



Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

2021 – 2024



Overarching Aim

The aim of this strategy is to help create an environment where women and girls feel safe to pursue their lives free of fear and harassment from men, delivering effectively upon our core responsibilities, and using our influence to support change in our communities to help enhance trust and confidence in Gwent Police.

Key Strategic Principles

- Violence, abuse, and intimidation against women and girls in any form is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.
- Public spaces, education establishments, and online should be safe places for all women and girls. This includes within our own organisation.
- Women and girls should feel confident to report their experiences of harm to the police directly or indirectly, safe in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously and that they will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Our actions to tackle violence against women and girls will be open and transparent to external scrutiny.
- The lived experiences of women and girls will be heard, and their opinions respected.
- Prevent police officers abusing their position.
- We need to target and deal with violent perpetrators.

Background

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) in all its forms is unacceptable. It affects every community and has an incalculable impact on the lives of those individuals affected, their families and the wider community. It is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality in society. The United Nations (UN) defines VAWG 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” (add reference). VAWG can take place anywhere, whether it be in the home, work or in public places such as the street or on public transport. VAWG includes the following crime types;

- Sexual violence
- Sexual harassment and stalking
- Sexual exploitation
- Domestic abuse
- Female genital mutilation

- Forced marriage
- Honour based crimes

It is important that VAWG is not seen as a series of incidents or assaults which an individual experiences. VAWG describes violent and oppressive patterns of behaviour, which achieve power and control over women and girls. It negatively impacts on the physical safety, health and emotional well-being of individuals.

This strategy has been developed in answer to the overwhelming evidence that women are more likely to experience violence and abuse in terms of frequency and severity, simply because they are women. We understand the gendered nature of these types of abuses and crimes, and also that men and boys are sometimes victims of these types of abuses and crimes. There are other wider Gwent police strategies and plans that deal with forms of abuse and violence against men and boys. These include;

- Child Centred Policing Strategy and Plan
- DA Delivery Plan
- RASSO Delivery Plan
- Vulnerability Strategy
- Joint Strategic Equality Plan

This strategy is also interdependent on the above strategies/plans that are helping to drive activity.

The statistics on the prevalence and range of these crimes are evident to see and make for stark reading. The Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that an estimated 1.6 million women in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in the 12 months to March 2020. In the 12 months to September 2020 the police recorded 153, 136 rape and other sexual offences. The victim was female in 84% of cases. Within Gwent in the last 12 months (to Nov 2021) there were 7468 female victims of DA, 404 female victims of rape and 794 victims of sexual offences.

There has been a recent significant national focus and drive to ensure that tackling VAWG is one of the top priorities for the government and criminal justice agencies. This follows the horrific kidnapping, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer on 3 March 2021, which has led to women and girls across the country speaking out about their own experiences of violence and abuse, and demanding change. This has had a major impact on trust and confidence in policing across the UK. In July 2021 HM Government released their VAWG Strategy which sets out the actions the Government will take to increase support for survivors, bring perpetrators to justice, and, ultimately, reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls. They have followed a four pillar approach around prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and strengthening the system.

HMICFRS have also produced two recent inspection reports;

- Police Engagement with Women and Girls Inspection (July 2021)
- A Duty to protect Police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls (August 2021)

They concluded that there needs to be a bold and radical shift in thinking about how to tackle crimes that disproportionality affect women and girls. They have further stated that the relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, resourced with the appropriate level of capability and capacity. They have recommended to police forces that the same work stream approach to serious and organised crime is utilised for the VAWG strategy. That is the four Ps- Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare.

The Welsh Government have previously produced a Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) strategy 2016-21. The overarching objectives were around prevention, protection and support for people affected by VAWDASV. The strategy is due to be updated. Any recommendations put forward as a result of the updated strategy will be considered and subsequently implemented into Gwent's delivery framework where appropriate.

The National Police Chiefs' Council released their VAWG National Framework. The focus in this initial framework is to concentrate on areas where policing can make the greatest impact in the shortest time. They have three overarching objectives;

- 1- Improving trust and confidence in policing
- 2- Relentlessly pursuing perpetrators
- 3- Creating safer spaces

Gwent Police's strategy is intended to align with all three of the above documents.

The aims and objectives of this strategy also encompass the responsibilities placed on us by the Welsh policy and legislative landscape, which has been helping prioritise VAWDASV for a number of years. The VAWDASV Act 2015 places duties on public bodies to play an active role in tackling VAWDASV and provides the direction required within the public sector to collaborate with partner agencies to plan how to tackle violence and abuse. The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 requires public bodies to sets out seven wellbeing goals relevant to VAWDASV and the support of survivors. The Act puts in place a "sustainable development principle" which requires public bodies to follow five ways of working to ensure they work collaboratively with people and communities, avoid repeating past mistakes and to tackle some of the long term challenges being faced.

The recent addition of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 have also provided important advances on matters such as coercive and controlling behaviour, and non-fatal strangulation.

This strategy is inclusive of all people that identify as female. This encapsulates and seeks to protect all woman and girls of any age, irrespective of race, faith, sexual orientation, disability, or any other protected characteristic, as defined by the Equality Act 2010. It also protects women and girls who have more than one of the above protected characteristics.

Gwent Police is focused on ensuring the intersectional needs of women, and the wider community needs are being met.

To help develop and shape the strategy, we took the time to listen to feedback from survivors who have provided us with some valuable contributions around helping tackle VAWG. These were the key themes to come from the feedback;

1- Importance of robust investigations and prioritising VAWG

“I feel they could have maybe looked at the case sooner as evidence was destroyed”.

“Abuse cases should be handled straight away, as the longer it is delayed the less likely the victim feels encouraged to alert the police again”.

“I called 8 times, perpetrator still not spoken to”.

“There is no abuse that should be judged as ‘not that bad’. Abuse is abuse and no one should have to suffer in silence”.

2- Showing professionalism, compassion and empathy to victims

“Most DA victims will only reach out a handful of times, please listen, and don’t judge”!

“Believe the victim”.

3- Multi-agency approach

“To see multi-agencies, businesses and volunteers working together with the police would be beneficial and to be applauded”.

“What would have benefited me was a trained counsellor working alongside the police officer”.

4- Early engagement and education

“Visits local schools to initiate talks on the subject, to prevent and share awareness. There maybe children who are living in homes where this is a regular occurrence, they may feel empowered to stand up, speak and report the problem”

“Community engagement and higher profile of police officers in schools and colleges for both boys and girls to educate what is and is not acceptable behaviour”.

This Strategy sets out how we plan to prevent these crimes, improve the experiences of victims and survivors, ensure perpetrators are brought to justice, and improve the way different organisations work together.

Strategic Approach

The strategy will adopt the widely recognised four pillar approach to help with the delivery of the strategy- Prepare, Prevent, Pursue, Protect;

ENABLER	AMBITION
Prepare	<p>We will make sure everyone involved is sufficiently prepared to respond to VAWG, and to provide the right support.</p> <p>We will ensure an intelligence led, evidence-based approach to supporting our partners and progressing actions.</p> <p>We will involve those affected most to ensure the best possible outcomes.</p>
Prevent	<p>We will take action to prevent crimes against women and girls before they are committed. This includes working with partner agencies around early intervention to help tackle issues that can contribute to someone adopting harmful behaviour.</p>
Pursue	<p>We will relentlessly pursue and disrupt adult perpetrators holding them to account for their actions.</p> <p>We will take action to address harmful behaviours in children.</p> <p>We will provide perpetrators opportunities to address harmful behaviours based around victim safety.</p>
Protect	<p>We will strengthen our protection of women and girls to stop them becoming victims of violent crime.</p> <p>We will close opportunities for individuals or groups of perpetrators to cause them harm.</p>

Prepare

For us to continue to prepare and be able to suitably respond to VAWG, we need to take a whole system approach where we are identifying, involving and working alongside our partners to ensure that “whole system” thinking. We need to work to improve and develop our understanding of what works through methods of involvement and engagement with the voices of survivors and those most affected by VAWG. This important engagement and partnership working will help to inform and shape our delivery.

WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- **An immediate and unequivocal prioritisation of VAWG**
- **Developing a clear structure that supports the sharing of information across different local and regional structures to ensure that “whole system” approach**
- **Seeking sustainable approaches to planning, commissioning and funding services for victims and survivors**
- **Seeking the views and assistance of survivors to help inform evaluation and monitoring of delivery of services**
- **Development and training for officers around understanding the impact of VAWG**
- **Improving further the understanding of the “hidden crimes”**
- **Understanding how VAWG disproportionately affects different parts of the community**

Prevent

Prevention and early intervention will sit at the core of this strategy. We will tackle the causes to prevent people from experiencing VAWG in the first place. We will focus on the needs of people and communities and continue to develop co-designed/co-located services/systems with partners to ensure we are sharing information and taking an early preventative approach to issues.

We will work to improve our understanding of what works and build our evidence-base to identify the most effective interventions to reduce harm in our communities. We will ensure that learning is adopted and practice is enhanced through the scaling up of projects that work.

We will seek to not only prevent incidences of VAWG against survivors by perpetrators but also to work with partners to create a climate in which there is no tolerance of unacceptable beliefs that underpin them.

WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- **Media campaigns to show the unacceptable nature of VAWG crimes**

- **Alongside partners, working with children and young people to help promote the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong**
- **Identifying and putting in place support mechanisms for those who exhibit early signs of perpetrating or experiencing VAWG**
- **We will continue to ensure survivors, including those that are disabled, older, younger, from all faiths and those from the LGBT community are able to receive support and advice as survivors of VAWG.**
- **Using technology to increase safeguarding opportunities.**
- **Use the data we collect to clearly identify the nature and scale of VAWG**
- **Gaining a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the evidence base on what works to prevent VAWG**
- **Increasing our transparency, providing confidence in investigative processes, and informing practice change**
- **Ensuring the gender balance of the force reflects that of our community**
- **Early intervention and prevention of women in the CJS, addressing vulnerabilities often leading to crime**

Pursue

We need to be relentless in our pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators in order to hold them accountable for their actions and prioritise the safety of victims. We are also clear that tackling VAWG over the long term is about much more than enforcement alone. As well as holding perpetrators to account, we need to increase our focus around the behaviour of perpetrators and understand what is driving this harmful behaviour in order to reduce offending. This will both challenge and support those who carry out abuse to both deter and to facilitate enduring change in behaviour.

WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- **Effective use of statutory tools and powers to manage the risk posed by perpetrators**
- **The robust management of high-harm violent offenders against women and girls**
- **Further improvements in the quality and timeliness of VAWG investigations**
- **Improvements in the outcome rates for VAWG offences**
- **Perpetrator programmes to understand what drives harmful behaviour and how to change it**
- **To lead by example in achieving cultural change, adopting a zero-tolerance approach within the workplace to all forms of VAWG**
- **Sufficient capacity and capability to investigate VAWG offences effectively**

Protect

We will safeguard vulnerable victims and children from exposure to the effects of VAWG. We need to protect women and girls from perpetrators who will seek to control and exploit them. Safeguarding victims and those at risk of harm needs to be central to all our partnership activities.

Women and girls encounter barriers to accessing and retaining support models due to their circumstances which can often be due to the ongoing presence of a perpetrator. We have the on-going challenge to continue to promote access to services, to build trust with survivors and in maintaining effective responses to women and girls needs.

WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- **Developing methods to increase confidence in the reporting of offences**
- **A trauma-aware approach at all levels, to better support victims through the criminal justice process**
- **Ensuring that women and girls feel safe in public spaces and online**
- **Tackling the norms, practices and structures associated with gender inequality**