

**Meeting:** Overview and Scrutiny Adult Social Care and Housing Sub-Group

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> October 2025

**Wards affected:** ALL

**Report Title:** Update on Women's Safety and Domestic Abuse Strategy

**When does the decision need to be implemented?** n/a

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## 1. Introduction

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- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the O&S Sub-Group with an update on Women's Safety and the Domestic Abuse Strategy highlighting key activity and emerging strategic issues.

## 2. Women's Safety Update

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- 2.1 Governance - TTAG & ENTE Delivery Group** - The Torbay Town Centre Action Group (TTAG) has been established as part of the revised governance of the Street Focus partnership activity. This partnership group is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the ASB Action Plan including the recommendations from the Environmental Visual Audit (EVA) which identifies potential safety improvements to the town centre. Although it is initially focusing on Torquay, the intention is for an EVA to be completed for Paignton and Brixham and specific plans to be developed for these areas. Reporting into this is the newly formed Evening and Nighttime Economy (ENTE) Delivery Group which will consider community safety partnership activity around licensing, including oversight of taxi marshalling; women's safety and other concerns, including engaging with the business community. This group will be using the Purple Flag framework as a guideline for best practice.
- 2.2 Project Nighteye** - Project Nighteye is a Devon and Cornwall Police (DCP) campaign to specifically target the male perpetrators of sexual violence in the evening and night-time economy (ENTE). The project aims to make public spaces safer for women and girls and deter crime. In order to raise awareness around behaviours of concern, how to spot them and provide signposting to methods of reporting, the Force has created two animated videos – one for partners and one for the public. This will be circulated via existing networks including across the DA Champions and SWAN.

- 2.3 SWAN (Safety of Women at Night Charter)** – the SWAN charter has been running for several years and is about supporting businesses and organisations to take practical steps together to make Torbay safer at night for women. 150 organisations are currently signed up to the Charter and we have continued to engage with local businesses to increase engagement. For the upcoming year funding has been secured to strengthen the offer to the network by providing additional bystander training, including developing an online offer; input from voluntary sector partners to increase awareness of VAWG – and linking more closely with the DA Champions network. The ENTE delivery group will be evaluating the effectiveness of SWAN during 25/26.
- 2.4 Safer Travel Survey** – a Torbay wide survey in April 2025 targeted at women and girls regarding safety on public transport which had 279 responses across the age range. This found that:
- Most people feel safe on public transport during the day.
  - Younger people are more likely to feel unsafe during the day.
  - 48% of participants feel unsafe using public transport after dark.
  - Females, young people, and disabled people are more likely to feel unsafe when using public transport after dark.
  - 42% of respondents have witnessed, or experienced, crime or harassment.
  - People aged 54 and under are twice as likely to have experienced, or witnessed, crime of harassment on public transport than those aged older.
  - 31% of people who experienced or witnessed crime or harassment reported it, and many respondents were unsure how to report concerns whilst using public transport.
  - Only 12% of people think there are enough security measures in place on public transport.
- 2.5 Safer Travel app** – learning from the Safer Travel survey, with funding from Great Western Railway, this project aims to improve safety for women and girls when using public transport, although it's impact will potentially be much wider. The funding has been used to purchase access to the IMABI travel app for a 12-month test and learn project. The app provides localised mapping and safety tools specific to Torbay – including quick incident reporting to police, Stagecoach and other partners. It also provides information on local services, safe spaces and useful advice guides which can be edited and changed locally. It offers a method for direct engagement with local users for example for spot surveys; and provides users with virtual tracking and other safety tools. This is already available to download free from [here](#). Comms will start leading up to 16 Days of Action although stakeholders have already been involved in developing local content and raising awareness.
- 2.6 Development of the Mentors in Violence Prevention approach** – funded by the Home Office Serious Violence Duty grant, this project works with primary age children. This is an early intervention peer mentoring programme that aims to create a safe and positive space to encourage positive peer to peer connection to ultimately reduce crime and violence. MVP is a preventative programme where children and young people develop leadership skills to consider their role as 'active bystanders', it aims to create safe and supportive learning environments by challenging bullying and abuse, building relationships and creating partnerships. MVP has continued to be delivered in several Torbay Primary schools however was impacted this year by severe delays in the announcement of Home Office funding. Work is ongoing to identify ways in which the project can be continued post 25/26 and potential embedded into wider prevention activity in education or community settings. Discussions have also taken place with Shekinah to develop a joint business

case outlining a combination of peer mentoring and restorative circles approach to deliver a programme in schools focused on healthy relationships and tackling misogyny.

### 3. Domestic Abuse Strategy Update

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#### 3.1 DASV Strategy Workstream Updates:

**Communication:** The Communications workstream is focused on delivering three campaigns this year. These include work specifically on Suicide Prevention (September), 16 Days of Action (November/December), and Sexual Violence Awareness Week (February). 16 Days of Action this year runs from 25<sup>th</sup> November to 10 December with variety of awareness raising events planned across Torbay. This will include drops in, myth busting, and an awareness raising bus.

**Workforce Development:** The workstream has mapped the various training offers on domestic abuse and sexual violence and is also examining the different offers on trauma informed practice. Most recently the group has been actively involved in reviewing and updating the Council's I-learn modules:

- Introduction to Domestic Abuse
- Introduction to Sexual Violence
- Introduction to MARAC
- Managing Sexual Violence Disclosures.

**Disruption:** The Disruption workstream focuses on developing and implementing activities that will identifying the person causing the harm and addressing these behaviours as early as possible and ensuring there is a coordinated system response that breaks the cycle of abuse. A significant gap in Torbay is the lack of a Behaviour Change offer to address the perpetration of domestic abuse. The focus of the Disruption workstream has been to scope and prepare a proposal recommending how this can be addressed (see Appendix 1). The paper presents three options:

**Option 1:** Recruiting Behaviour Change Specialist Roles x 2 (into existing structure)

**Option 2:** Commission Behaviour Change interventions with support for victims and children (as a separate provision)

**Option 3:** Seek to partner with Plymouth or Cornwall pending their commissioning outcomes

The preferred option which will now be costed and put forward as part of budget considerations for 26/27 is **Option 2** to commission a Behaviour Change intervention with support for victims and children. This will be progressed via the Disruption work-stream.

**3.2 Findings from our Lived Experience Work:** One of our key DASV Strategy pillars is Embedding Lived Experience. This means listening to, learning from and using what our victim and survivor communities tell us to develop and improve the system response to DASV in Torbay, including co-producing with them. To support this, we provided funding for some specific activities:

- Peer Researchers** – recruited, trained and supported by Devon Rape Crisis to undertake structured interviews with victims and survivors of their experiences of accessing services and suggestions for improvement
- Facilitating Engagement Grants** – small sums of money paid to VCS organisations to use to facilitate engagement with victims and survivors and build lived experience networks.

The first year of work has provided valuable insights for the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) which have been collated and reflected upon by a small sub-group of DASVEG and some proposed solutions identified:

Issue	Proposed solution
Waiting lists for services including therapy offers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OPCC Sexual Violence Therapies contract due to start in early 2026 will help to address some of the waiting lists however demand will continue to exceed supply</li> <li>Trauma stabilisation training has been and continues to be delivered to staff in key services so they can support people whilst waiting for MH support. The training gives staff skills and techniques to help ground people in emotional distress.</li> </ul>
Fragmented and disjointed referral pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure multi- disciplinary forums and pathways are well publicised</li> </ul>
People feel let down, disbelieved, stigmatised and alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-produce a Victims Charter setting out values and principles of what to expect from services including making venues trauma informed and welcoming</li> </ul>
Tensions between trauma informed approaches and limitations in what statutory agencies can do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased complexity and multiple nances in presentations</li> <li>Amplify Power Threat Meaning Framework approach across system (<i>What happened to you?</i> not <i>what is wrong with you?</i>)</li> </ul>
Lack of long-term support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fund Peer Support offers that are available long term</li> </ul>
VCS holding unacceptable and unsafe levels of risk due to MH thresholds/limited service offers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address impact of DPT thresholds on wider system</li> <li>Support VCS to facilitate safe delivery as a valued partner - including in-kind support</li> </ul>
Request to co-produce service solutions with people with living and lived experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for men and those with intersectional needs</li> </ul>

In addition, the Peer Researchers have been involved in gathering views to help frame communications around suicide prevention and DASV to support the Council's work on suicide prevention.

## 4. Policy and the External Environment

**4.1 The Increasing Impacts of Online Pornography on Children:** In September the Children's Commissioner published a new report on the harms being experienced by children from online pornography.

This report follows on from the 2023 report “*A lot of it is just actually abuse - young people and pornography*” and highlights that the situation has worsened in the last two years – with the caveat that the report was prepared before the Online Safety Bill was enacted this July.

The report is clear that the Act’s protections can only go so far whilst online and offline pornography is governed by two different sets of rules- what is illegal to publish offline is not always illegal to publish online. Offline formats of pornographic videos, for example DVDs, are required to be classified by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) to be legally distributed in the UK. The BBFC will not classify pornographic material that is potentially harmful, including acts likely to cause serious physical harm and material likely to encourage an interest in sexually abusive relationships.

Online pornography is not regulated in the same way so whilst the Online Safety Act provides protection against illegal material, and access protections for children, it is important to understand there are no provisions to regulate the publication of legal but harmful pornography.

#### **Key findings from the report:**

<b>It is normal for children and young people to be exposed to online pornography:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70% of survey respondents had seen pornography online, up from 64% in 2023.</li> <li>• Boys (73%) were more likely than girls (65%) to report seeing online pornography</li> <li>• A larger proportion of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (76%) had seen pornography in comparison to those without SEN (69%)</li> </ul>
<b>Children are being exposed at very young ages:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The average age a child first sees pornography online is 13.</li> <li>• More than a quarter (27%) of respondents had seen online pornography by the age of 11.</li> <li>• Some respondents reported having seen pornography by the age of “6 or younger”.</li> </ul>
<b>Children are most likely to see pornography by accident</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 59% reported seeing pornography online by accident up from 38% in 2023.</li> <li>• X (formerly Twitter) remains the most common source of pornography for children, outstripping even dedicated pornography sites.</li> <li>• The gap between the number of young people who saw porn on X and the number who saw it on dedicated pornography sites has widened in the last 2 years. X now accounts for 10% points more exposure than dedicated pornography sites (45% vs. 35%) in 2025, compared to only 4% points in 2023 (41% vs. 37%).</li> <li>• 8 out of 10 of the main sources children access pornography are social media or networking sites.</li> </ul>
<b>It is normal for the pornography children see online to be violent</b>	For example, choking, strangulation, hair pulling

**4.2 The weaponisation of the VAWG agenda:** In recent months we have seen women’s safety being co-opted by far-right groups to justify racist and anti-migrant agendas. Male violence against women and girls (VAWG) is being reframed as an “imported” issue, rather than a systemic, society-wide problem.

**Examples include:**

- False statistics (e.g. “40% of sex attacks by foreign nationals”) spread by unverified sources like the Centre for Migration Control and then quoted by the media and some high-profile political figures without verification
- Misleading claims linking immigration to rising sexual violence, reinforcing incorrect and harmful myths that most gender-based violence is committed by strangers or migrants
- Far-right groups have staged protests outside hotels housing asylum seekers, claiming to protect women and girls (for example the recent demonstrations in Epping against a migrant who had allegedly sexually assaulted a young girl.) Such protests often use isolated incidents to generalise and stigmatise entire migrant communities. Last summer’s riots following Southport, involved a similar rhetoric and protesting around asylum hotels. In Rotherham, out of the 75 people arrested after rioters set fire to an asylum hotel 35 turned out to have been previously reported to the police for domestic abuse.
- Slogans like “Safety of women and children before foreigners” have been used to promote anti-migrant protests.
- Influential public figures Elon Musk amplified far-right voices on X (formerly Twitter), including Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) and Andrew Tate.

**The impact of this is that:**

- The narrative distracts from the reality that most violence is committed by men known to the victim, not strangers or migrants. Male violence is not imported; it is a pervasive issue across all communities
- It puts survivors at greater risk
- It detracts from educational discourse with young people and communities about healthy relationships and consent
- It diverts attention from systemic issues like underfunded support services and long waiting lists for support
- It normalises hate speech and fuels division, thus affecting community cohesion
- Migrant and minoritised women face increased fear, harassment, and isolation
- Survivors are retraumatised by using their experiences for political purposes
- Public trust in genuine safeguarding efforts is undermined.

**In response we need to:**

- Ensure our communications centre survivor voices and systemic causes of violence
- Ensure that we correct misinformation
- Challenge the narrative

**4.3 Emerging challenges for LGBTQ+ community and impact on victims experiencing DASV:** Over the last few years and particularly since the High Court ruling regarding Biological Sex, the Intercom Trust report noticing a significant negative impact on our trans and gender diverse communities, due to the social, political climate of fear that has been created in the media/social media and by some politicians. The Intercom Trust are now working with more victims of crime than ever before, a significant rise in mental/emotional health and fear of living their authentic lives.

The service has reported having clients that will not go out into town due to fear of using toilet facilities and have had Trans, CIS gender clients and staff who have been challenged in toilets as they do not fit the perceived appearance of a ‘woman’. They have noticed the increased need for support as the current climate impacts on the trauma, mental and emotional health of individuals.

The current provision for LGBTQ+ DASV victims and survivors is provided by grant funding from the Ministry of Justice and delivered by the Intercom Trust's Safer Rainbow service, which is commissioned by Torbay for the whole of wider Devon. The funding is due to end on 31st March 2026.

There is no information about continuation or new funding for this work at the time of writing this report, suggesting that nothing will be announced until after the Chancellors Budget in late November. This places the service at risk as staff may leave before any announcement is made.

In the meantime, The Intercom Trust is actively seeking charitable funding to enable the continuation of the work in some format.

The value of the work being delivered by Safer Rainbow has come to the attention of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner Nicole Jacobs, who is a strong advocate for "by and for" services.

## 5. Appendices

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Appendix 1: Report on Options for Responding to DA Perpetration