulative Community Impacts

- 11.1 None from the local perspective. However continuing and worsening economic hardship in our communities is expected to result in increased incidences of domestic violence and abuse.