

# Equality Impact Assessment – Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2028

## Details of proposal:

Sefton is looking to adopt a revised Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy for 2023-2028. The Strategy has been revised following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The strategy also includes the Councils statutory responsibilities under the Safe Accommodation duty. The Strategy has been written and approved by the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board following the completion of Local Strategic Needs Assessment.

## Ramifications of Proposal:

The Strategy will look to address issues of Domestic Abuse broken down into 3 main themes:

- **Prevent** – Early intervention and prevention to reduce the cycle of abuse.
- **Protect** - Keeping victims and their families' safe whilst challenging the behaviour of perpetrators.
- **Repair** - Providing ongoing support beyond crisis intervention and developing resilience for the future.

The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board will develop an action plan to accompany the lifetime of the strategy in order to deliver the priorities identified in a realistic timeframe. Accompanying this will be a commissioning plan to provide new or enhanced services to address need and any identified gaps in provision.

## **Are there any protected characteristics that will be disproportionately affected in comparison to others?**

It is accepted that Domestic Abuse can affect anyone irrespective of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity. This is an important message to impart. Domestic Abuse does not happen to a certain type of person. Just because someone does not look like a “typical victim” does not mean s/he is not suffering from domestic abuse.

*The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:*

- *Age*
- *Disability*
- *Gender Reassignment*
- *Marriage and Civil Partnership*
- *Race*
- *Religion or Belief*
- *Sex*
- *Sexual Orientation*
- *Pregnancy and Maternity*

Activities to prevent Domestic Abuse, support victims and deal with perpetrators need to be designed to meet the legitimate and particular considerations of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity.

### **Sex**

The Domestic Abuse strategy recognises that it affects men as well as women. There is a risk that victims are portrayed only as women. The activities proposed in the strategy will, wherever possible, cover both genders in terms of victims and perpetrators. The local refuge is only available to females. It has been recognised that there is a lack of services for males in Sefton. This is a concern the strategy aims to address. There are real differences in how the genders experience Domestic Abuse and this will lead to variation in the approach taken towards men and women. Women do seem to experience the most serious physical and repeated assaults

Female victims accounted for 73% of domestic abuse related crimes recorded by the police 2020/21 and 74% in 2021/22 (Domestic Abuse in England and Wales Overview November 2021 and November 2022, Office for National Statistics (ONS)).

There were 373 victims of domestic homicide aged 16 and over in England and Wales between March 2019 and March 2021. 72% of these victims (269) were female. (Domestic Abuse in England and Wales Overview November 2022, Office for National Statistics (ONS)).

### **Sexual Orientation**

The DA Act 2021 applies to same sex relationships in the same way as heterosexual relationships. This strategy also applies to people suffering from domestic abuse in same sex relationships. Training packages and publicity will stress this. The Local Domestic Abuse Partnership may consider it worthwhile to target our LGBT+ community to encourage victims to seek help.

## **Disability**

The Domestic Abuse Partnership recognises the additional problems faced by victims with a disabling condition. The local refuge is accessible for people with mobility problems. The problems faced by disabled people are not seen as different, but over and above those facing people without a disability. Regarding mental health, this is complex. As a rule of thumb, all victims of domestic abuse (and their children) will have a reduced level of mental well-being as a result of the abuse. This needs to be taken into consideration by those offering them services. For someone who is depressed, making major changes can seem too daunting despite the risks of staying in a relationship. The strategy recognises the role of counselling for victims and their children. Risk assessments for victims must include the risk of suicide and self-harm. It can also be argued, that the perpetrators of Domestic Abuse have mental health problems expressed by the need to feel power and control. Sometimes this stems from experiencing abuse in the home as a child. This again emphasises why work with children in violent homes is so important as it can help break patterns of abusive behaviour. There is a link between mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse for both the perpetrators and victims of Domestic Abuse. It is important for substance misuse treatment services to respond to Domestic Abuse and work closely with partners on the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

## **Age**

There is no upper age limit to being a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse. Organisations representing older people will be made aware of this strategy. Domestic abuse has a detrimental impact on children, as this strategy has emphasised. The strategy aims to deal with concerns about:

- The impact on children in violent homes
- Young people adopting violent/victims patterns in dating relationships or towards other family members.

There will be a focus on work in schools, especially with primary age children.

The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board will include amongst publicity campaigns messages, as part of its VAWG Strategy aimed at young women regarding dating violence, date rape and sexual assaults.

## **Race**

The strategy has covered the lack of culturally sensitive services for victims from ethnic minorities. There is concern at the lack of reporting from certain communities. This may mean that current data in relation to offenders and victims does not present an accurate picture of domestic violence within ethnic minority communities. Safer Sefton Together's approach to VAWG also covers so called Honour Based Abuse such as Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This issue has both an age and gender bias as problems are faced most by young people and are most detrimental to young women. However, it will not be overlooked that Forced Marriage affects men. Raising awareness of forced marriage will need to be done sensitively with the aim of working with local communities.

## **Pregnancy & Maternity**

We know that the risk of domestic abuse increases during pregnancy and therefore the strategy will ensure that women who are pregnancy will be able to access the help they need as well as their unborn child.

## **Gender Reassignment**

Whilst not revealed during the needs assessment there may be issues to take into account around trans or non-binary victims of domestic violence and how to provide for their needs while maintaining safe single sex spaces.

## **Consultation:**

The needs assessment carried out a number of focus group engagement sessions with victims/survivors as well as collection of views through interviews and questionnaires. The views of victims/survivors in Sefton has shaped the strategy. We are keen to further develop the victim / survivor voice and it be at the heart of all strategic decisions. This will be regularly reviewed.

## **Is there evidence that the Public Sector Equality Duties will be met?**

*The Equality Act 2010 requires that those subject to the Equality Duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:*

- *Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.*
- *Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*
- *Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*

*The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:*

- *Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.*
- *Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.*
- *Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.*

The purpose of the strategy is to provide Domestic & Sexual Abuse support services for victims of Domestic and Sexual Abuse/Violence no matter what their background. Indeed, the strategy aims to protect the most vulnerable in our society and provide support to increase their resilience in order to break the cycle of abuse.

**What actions will follow if proposal accepted by cabinet & Council?**

*Include details of any mitigating action and ongoing monitoring to address any of the equality impacts highlighted above*

Next steps will include the completion of an action plan to accompany the priorities identified within the Strategy and from the Needs Assessment. Accompanying the Action Plan will be a commissioning plan. The strategy and action plan will be reviewed regularly throughout its lifespan.

One of the first priorities will be develop a stronger survivor voice. Whilst survivors are represented on the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board by agencies that support them, we are keen to develop a survivor forum that will have representatives on the Partnership Board.

Once established regular engagement with the survivor forum (s) as representatives of victims / survivors will take place throughout the lifespan of the strategy and beyond.