

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (VAWDASV): Gwent Regional Strategy 2023 – 2027

**This document is available in Welsh
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**

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Executive Summary

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) is everybody's business. Individuals have a right to live, work and enjoy communities that are safe, and free from abuse and violence.

This Strategy will set out how we are looking at achieving this vision across Gwent, in the prevention of VAWDASV, protection from VAWDASV and support for those impacted by VAWDASV. It will show that across Gwent, partners, stakeholders and those with lived experience of VAWDASV are committed to collaborative working and joined up approaches to tackle issues of abuse and violence.

Due to regional movements in the period leading up to and in development of this Strategy, there has been a limited evidence base to truly understand local needs. Acknowledging the absence of quantitative and analytical data, this Strategy has been informed by the needs and demands of the sector through regional workshops and stakeholder meetings. Lived experience has also informed this Strategy through survivor engagement.

The six objectives outlined within the Strategy have been developed in the context of Welsh Government's National Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2022-2026. To achieve these objectives, priorities have been separated into two approaches:

Fundamentals (areas integral to successful change)

1. Implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act, 2021 (Section 3)
2. Regional Structures Reform
3. Infrastructure for Regional Services and Delivery

Focus Areas (specifically reflecting the regional needs of the Gwent population)

1. Tackling Perpetration
2. Children and Young People
3. Misogyny and Harassment
4. Multiple or Co-occurring Needs

The Strategic Plan outlines how we intend to achieve these priorities by 2027. Delivery of the priorities will be detailed within an Annual Delivery Plan, agreed each year through the governance structures in place for the region.

Although not specifically detailed within the Strategy, there will be definitive links across wider partners to embed VAWDASV as core business beyond the sector. These links include the regional Suicide and Self-Harm group, the IRIS programme in GP surgeries, Remote

Evidence Site under His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) and Local Criminal Justice Board to name a few.

Our Strategy is ambitious as challenges to tackling abuse and violence are becoming greater - strong leadership is required if we are going to achieve a whole system approach for VAWDASV to be everybody's business. For the next four years, the regional VAWDASV Board and Strategic Delivery Group are committed to ensuring that VAWDASV partners and stakeholders not only support the implementation and delivery of this Strategy, through contributing and developing evidence, but also take ownership and hold accountability under the Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act, 2015. It is only in this way that we can support a Gwent population that is safe, healthy and free from abuse and violence.

Statement of Intent

This Strategy builds on the Gwent VAWDASV Strategy 2018-2023 which set out the regional integrated approach to stop violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and families affected by abuse, whilst also holding to account those who perpetrate such abuse.

Our vision is for the region to be a safe place for all those impacted by VAWDASV - whether this be in the prevention of, protection from, or support to recover from VAWDASV. To achieve the vision, the Strategy creates a high level, single point of reference across the region for:

“Relevant Authorities” – a framework to support the requirements set out in the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Wider stakeholders – a clear, co-produced and collectively agreed priorities and expectations to improve outcomes for all individuals and families experiencing any form of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

Commissioners - whilst recognising that this is not a commissioning strategy, the content and associated strategic delivery plan should inform and influence Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence commissioning decisions and investment of resources across the region

Survivors - a transparent way forward, defining how we tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence to be held accountable in our implementation of this Strategy

It will also detail how the existing partnerships and collaborative working arrangements between non-devolved and devolved public bodies, statutory services, specialist sector and the third sector will be further developed and strengthened, to move towards a society where everybody is able to live fear free from violence and abuse.

It is intended that this Strategy and the associated focus areas and activities detailed within the region’s annual delivery plan, will support the Welsh Government and UK Government legislative, strategic and delivery framework to achieve the prevention of violence and abuse, the protection of victims and support for all those affected by violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Introduction

Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) is a complex landscape, but in Wales, the UK and across the world, VAWDASV is considered to be a violation of human rights and a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men. It happens to women because they are women, and women are disproportionately impacted by certain forms of violence.

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence includes domestic abuse (physical, financial and emotional), coercive or controlling behaviour, rape, sexual assault and sexual violence, stalking, harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, crimes committed in the name of 'honour', modern day slavery and trafficking, and sexual exploitation (including commercially through the sex industry, and sexual harassment).

VAWDASV has far reaching consequences for families, children, communities, and society. The direct harm to the health and well-being of victims is clear, and at its most severe can, and does, result in death. However, impacts are wide-ranging - not just on health and wellbeing, but also on poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and the economy. It is also important to note that VAWDASV not only affects adults who experience abuse in the home, in intimate or family relationships but children also - for the first time, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims in their own right. Wider family members can also be impacted by VAWDASV as well as the experience of abuse and violence often being perpetrated in public spaces impacting the wider community.

It is important to note that whilst this Strategy (as well as legislation and policy referred to), references violence against women and girls, it is because it is acknowledging the disproportionate experience of women and girls. It does not - in any way - negate violence and abuse directed towards men, boys and other genders, or violence and abuse perpetrated by women and other genders. This Strategy recognises that anyone (all genders, older people, young people and children) can experience and be affected by domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, sexual abuse, forced marriage, child sexual abuse, stalking and harassment, sexual harassment and exploitation and this can happen in any relationship regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, religion or belief, income, geography or lifestyle.

Similarly, throughout this document, language will be used that readers may not identify or associate with. The Strategy uses commonly used language which is not defined by its term or wording. A Glossary is provided in the Appendix of this Strategy for further reference.

Legislative Context

Welsh Government has led the way in their tackling of VAWDASV in Wales; starting with the Right To Be Safe Strategy (2010) which was updated in 2016, published as the National Strategy on Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (2016-2021), following the enactment of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act'). The Act, which aims to improve:

- a) arrangements for the prevention of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- b) arrangements for the protection of victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence and
- c) support for people affected by gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and sexual violence;

places an emphasis on Relevant Authorities¹ responsibilities to achieve Welsh Government's vision to end violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales, and their ambition for zero VAWDASV.

This Strategy will also support the delivery of a number of key priorities across Welsh and UK Government. In considering this Strategy, context should also be given to the following legislation and its purpose:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – an Act that guarantees an independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner to be the voice that speaks on behalf of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. It also sets out the statutory powers available to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to raise public awareness and hold both agencies and government to account in tackling domestic abuse.
- The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of those in Wales, through an approach of seven wellbeing goals that ensures public bodies think about the long term, work better with people, communities, and each other; looking to prevent problems and taking a more joined-up approach.
- The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 – providing a framework for care and support in Wales; improving the wellbeing of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and for transforming the way in which services are commissioned.

¹ Meaning of "relevant authority" - [Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/12/section/2)

- The Modern Slavery Act 2015 – providing the tools to fight modern slavery; ensuring perpetrators can receive suitably severe punishments for these appalling crimes and enhance support and protection for victims.
- Crime and Security Act 2010 – provides procedures for Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS).
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 – making it a criminal offence to force somebody to marry.
- Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 – underpinning Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Orders and an FGM mandatory reporting duty.
- Serious Crime Act 2015 – supports punishment of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship and strengthened measures to manage people who commit sexual offences or those who pose a risk of sexual harm.
- Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – enshrines local authorities in preventing and alleviating homelessness.
- Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 – improving how individuals rent, manage and live in rented homes in Wales, including support victims and survivors escaping VAWDASV and enabling perpetrators to be targeted for eviction.
- Equality Act 2010 – protecting individuals from discrimination in the workplace and wider society to strengthen protections and supports actions where there has been unlawful treatment of individuals.

Policy Linkages

Successfully implementing this Strategy requires coordination across several areas of policy. This Strategy will hold links to, and with, the following policy areas:

- Health

VAWDASV recognisably has an impact on mental health, often presenting as depression and anxiety, PTSD, and poor wellbeing. There can also be direct effects on physical health and reproductive health, as well as wider family wellbeing and public health. Aligning VAWDASV with health policies and long-term collaboration with GP's, Hospitals and Community Health Services is key to successful outcomes for the population. This Strategy will be coordinated in line with Welsh Government's 'A Healthier Wales' Plan (2018), Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Strategy (Talk to Me 2) and Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010.

- Substance Use

Those who experience or perpetrate VAWDASV can often be entrenched in circumstances of harmful substance use. Links are therefore crucial on both a strategic and operational level, to ensure support for addressing presenting substance use needs, as well as looking to address underlying, long-term causality. Implementation of this Strategy will be approached with consideration of Welsh Government's Substance Misuse Delivery Plan and align with Gwent Substance use Area Planning Board policies.

- Housing and Homelessness

Preventing homelessness, protecting housing rights and provision of good quality, safe accommodation is vital to ensuring stability and safety for people experiencing VAWDASV. This Strategy will draw links with housing policy and implementation of local housing strategies to ensure housing support for all those who experience VAWDASV, including older people, individuals with protected characteristics and those with multiple or co-occurring needs.

- Social Services and Safeguarding

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures and All Wales Practice Guides provides a solid framework for safeguarding adults, children and young people who are at risk of harm, neglect, or abuse. Many people who experience or perpetrate VAWDASV often have historical or existing relationship with Social Services so this Strategy will be coordinated with the drivers within statutory services. As VAWDASV victims may require safeguarding arrangements, this Strategy will also demonstrate alignment with Gwent Safeguarding Board policies and procedures and robust multi-agency working through strategic leads and governance structures.

- Education

With the Curriculum for Wales guidance enabling each school to develop its own curriculum, education will be key to the prevention of future VAWDASV through 'healthy relationship' and early intervention work. This Strategy will link to Healthy Schools Coordinator provision and consider how the commissioning, planning and delivery of VAWDASV approaches in education can support the four purposes of curriculum design and skills that can be developed within learning.

- Equalities

The Gender Equality Plan; Framework for Action on Disability: The Right to Independent Living; Race Equality Action Plan; LGBTQ+ Action Plan; guidance from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales and Welsh Government No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Guidance will all underpin the delivery of this Strategy. There will also be links to structures that champion intersectionality and allyship (such as networks and forums), to ensure that this Strategy delivers for all across the region in the pursuit of its objectives.

UK Context

The success of this Strategy relies on acknowledging the UK context and how, non-devolved bodies² are key partners in tackling VAWDASV. To support a consistent approach between UK Government and local, devolved areas, this Strategy will be supported by the UK Government Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2021 and Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan 2022. Guidance that will also inform the implementation of this Strategy includes:

² Police Forces, Police and Crime Commissioners and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service



- *Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Statutory Guidance (April 2022)* which provides information on controlling or coercive behaviour, to assist the police, criminal justice and other agencies in identifying, evidencing, charging, prosecuting and convicting the offence as well as providing information on how to reduce the risk of harm to the victim and their family; provide support for the victim and their family, including how other agencies and support services can assist; and manage the perpetrator
- *Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations (December 2016)* which sets out what local commissioners (Police and Crime Commissioners, Local Authorities, or health commissioners) need to put in place to ensure their response to violence against women and girls is collaborative, robust and effective
- *Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme Guidance (March 2014)* (often referred to as “Clare’s Law”) which sets out procedures that could be used by the police to disclose information about an individual’s previous violent and abusive offending, where this may help protect their partner, or ex-partner, from violence or abuse
- *Multi-agency Statutory Guidance on Female Genital Mutilation (July 2020)* issued under section 5C(1) of the Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003) and extends to England and Wales, setting out the responsibilities of agencies involved in safeguarding and supporting women and girls affected by FGM
- *Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (December 2016)* which sets out the purpose of a domestic homicide review, conducting a review and involving family and friends
- *National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE): “Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working”* – guidance that covers planning and delivering multi-agency services for domestic violence and abuse; aiming to identify, prevent and reduce domestic violence and abuse among women and men in heterosexual or same-sex relationships, and among young people

Global Context

There is acknowledgement that VAWDASV is a global issue. The UK is a member of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (‘Istanbul Convention’) and this Strategy will root itself in the minimum standards of the convention to prevent, protect and support victims and prosecute perpetrators and offenders. It will also align with the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), enshrined within the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (2015).

Regional Context

The Gwent region covers the five local authority areas of Blaenau Gwent (BGCBC), Caerphilly (CCBC), Monmouthshire (MCC), Newport (NCC) and Torfaen (TCBC). The region is culturally diverse and has socio-economically disadvantaged communities with 12% of Gwent defined as ‘most deprived’³. Across the five local authorities, there is an ethnic minority population of around 5.2%, rising to around 12.5% in Newport⁴. The geography of the region is also varied and includes rural countryside areas, urban centres and the most easterly of the South Wales Valleys.

Area 	The total area of Gwent is 158,500 hectares – approximately 7.6% of the total area of Wales.				
	Blaenau-Gwent	Caerphilly	Monmouthshire	Newport	Torfaen
	10,900	28,000	88,000	19,000	12,600
Population 	The estimated population of Gwent is 594,164 , approximately 19% of the total population for Wales ¹				
	Blaenau-Gwent	Caerphilly	Monmouthshire	Newport	Torfaen
	69,862	181,075	94,590	154,676	93,961

Source: Gwent Public Services Board Wellbeing Assessment (May 2022)

The most recent Wellbeing Assessment for Gwent (May 2022) noted that violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence continues to be an issue across Gwent and there is a need for robust arrangements for the prevention, protection and support for individuals affected by such violence and abuse. The 2022 Population Needs Assessment confirmed the below priority outcomes for the region following engagement with citizens and partners⁵:

- Provide earlier intervention and safeguarding arrangements to potential victims through ‘Ask & Act’
- Safeguard victims, including men, through effective partnership support

Within the footprint of the region, there is also the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), Heddllu Gwent Police, the Office of the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner

³ [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation \(full Index update with ranks\): 2019 | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ [joint-strategic-equality-plan-2020.pdf \(gwent.police.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence - Gwentprb](#)

(OPCC), His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. Under this footprint, Gwent has recently become a Marmot Region⁶, adopting the eight Marmot principles to reduce health inequalities across the region.

This Strategy acknowledges that the region's equality and diversity is not properly captured within its contents and there is a need to do more to understand equality and diversity in VAWDASV, as different and diverse communities will require varying responses and resources. As such, the VAWDASV Board are committing to understanding these needs and responding to them in the delivery of this Strategy.

Within the region there is also a range of existing activities, provision and support services in place to prevent, protect and support those affected by VAWDASV. Some of these include early intervention programmes, refuges, counselling services, multi-agency arrangements for the support and safety planning of high-risk victims and forums for identifying and disrupting perpetrators. This Strategy will continue to build on the good work that is being delivered in Gwent in pursuit of achieving the Strategy objectives.

⁶ [Gwent Marmot Region - Gwent Public Services Board Gwent Public Services Board \(gwentpsb.org\)](https://www.gwentpsb.org)

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Gwent

Prevalence and Scale

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence are large scale, pervasive problems which, every year causes needless deaths and damage to thousands of lives across Wales. Whilst the incidence of VAWDASV is high, those who experience these forms of violence and abuse are known to under-report and official data therefore represents an under representation of the problem. Key data we have that confirms the prevalence and scale includes:

Domestic Abuse

21,558 Victims

Incidents

Jan '20 to Dec '22 (Source: Gwent Police)

16,342 Victims

Crimes

Honour Based Abuse (HBA)

109 incidents

Jan '20 to Dec '22 (Source: Gwent Police)

81 HBA crimes

Serious Sexual Offences

16,780

Jan '20 to Dec '22
(Source: Gwent Police)

Initial MARAC Referrals

864

2020

1,219

2022

(Source: Gwent Police)

Counselling for Sexual Violence & Abuse

921 Individuals (115 Children/Young People, 806 Adults)

Apr '21 to Mar '22 (Source: New Pathways and Cyfannol Women's Aid)

In the implementation of this Strategy, the prevalence and scale of VAWDASV across Gwent will be understood and monitored through ongoing cycles of needs assessments. In addition, recognising that there is a lack of data and statistics supporting prevalence and scale for the varying social constructs, consideration will be given during this Strategy as to how VAWDASV agencies and organisations can support improved data collection for more informed and accurate needs assessments.

Strategy Development

Methodology

To inform the development of this Strategy, information from the following sources were reviewed:

- Welsh Government Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence National Strategy (2022-2026)
- Gwent Wellbeing Assessment (published 5 May 2022)
- The most recent VAWDASV Needs Assessment (July 2020)
- Gwent Police Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Plan 2021-2024
- Needs mapping information submitted by Gwent VAWDASV sector providers (October 2022)
- Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Development Session (December 2022)
- Stakeholder Engagement Meetings (October to December 2022)
- Survivor Engagement Sessions (October to December 2022)

Findings

The region, like the rest of Wales, the UK and the world has recently experienced a pandemic, and a resurgence and recovery from COVID-19 is still to be wholly experienced. This recovery has also been impacted by the current cost of living crisis thereby enabling a 'perfect storm' of economic and societal challenges that are facilitating further gender inequalities. During engagement with stakeholders and survivors, the increasing pressure on services and resources, together with the complexity of cases, economic challenges and workforce resilience issues have been clear.

'We are seeing more people needing support, but our team are working on a reduced service offer because so many of us are unwell with Covid'

Practitioner from the Specialist Sector

'MARAC meetings have been occurring far more regularly in response to the increase in demand... on average, they are currently 140 MARAC referrals per month... in response to the influx in referrals, partners are feeling the pressure and are struggling to remain engaged in the MARAC process'

Information provided at VAWDASV Subgroup, September 2022

Across the region, the strain on public and specialist services, and the complexities that are now being faced - that need supporting and adequately resourcing - has been recognised by all stakeholders. Emerging themes and priorities identified by stakeholders as part of the methodology for this Strategy, included:

Violence Against Women

- There needs to be a better understanding of experiences of women and girls in relation to misogyny and workplace harassment
- Misogyny needs tackling – calling it out, challenging behaviour and attitudes, changing social norms, culture, and attitudes; treating misogyny as a hate crime
- Street harassment - uninvited attention from males where males do not see their behaviour as unacceptable, or as opportunistic chance to target vulnerable women
- No male accountability for behaviour – women have to protect themselves rather than males changing their behaviour or championing behaviour change across their peer groups, social circles etc.
- Stalking and associated risks needs more resource, especially where the Internet of Things (IoT)⁷ is part of stalking, and in its continued development at pace, technology cannot be escaped. For example, targeting social media, sharing information and photos, revenge porn, young people not recognising the consequences of engaging in some social media activities (e.g., sharing pictures)
- Lack of trust in police – people having confidence to report, confidence of getting a response (criminal justice) and abuse of power
- Workplace harassment – supporting the response to build trust and prevent abuse of power
- A need for awareness of support available to prevent, protect and support victims of violence against women, aside from police and criminal justice processes
- Online abuse is becoming more prevalent and inappropriate behaviour being seen at younger ages (role modelling from reality TV, social media, music lyrics) – impacting on healthy relationships for young people at a peer and child-parent level
- Lack of understanding around Honour Based Abuse (HBA), forced marriage and FGM which is leading to difficulty in identification, response and understanding ‘what works’
- Coercion and control – double edge through technology as well as in person
- Huge demand on MARAC – number of referrals, complexity of cases, high level numbers
- Bystander/Allyship as a response to awareness raising, challenging attitudes and behaviours and support to report

⁷ Internet of Things include physical objects (or groups of such objects) that have sensors, processing ability, software and other technologies that connect and exchange data with other devices and systems remotely via the internet or other communication devices (e.g., smart speakers, home security cameras, smart devices, Hives, Air Tags)

Domestic Abuse

- Needs to be a whole family approach to supporting domestic abuse – victim, perpetrator and child/young people; tackles perpetration as well as support for victim and wellbeing of family; prevents main parent/caregiver being viewed as incapable of, or having poor parenting skills trying to keep child(ren) safe
- Housing supply is an issue – move on options are limited and people are in refuge longer than they need to be which prevents access for those who need it
- Limited engagement with/from health in identification of support, response and collaboration with other agencies across the sector, outside of GP based IRIS⁸ programme
- Coercion and control – awareness and information needed on controlling behaviours versus coercive behaviours and perceptions of these in relationships
- Consideration of links between domestic abuse, substance use and mental health (multiple or co-occurring needs) – services offer support on presenting need so can see demand on mental health, substance use, VAWDASV services and police but needs aligned approach
- Repeat victims of domestic abuse – not clear on what support is available or poor support is offered because professionals do not know individual is repeat victim so whole picture not understood to provide appropriate support
- DASH as a risk assessment tool – may flag other forms of VAWDASV but focus is on the reported issue; can often miss nuances of relationship issues or richness of information to be disclosed
- Strangulation (non-fatal) needs further learning to prevent and support
- MARAC demand – increase in referrals and under-resourced MARAC team
- Child/adolescent on parent violence – gap in services; delayed reporting; minimisation where child on parent or intrafamilial abuse or violence to protect perpetrator
- Perpetrators presenting as victims can lead to mistrust in services for actual victims

Sexual Violence

- Women and girl's safety – at night (with a specific reference to training across the night-time economy (e.g., Taxi Drivers, Door Security Staff, Bar Staff) around identifying vulnerabilities); in communities; sexual harassment in public; inappropriate touching in street and schools; sex trafficking; street-based work; male misogyny and attitudes of 'entitlement to sex'; abuse of power within professions (e.g., sexual favours)
- Sexual exploitation – through peer relationships, intimate partner relationships, for commercial purposes or via dating sites
- Lack of widespread understanding of prevalence and type of sexual violence issues

⁸ [Iris Programme \(llamau.org.uk\)](http://Iris Programme (llamau.org.uk))

- Abuse through technology – threats to disclose messages or images, online sexual exploitation and radicalisation of young people who are particularly susceptible (leading to child sexual exploitation)
- Gateway offences (offences, or first-time offences, where consequence or punishment is light) offers to identify early indicators and progression of sexual violence (e.g., exposure)
- Social media contributing to ideologies and modelling of behaviours that are inappropriate and unacceptable, glorifying behaviours and putting pressure on young people – sexting; grooming; access to pornography; Only Fans content; a risk that social media behaviours are becoming normalised and accepted
- Lack of understanding and support for young people displaying problematic or harmful sexual behaviours
- Lack of understanding around choice in relationships (young people and adults) – consent versus coercion
- Lack of models or programmes available for perpetrators of sexual violence – no health services or support available for people who have, or might commit sexual offences
- Sexual offences viewed as police responsibility – rape team within police but lack of programmes or resource for perpetrators where there is no conviction
- Lack of acknowledgement around the complexity of trauma and support required for victims of sexual abuse or violence
- Increase in ‘incel’ ideology and cultures – moving away from ‘incel’ forums that are filled with self-pity towards grievances against women and girls, misogyny and advocating graphic sexual violence

Intersectionality

- More male victims coming forward but still unconscious bias in response
- Data showing increase in older people now reporting they are victims
- Elder abuse - opportunities for older people to come forward to report controlling or abusive behaviours; can be experiencing abuse or violence from older child living at home; increase in domestic homicides in older people (50+ years old) in region
- Preventing VAWDASV perpetrated in care homes – psychiatric units, refugee centres, older persons care home (i.e., institutionalised settings)
- Rough Sleepers – support to escape exploitation in adolescence, street-based exploitation, street drinking if individuals are not able to access refuge
- Engagement with minority ethnic groups as well as those with protected characteristics (deaf, LGBTQ+, disability, Gypsy Roma Travellers accessing support or fleeing communities) needs to be properly considered
- Seeing more and more funding opportunities requiring services to be ‘by and for’ or led by individuals with lived experience
- Difficult to meet the needs of everybody in refuge – language, cultural sensitivity

- More resources to support same sex relationships where there is domestic abuse/violence and transgender victims – people and services often not knowing or being resourced to support as situations do not fit into ‘norms’
- Older people – wanting acknowledgement and support for historical incidences of sexual violence of abuse

Accessibility

- Resources do not match the scale and ambition of tackling issues
- Evidence of increase in older people being victims of domestic homicides and not all services being accessible for all ages (e.g., older people experiencing abuse or wanted to flee are considered for residential home when not suitable)
- Funding issues post pandemic, cost of living crisis and continued economic challenges being faced and sustainability of services
- Too much compartmentalisation within funding and political oversight (social care, health, justice) – need to be more collaborative with streamlined approaches and joined up support
- Impact of challenges and issues leads to increase in statutory services threshold
- Access to refuge if in full time work or no access to public funds – can prevent people from fleeing or leave them at risk of homelessness, being ‘bounced’ around services and agencies
- Need funding that supports flexibility to provide equal access to resourced services – currently not equal across rural areas
- Implementation of Domestic Abuse Act and resource requirements – extending time period for domestic abuse related common assault; children and young people identified as victims in their own right; non-fatal strangulation offence

Workforce Resilience

- Recruitment and retention of sector staff is a huge issue – combination of Covid burnout, salary offers (lack of value on roles and salaries), impact of cost of living and mental demands of role
- Time required to familiarise and implement training undertaken, knowledge and skills developed (i.e., dedicated time post training to research, shadow, experience and implement to strengthen response and support continuous service improvement)
- Cultural competence is needed to be able to identify, respond to and support Gwent’s diverse cultures
- Requirement for public health approach, trauma informed approach, equalities approach and being led by lived experience but no capacity to become trained and no resource to implement these approaches successfully and meaningfully

- Professionals are passionate and committed to their delivery and making a difference, but challenges make it difficult to create environments that better support staff

Specific Considerations

Proposed legislation that was also heavily referred to throughout this Strategy development, which will require specific consideration for Strategy and policy alignment, governance, action, and resource implications in addressing VAWDASV across the region included:

Serious Violence Duty

The Duty covers the requirements set out in Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) for specified authorities⁹ within a local government area, to work together and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence¹⁰; including identifying the kinds of serious violence that occur in the area, the causes of that violence (so far as it is possible to do so), and to prepare and implement a strategy for preventing, and reducing serious violence in the area.

The Duty does not require the creation of new multi-agency structures as existing local structures can be used to comply with the requirements of the Duty, but essentially, specified authorities must work together to prevent and reduce serious violence in their local areas and, ultimately, improve community safety and safeguarding.

Online Safety Bill

The Bill introduces new rules for firms which host user-generated content, i.e., those which will allow users to post their own content online or interact with each other, and for search engines, which will have tailored duties focused on minimising the presentation of harmful search results to the users. Platforms that fail to protect people will need to answer to the regulator and can face heavy fines or in serious cases, be blocked. All platforms in scope will need to tackle and remove illegal material online, particularly material relating to child sexual exploitation and abuse. The new online safety laws will make the internet a safer place for everyone in the UK, especially children.

Victims Bill

Published in May 2022, this draft bill when legislated will affect all victims of crime, but it is anticipated those most affected will be victims of serious crime, including VAWDASV. The draft Victims Bill includes measures that will:

⁹ Specified Authorities include Police, Justice (Probation services and Youth Offending Teams), Fire and Rescue, Health and Local Authorities

¹⁰ Whilst the Duty does not specifically have to include domestic abuse and sexual violence, the region's partners will look to see how this can be included within the Strategic Needs Assessment

- amplify victims' voices and make sure victims are at the heart of the criminal justice system
- improve support for victims to cope and recover from the impact of crime and enable them to engage with the criminal justice system
- strengthen transparency and oversight of criminal justice agencies at local and national level so that victims' experiences support them to engage, and remain engaged with, the criminal justice system

These measures will help victims to have confidence that there is the right support available and that if they report crime, the criminal justice system will treat them in the way they should rightly expect.

Public Sexual Harassment

In 2022 the Home Office consulted on the option of creating a new public sexual harassment criminal offence. With the vast majority of respondents considering public sexual harassment to be a widespread problem (despite already being illegal), it will now be made a specific offence with a maximum sentence of two years. This commits the government to pursuing new legislation which builds on the intentional 'harass, alarm, distress' definition first established in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 as well as setting out new guidance for Police and Prosecutors on sexual harassment.

Survivors As Experts

In understanding the emerging themes and priorities for VAWDASV across the region, stakeholders acknowledged the importance of survivors as experts. Survivors' voices are central to providing a perspective that no agency can realise unless they have mechanisms within their organisations for the development and delivery of services led by people with lived experience. In the development of this Strategy, survivors have told us what works well across the region, as well as the challenges they experience.

The responding officers were absolutely fantastic. Even though I was hysterical and all responding officers were male, when trying to calm me down no one was condescending. They listened to what I had to say, answered any questions I had and told me what would happen next

*Victim who had been assaulted by her partner
and locked herself in a different part of the house until help arrived*

When I left my abuser I was housed in a temporary flat but this left me isolated. I was nervous, on my own and had been brainwashed. I'd lost my independence. I started to talk to neighbours but later learned that there was a perpetrator upstairs in my block after he committed a really serious offence. It frightened and retraumatised me. Was there any thought or consideration given to my circumstances and who I would be living around when I was housed there? If you are a victim of domestic abuse housing should consider this

Survivor Voice, October 2022

Survivor engagement as part of this Strategy development has been rich and insightful. The voices of those with lived experience has been reflected throughout and will continue to influence regional delivery plans, developments and focus areas.

It is important to note that there was no consultation with male survivors as part of this process. The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, there are limited services that are supporting male survivors and secondly, those identified did not want to participate. Similarly, survivors of sexual violence are under-represented due to the barriers they face in engagement activities (e.g., risk of re-traumatisation and higher levels of support needed). This means there are significant gaps in knowledge; however, in the delivery of this Strategy and regional work, there will be a commitment to supporting engagement and participation by all survivors, with an emphasis on creating suitable opportunities for engagement where they do not already exist.

Survivor engagement will primarily be achieved through existing structures, including the Gwent Police Survivor Engagement Network, the National Strategy workstreams for Survivor Engagement and groups and forums that exist within specialist sector organisations. In addition to these forums, this Strategy will prioritise on-going engagement, participation – and where possible – co-production with survivors and individuals with lived experience through the following commitments:

- supporting organisations and providers to **embed a culture** of engagement and participation for ongoing development of services or response to VAWDASV
- facilitating support to **overcome structural barriers** that can exclude or hinder participation
- **welcoming different practices** and models of participation; especially those that support participation from seldom heard communities, black and minority ethnic groups and individuals with protected characteristics or communication difficulties
- **supporting reviews** on the effects and impact of participation to increase accountability to survivors, supporting outcome focused approaches

Noting the ambition to embed equality and diversity within the delivery of the Strategy across the region, survivor engagement in the coming years will consciously uphold principles of inclusivity to support survivor voice by individuals with protected characteristics. Links will also be made with existing forums (e.g., Children’s Commissioner, Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s Office and Welsh Government Children & Young People Blueprint workstream) to ensure the voices of children and young people are also reflected in our work.

This Strategy acknowledges the vital importance of collaborating with survivors who are ‘experts by experience’ in terms of what has worked for them, their pathways through services and how easy (or difficult) it has been to find the right service and move towards independence and freedom from abuse. Key issues, challenges and concerns raised by survivors are essential for continuous improvement of services.

‘my experiences can help inform services and make a difference’

‘it’s all about preventing as much as you can’

‘having an opportunity to talk about our experiences is great but we need to be listened to for a difference to be made for others’

Survivor Engagement Session, October 2022

Survivor engagement success will be determined by the following measures:

- there has been engagement from the outset
- survivors were well represented and more than just one or two 'token' members
- there has been a real say in decisions
- opportunities exist to meet regularly and receive updates on actions and progress
- activities are safe, inclusive, and meaningful
- recognition is provided for subject matter/lived experience *and* contribution to results

How We Will Tackle VAWDASV

Aligned to the National Strategy, Gwent will adopt the following six objectives, mapped to the three aims of the Act:

Prevention

Objective 1

Challenge the public attitude to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh population through awareness raising and space for public discussion with the aim to decrease its occurrence.

Objective 2

Increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices.

Protection

Objective 3

Increase the focus on holding those who commit abuse to account and supporting those who may carry out abusive or violent behaviour to change their behaviour and avoid offending.

Objective 4

Make early intervention and prevention a priority.

Provision of Support

Objective 5

Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors.

Objective 6

Provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, inter-sectional, and responsive services across Wales.

These objectives will be pursued in an approach separated into:

- three 'Fundamentals' (i.e., areas integral to successful change in achievement of the vision and Objectives) and
- four Focus Areas, that specifically reflect the regional needs of the Gwent population.

1. Implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Section 3)

The Domestic Abuse Act became law in England and Wales on 30 April 2021. Whilst the Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 will continue to hold precedence in Wales, the legislating of the Domestic Abuse Act has an impact on the core business and service delivery of statutory VAWDASV agencies across the region. Under the Act, there is now:

- A legal definition of domestic abuse which recognises children as victims in their own right
- A legal duty on councils to fund support for survivors in 'safe accommodation'
- A guarantee that all survivors will be in priority need for housing
- New criminal offences including coercive control, non-fatal strangulation, threats to disclose private sexual images

This has an impact for Relevant Authorities (i.e., local authorities) as defined under the VAWDASV Act as well as public bodies who deal with VAWDASV (e.g., Police) and the third sector who are often grant funded to provide specialist, high quality, expert support to victims and survivors.

Acknowledging the resource required to initiate changes across statutory agencies to successfully implement the Domestic Abuse Act, this Strategy will prioritise supporting Relevant Authorities to fulfil the legal requirements of domestic abuse which recognises children as victims in their own right. In pursuing this Fundamental, the following will be progressed:

- An evidence-based needs assessment on children and young people impacted by VAWDASV, to link with Marmot principles and include:
 - an analysis and understanding of services to support children, young people and families
 - the identification of gaps and areas for specialist service development to further inform the Strategy direction and act as a baseline
- Raising awareness of services, pathways of support and interventions for children and young people impacted by VAWDASV
- Collaborative commissioning and/or grant funding of services, pathways of support and interventions where gaps are identified
- A review of the role of public services for the further development of partnership working (e.g., Operation Encompass, multi-agency safeguarding hubs) to meet the needs of, and support children and young people impacted by VAWDASV

The above will be enabled through close working between the regional Safeguarding Board, existing regional partnership working arrangements and further expanding joint and inter agency working to ensure effective protection and support of child victims.

2. Regional Structures Reform

In December 2021 the Gwent Public Services Board agreed a comprehensive governance review of Community Safety, incorporating Substance use Area Planning Board delivery and VAWDASV delivery across Gwent. Alongside this review, the region has also reviewed and consulted on its Wellbeing Plan, become a Marmot Region¹¹ and also begun planning for the implementation of the Serious Violence Duty and subsequent Strategic Needs Assessment. On a national level, the roll out of the Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) will also commence in 2023.

The development of this Strategy has been a timely parallel to these changes. It has been recognised that these wider regional reforms offer an opportunity to effectively implement a VAWDASV structure and landscape that co-exists and intersects with other regional structures, to enable true sustainable and collaborative working in the pursuit and achievement of the aims of the VAWDASV Act. In-line with these regional reforms, the following will be pursued in the achievement of this Fundamental:

- Building VAWDASV into governance arrangements within wider strategic areas currently subject to reform, to effectuate robust and well-grounded infrastructure for supporting victims and survivors and tackling perpetration
- Reviewing the new regional structures for partnership delivery of sustainable services (both core and commissioned)

3. Infrastructure for Regional Services and Delivery

The region benefits from a range of services and support for victims, survivors, and perpetrators of VAWDASV, with the specialist and third sector delivering the majority of these. This delivery includes community provision, safety planning, counselling services, wellbeing projects, refuges, educative interventions as well as evidence-based programmes. Services available are funded through prescriptive parameters that prevent connectedness, flexible approaches and collaboration. The funding is often of a short-term nature and this can hinder the ability of organisations in their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

¹¹ [Gwent Marmot Region Launch Event - Gwent Public Services Board Gwent Public Services Board](#)

Under the VAWDASV Act, Relevant Authorities have statutory obligations to prevent, protect and support victims of VAWDASV. This Fundamental will therefore focus on:

- Establishing 'benchmark' needs assessments that outline problem profiles, prevalence, scale, good practice and resource deficits
- Regularly reviewing and updating needs assessments to support responses to 'live' priorities
- Establishing a VAWDASV Commissioning Group with Relevant Authority and commissioning cross-sector representation, for a focus on maintaining, sustaining and developing VAWDASV services
- How the region can move towards VAWDASV services and delivery embedded in a whole system approach

Focus Areas

The following Focus Areas have been identified in the development of this Strategy:

1. Tackling Perpetration

Currently, there are limited programmes available across the region to tackle perpetration and challenge those who perpetrate in changing their behaviours. This is primarily because of funding as well as a lack of evidence-based programmes for domestic abuse and sexual violence perpetration for both adults and children/adolescents/young people.

Working with perpetrators is fundamental to successfully tackling VAWDASV and reducing the number of VAWDASV victims. However, it requires a whole system approach to achieve true early and effective intervention and opportunities to divert perpetrators. To tackle perpetration across Gwent, this Focus Area will prioritise:

- Undertaking a regional needs assessment that will inform a whole system approach to tackling perpetration, which includes:
 - Collaborative working arrangements to enable the disruption of perpetrators
 - Identification and response to serious and serial perpetrators
 - Evidence-based adults and children/young person VAWDASV perpetrator programmes (i.e., 'What Works' in tackling perpetration)
 - Mapping of perpetrator services and programmes to inform commissioning arrangements and sustainable funding influencing
- Understanding victim data from perpetration of VAWDASV, for commissioning of perpetrator services and programmes

Through collaborative working with partners and providers across the criminal justice system, social care, third sector and within communities, we will ensure that perpetrators of VAWDASV in Gwent are dealt with appropriately, provided the opportunity to break cycles of perpetration through behaviour change and that survivors and their children are given protection against further abuse. These priority areas will meet strategy Objectives 3 and 4.

2. Children and Young People

Key to breaking generational cycles and mitigating Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is understanding the needs of children and young people. This includes acknowledging the impact on them as witnesses (they are now recognised as victims in their own right under the Domestic Abuse Act 2022), supporting a response when they have experienced VAWDASV, or recognising and challenging societal ‘norms’ that lead them to engage in unhealthy attitudes, behaviours and relationships. Wales has long been committed to children’s rights and the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children’s rights are already enshrined in Welsh law (Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011) with the measure placing a duty on Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC when developing or reviewing legislation and policy.

Prevention of VAWDASV can be initiated in school-age children and young people through education. Hafan Cymru’s Spectrum Project¹² supports a whole school approach to healthy relationship education with the new Curriculum for Wales Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Code providing the mandatory elements for RSE learning in schools. However, development of this Strategy has informed that the needs of children and young people are significant; they are being exposed to abuse at home, they are perpetrating abuse against their parent(s)/caregiver(s), they are experiencing abuse and harassment in schools and they are engaging in controlling and harmful peer relationships, not recognising such due to social media, online content, and lack of positive modelling. Therefore, more needs to be done in the region to protect and support children and young people from becoming victims of VAWDASV. To better prevent, protect and support VAWDASV in children and young people, this Focus Area will prioritise:

- Empowering and educating young people to support VAWDASV prevention and early intervention; especially for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), those in education other than at school (EOTAS) provision or those with additional learning needs
- Challenging unhealthy attitudes and behaviours through education and empowerment
- Encouraging reporting to understand causes and prevalence to support actions towards prevention and early intervention

¹² [Spectrum Project - Educating schools in Wales about Domestic Abuse and Healthy Relationships.](#)

- Developing a 'Knowledge Hub' of evidence-based programmes and interventions for children and young people
- Ensuring the voice and experience of children and young people impacted by VAWDASV in the development of planning and delivery of services
- Grant funding programmes for children and young people aged between 3 and 21 years old

Working closely with professionals in education, social care, police and youth/community-based services, we can challenge perceptions, increase awareness and empower personal choice to promote sustainable wellbeing and safety in the next generation. These priority areas will meet strategy Objectives 2, 4 and 6.

3. Misogyny and Harassment

Misogyny is rife within society with attitudes of toxic masculinity, victim blaming, and inequalities linked to protected characteristics (i.e., race, disability etc.), contributing to negative behaviours increasing the existence of VAWDASV; for example, casual misogyny permeating the workplace and harassment in public spaces.

Challenging misogyny is a huge feat demanding whole society education, awareness raising and public discussion. It requires 'calling out' and directly challenging those who perpetrate misogyny and misogynistic behaviours in order to make women feel safe. Currently, expectations are placed on female victims to 'protect themselves' from misogyny or harassment, both within the workplace and public spaces. To start the fundamental shift required and begin to tackle misogyny and harassment, this Focus Area will prioritise:

- Communication and campaign activities that raise awareness of misogyny and harassment, creating a stigmatisation to decrease occurrences
- Encouraging reporting of harassment to understand causes and prevalence
- Learning from culture reviews within other charitable, public and private bodies; building on the work that is being done more widely outside the region
- Supporting Relevant Authorities to identify and implement a response for instances of workplace harassment
- Supporting identification and reporting of abuse of power, position or perpetration by public bodies

Central to successfully achieving the above priorities will be a clearly communicated and effective response by public bodies and Relevant Authorities to disclosures. This Strategy, through its partnership and governance arrangements, will ensure that all victims who take the step to report their experience, can be confident and trust public bodies in their

commitment to end misogyny and harassment. These priority areas will meet strategy Objectives 1.

4. Multiple or Co-occurring Needs

VAWDASV can impact on many areas of life. It can introduce or affect additional challenges (e.g., mental health) as well as contribute to further issues (e.g., homelessness, poverty). Currently, VAWDASV is primarily responded to via a compartmentalised approach, supporting the presenting needs of victims and current behaviours of perpetrators.

To successfully tackle VAWDASV, a contextual approach is needed that considers support needs inter-linked with, or those that compound VAWDASV. These needs include mental health, substance use, homelessness/housing, exploitation (included those exploited through sex work), employment, poverty and access to finances or financial support. Across the region, services are seeing an increase in individuals with multiple or co-occurring needs, so addressing VAWDASV alongside the multiple needs that exist is going to need multi agency intervention. However, the systems, pathways and solutions are not currently established to provide this level of support effectively. To begin to address this gap, this Focus Area will prioritise:

- Training the sector to understand trauma informed approaches to respond appropriately to VAWDASV
- Exploring cross-specialism roles that support a ‘No Wrong Door’ approach
- Strengthening collaboration between agencies and providers to enable effective and responsive services
- Facilitating networks, communication pathways and resources to address and support solution focused approaches to barriers encountered

VAWDASV is “everybody’s business” and so it should not be the responsibility of a single organisation to support or address VAWDASV. It requires multi-agency commitment and collaborative working to achieve long-term, sustainable change for individuals and society. These priority areas will meet strategy Objectives 4, 5 and 6.

In addition to the Fundamentals and Focus Areas, the foundations of this Strategy will be rooted in ensuring that professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims, survivors, and perpetrators. This will be achieved through the National Training Framework and Specialist Syllabus training offer.

National Training Framework

The National Training Framework (NTF)¹³ outlines Welsh Government’s requirements for training on VAWDASV across public services and specialist third sector. Under the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015, Relevant Authorities have a legislative duty to ensure that all their employees complete this training to fulfil their statutory obligations. Consisting of six groups, the Framework provides minimum mandatory training of professionals aligned to their roles:

Group	Training	Audience
1	E-learning	All Public Service Professionals
2	Ask & Act	Professionals who are likely to be in jobs where VAWDASV is an issue for their client group
3	Ask & Act Champions	Individuals in roles which require them to do more than “Ask and Act” and those who perform a “Champion” role
4	Specialist Sector	Professionals whose client group is specifically those affected by violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
5	Managers of Specialist Sector	Service managers working in the violence against women, domestic abuse & sexual violence sector
6	Public Service Leaders	Strategic Leaders who have a responsibility to foster a culture and infrastructure in which violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence are acknowledged as issues which may affect the workforce, the client group and friends and family

Specialist Syllabus

This Strategy will also support the delivery of Specialist Syllabus training that is mapped to the Framework and additional training commissioned by Welsh Government. Training will be reviewed on an annual basis but will consist of an offer that supports the development of skills, knowledge and experience needed of professionals, to identify and deliver support that meets regional needs.

Cross Cutting Themes

Appreciating that VAWDASV traverses a number of themes, there are key areas that will also cut across the success of this Strategy. These are:

¹³ [National Training Framework on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence | GOV.WALES](#)

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

The region's MARAC's have seen a huge increase in referrals recently. The meetings, which share information on the highest risk domestic abuse cases, have seen additional pressures on police, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors who sit in MARAC's. MARAC is a crucial area of business for protecting and supporting victims of VAWDASV.

Safeguarding

The region currently benefits from strong working relationships and robust arrangements with the Gwent Safeguarding Board. Aligning safeguarding and VAWDASV processes, this Strategy will focus on the following areas to strengthen responses to VAWDASV across the region:

- Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR)¹⁴
- Elder Abuse and VAWDASV in Older People
- Transitional Safeguarding
- Suicide and Self Harm Prevention

Multiculturalism and Intersectionality

Gwent has a diverse population and crucial to understanding and addressing VAWDASV across communities, is acknowledging cultural beliefs and recognising the impact of discrimination and disadvantage that intersectionality can bring. To fully support victims and survivors of VAWDASV, this Strategy will establish the structures to clearly understand the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic people, disabled people, children, older people and LGBTQ+ communities to support more responsive services.

Strategic Planning

Effective strategic planning is key in tackling VAWDASV as part of a whole systems approach. Through existing regional platforms, this Strategy will seek to influence policies and strategies across safeguarding, community safety, substance use, housing, health, police and probation to improve the planning, integration and collaboration in response to VAWDASV. This will be achieved through enacting a clear vision and working across these fields to share knowledge to influence thinking.

Commissioning

Welsh Government's Statutory Guidance for the Commissioning of VAWDASV Services in Wales will provide the parameters and principles for commissioning of VAWDASV services

¹⁴ [Single Unified Safeguarding Review | GOV.WALES](#)

that are funded via the Welsh Government VAWDASV regional grant. However, it should be recognised that VAWDASV services across the region are enabled through a range of funding streams. Relevant Authorities and public bodies commit a significant amount of funding to mitigate the effects of VAWDASV across the region, with funding also coming from Supporting People; Housing; Social Care; Police; Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC); Home Office; Ministry of Justice; and grants or contracts specialist or third sector organisations can secure. Whilst funding services, programmes, support or interventions in this way can lead to a lack of sustainability, inequity and inconsistency in delivery, it also brings much needed funding and support to the region to tackle VAWDASV through specific expertise (e.g., IDVA and ISVA services).

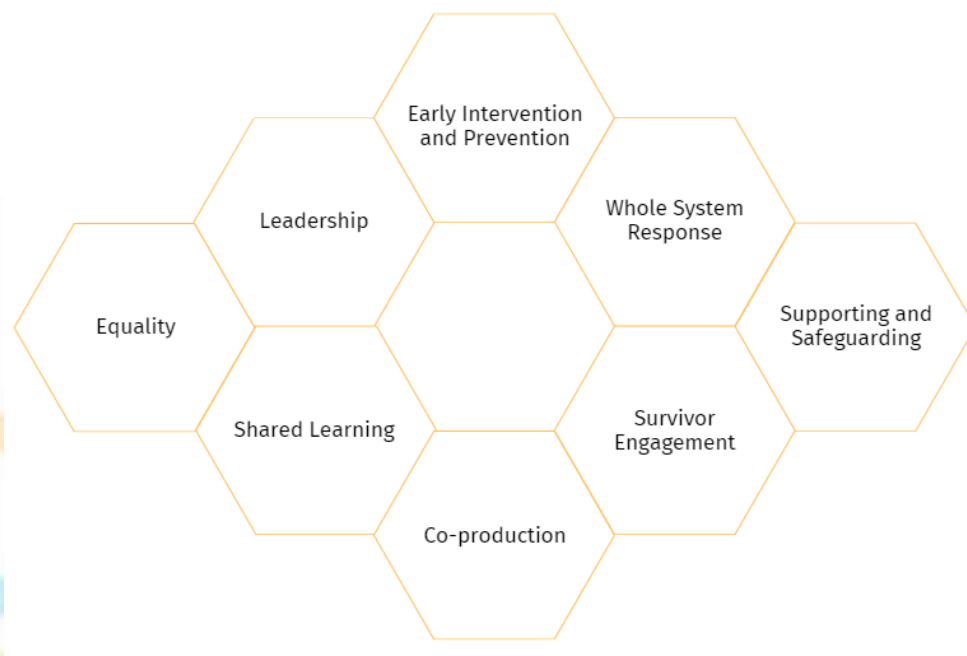
This Strategy will ensure that across the sector and beyond, Commissioners are informed about VAWDASV, where the links are to their area of work and understand their responsibilities for better investment. This will be achieved through the following commitments under the governance arrangements for the region:

- Strengthening collaboration and working arrangements with key Commissioners in health, housing and substance use to inform planning and budgeting to ensure VAWDASV is complemented in other areas
- Collaboration and equal partnership across appropriate agencies to ensure the effective investment in responses to VAWDASV and enable integrated pathways of support that promote prevention and earlier intervention
- Not undertaking commissioning activities in silos to support specialist provision linking with mainstream provision and services
- Providing all survivors, including children and young people, equal access to holistic appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength based, and trauma informed, gender responsive services across the region
- Engaging with and be informed by survivors, including children and young people, to inform needs analysis, service design and whole system responses
- Understanding the expertise of the specialist sector to inform needs analysis, service design and whole system responses
- Understanding where good services are already being delivered, in accordance with recognised standards and consider how best to facilitate service
- Where possible, providing stability to the sector in terms of duration of contracts or agreements

How Will We Deliver This Strategy?

Strategy Principles

The implementation of this Strategy and achievement of its objectives will be underpinned by the following principles:



- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – the foundation for the effectiveness of the strategy as part of a public health approach to violence
- **A whole system response** – recognition of the different and distinct elements and responses required to meet needs of survivors for all forms of violence against women, sexual violence and domestic abuse
- **Supporting and Safeguarding** - ensuring that all individuals who are safeguarded from violence and abuse, receive an efficient, effective and coordinated response and are supported to access a range of services to meet their needs
- **Survivor Engagement** – where survivors are involved, heard and are central to why we are making the changes needed
- A commitment to **Co-production** - solution focused approaches where people are given equal status and are meaningfully involved at all stages
- **Shared Learning** - promoting a culture of continuous improvement, reflection and review to improve outcomes for victims and survivors
- **Equality** – a positive approach to diversity, ensuring this Strategy is responsive to all; as well as equally accessible provision across the region to meet needs
- **Leadership** - a need to ensure regional to local continuum, accountability and clarity of direction

Multi-Agency Working, Partnerships and Collaboration

Collaborative work in relation to VAWDASV is often focused on multi-agency fora which bring organisations together to support and case manage those at risk of harm or abuse, as well as those who are at risk, or are perpetrating abuse or harm. The region has benefited from strong collaboration and partnership working arrangements for many years. Across the region, partners are committed to tackling VAWDASV and as such, there is commitment at strategic leadership level and operationally to drive forward work plans, progress and enable effectiveness in the response to VAWDASV and delivery of services. In the implementation of this Strategy, collaboration, partnership arrangements and multi-agency working will continue to include the following, to improve services for victims and survivors:

- Representation within the regional governance structure and arrangements from all Relevant Authorities and public bodies; devolved and non-devolved
- Commitment by all partners at a strategic level to ensure resources are utilised according to the needs of the local communities
- Supporting innovative practices and ideas to provide a complete package of support for those who need it
- Acknowledging and further facilitating the expertise and knowledge that the specialist services and sector brings

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence impacts upon all services, not least adult and children's social services, housing, criminal justice, education, the police, health services, and voluntary and community organisations. This strategy will further enable a coordinated community response within Gwent to reduce the prevalence and impact of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and increase the awareness and ability to act swiftly and effectively within communities and professionals. Specifically, collaboration will support mechanisms to remain dynamic, continuously enabling seamless and integrated provisions, for example:

Police and Office for Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)

Strategically, collaboration will focus on alignment of strategies to achieve greater impact and lobbying Relevant Authorities and wider partners in improving their response to VAWDASV using data and trend information to influence and attract commitment. It will also support joint funding and commissioning arrangements supporting value for money processes and avoiding duplication of services. Operationally, multi-agency working will facilitate links between the Public Protection Unit, Rape and Serious Sexual Assault, Management of Serious or Violent Offenders (MOSOVO) and Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Team to support information sharing, risk assessment approaches and effective pathways for those requiring support for VAWDASV.

One of the historic challenges of the region has always been the difficulty of defining and agreeing across partners and agencies, the definition or meaning of early intervention and prevention. A shared understanding of prevention is required across the sector to properly determine where and how partners, services and implementation of this Strategy fits within the prevention of VAWDASV agenda. The Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) adopts a public health lens across three tiers of intervention that supports a systematic, whole society approach to the prevention of VAWDASV. Therefore, this Strategy will hold alignment with this approach and interpretation of prevention as follows:



Source: Violence Prevention Unit website

National Programmes

There are also national programmes in existence that further support collaboration across the region and strengthen partnership working for on-going contribution to achieving the aims of the Act:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Preventing ACEs and breaking generational cycles of ACEs can have significant benefits for individuals and families as well as wider communities. This Strategy will support the focus and emphasis of mitigating and preventing ACEs. This will be achieved through partnership working structures that support learning and commitment that enables partners to become more ACE informed in their responses to VAWDASV.

Violence Prevention Unit (VPU)

The VPU in Wales works with partners and service providers to deliver programmes and projects that ensure violence prevention activity in Wales is effective and sustainable. The VPU take a public health approach to preventing violence, seeking to understand the causes of violence based on evidence and using this evidence to develop interventions focused on the underlying causes of violence. As the VPU also evaluate these interventions before they consider scaling up each one to help more people and communities across Wales, they support the capacity building required to develop a whole system response to the prevention of violence.

Criminal Justice in Wales Remote Evidence Sites (RES)

The region benefits from one Remote Evidence Site that supports alternative settings for victims of VAWDASV, including children, to give evidence to Magistrates and Crown Court hearings. Under the partnership arrangements of the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB), VAWDASV partners will implement the national RES Protocol to support the operational processes', principles and responsibilities to continue enabling survivors of VAWDASV to access justice and achieve best evidence.

Operation Encompass

Operation Encompass is a police and education early information safeguarding partnership enabling schools to offer immediate support to children experiencing domestic abuse. Operation Encompass ensures that there is a simple telephone call or notification to a school's trained Designated Safeguarding Lead /Officer prior to the start of the next school day after an incident of police attended domestic abuse where there are children related to either of the adult parties involved. This sharing of information enables appropriate support to be given, dependent upon the needs and wishes of the child.

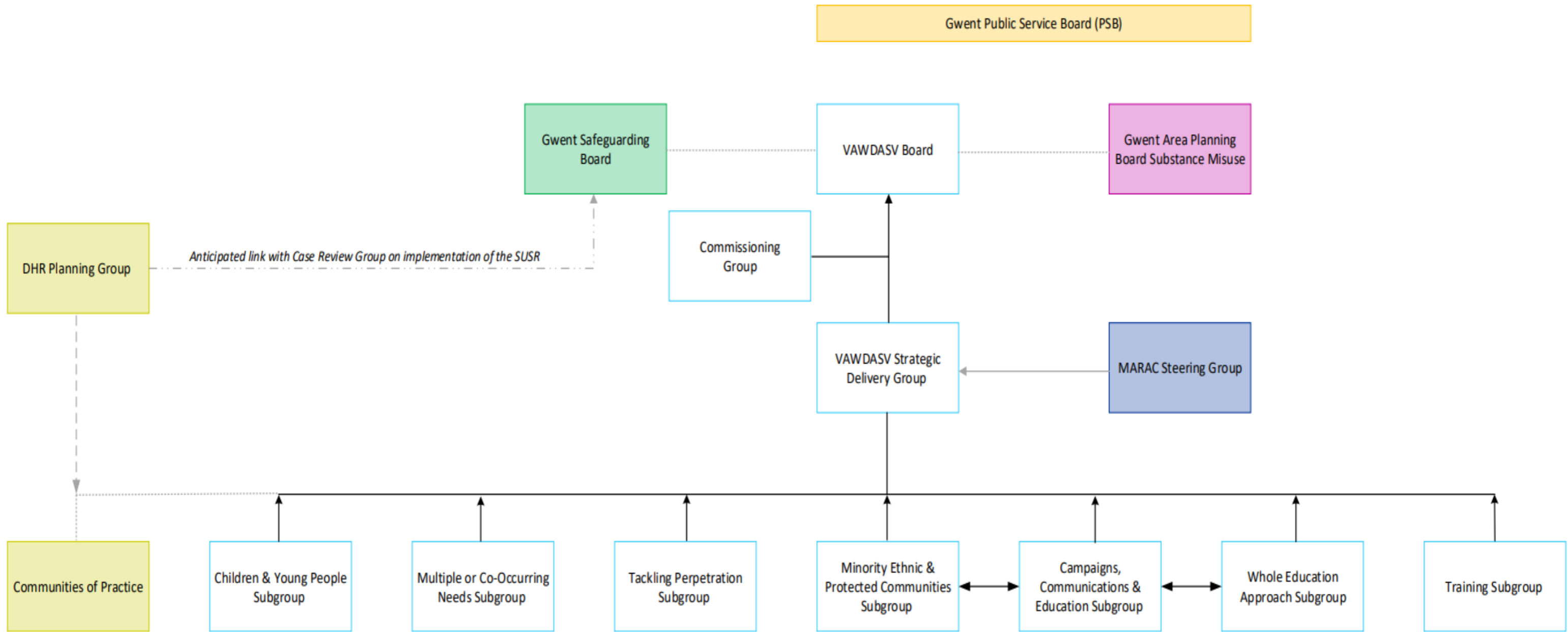
Children are negatively impacted by experiencing domestic abuse and without early intervention and support this negative impact can last through a child's life course. Domestic abuse can impact upon social, psychological, physical, emotional and behavioural outcomes with an often-negative impact upon a child's academic success. This Strategy will continue to support Operation Encompass aims across Gwent, by directly connecting police and schools, to:

- secure better outcomes for children
- enable schools to better understand the impact living with domestic abuse has upon children
- help schools to better understand a child's lived experience and to therefore be able to support and nurture each child, making a child's day better and giving them a better tomorrow

Governance Arrangements

Strong leadership is required to embed violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as “everyone’s business” that requires all areas of public policy to address. Subsequently, ownership of this Strategy must sit at the highest level to secure robust strategic buy in from partners and ensure a significant contribution to shape and improve the delivery of services for those affected. The direction and oversight of this Strategy sits within the structure outlined below. However, in progressing the actions under Fundamental 2 (regional structures reform), the governance for VAWDASV will continue to evolve beyond the arrangements below to intersect with Community Safety, Substance use, Safeguarding, Criminal Justice and Gwent Public Services Board structures to achieve a strong public service approach.

Gwent Regional VAWDASV Governance and Reporting Structures



VAWDASV Board

The VAWDASV Board will hold representation of Relevant Authorities and statutory bodies directly responsible for upholding and implementing the statutory obligations and guidance under the VAWDASV Act. Collectively, members of the Board will ensure that the relevant functions of the Act are upheld across the region, ensuring the need to remove or minimise any factors which increase the risk of violence against women and girls, or exacerbate the impact of such violence on victims. A key role of the Board will be the implementation of the Strategy, which is a statutory requirement placed on Local Authorities and Local Health Boards under Section 5 the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

In recognition that effective implementation of the Act and its statutory guidance must, by necessity, involve all Relevant Authorities, the membership of the Board will include representation from the five Gwent local authorities, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and Welsh Ambulance Service (as an NHS Trust). Local authority representation will include social care, education, community safety, safeguarding, substance use and housing. To enable whole system change and support a public health approach, senior leaders from VAWDASV related statutory bodies (i.e., Police, Probation and Office for Police and Crime Commissioner) will also hold Board membership.

Linked to the regional reforms, it is anticipated that the VAWDASV Board will become accountable to the Gwent Public Services Board.

VAWDASV Strategic Delivery Group

The VAWDASV Strategic Delivery Group (SDG) will be the key driver in the delivery of this Strategy and the implementation of the annual delivery plans. As a senior group, the SDG will directly coordinate the work of the subgroups that report to it and oversee the progress and outputs of the relevant work plans across the region. SDG membership will consist of senior managers across Relevant Authorities, specialist and third sector and public bodies who will have the ability to raise any issues, contribute to discussion (offering challenge where appropriate), ensure dissemination of information, commit to partnership working and collaboration and hold authority and decision-making powers to act upon requirements of their individual organisation.

Commissioning Group

The Commissioning Group will be an integral function to the long-term and sustainable commissioning of high quality, collaborative services in the prevention, protection and support for victims affected by VAWDASV. The Commissioning Group will comprise of multi-sector representation where VAWDASV is present (e.g., social care, health, preventative services, substance use). The purpose of the Commissioning Group will be twofold:

1. To collectively plan for the design and delivery of sustainable VAWDASV services across the region, embedding the Commissioning of VAWDASV Services in Wales Statutory Guidance¹⁵
2. Decision making in respect of grant funding and allocation of grants providing to the region by Welsh Government.

The Commissioning Group will typically report into the VAWDASV Board but will have close links with SDG and the subgroups as these will inform the evidence-base and provide the work direction for the Commissioning Group.

Subgroups

Acting as enablers to this Strategy and reporting to the VAWDASV Strategic Delivery Group will be several subgroups. These subgroups will exist for the duration of this Strategy with their workstreams dictated by the Focus Areas and subsequent annual implementation plan. Across the three-year period, there will be flexibility to review purpose and/or change the considerations of subgroups to remain dynamic in their focus but as a brief overview, subgroups parameters will cover:

Children & Young People – whole system approaches to supporting children and young people affected by VAWDASV, whole system approaches to addressing abusive behaviours and perpetration by children and young people and development of a regional ‘Knowledge Hub’; capturing best practice, gaps in delivery and areas for influencing regional policy considerations

Multiple or Co-occurring Needs – identifying and addressing the gaps to meet the needs of those that experience multiple barriers to accessing services. As a minimum, this subgroup will have representation from health, substance use, housing and third sector providers

Tackling Perpetration – providing the structure, focus and direction for identifying and disrupting perpetration and understanding ‘what works’ with perpetrators

Minority Ethnic and Protected Communities – to improve the recognition, reporting and response to VAWDASV in relation to minority ethnic groups and protected characteristics (e.g., honour-based abuse, disability) to strengthen multi agency response as well as providing scrutiny and challenge to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion in services across the region

Campaigns, Communication & Engagement – the development, planning and implementation of campaigns, awareness raising and engagement of the public on VAWDASV

¹⁵ [statutory-guidance-for-the-commissioning-of-vawdasv-services-in-wales.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/statutory-guidance-for-the-commissioning-of-vawdasv-services-in-wales.pdf)

Whole Education Approach – holding oversight of the regional response to the Whole Education Approach Guidance from Welsh Government, ensuring the recommend elements are considered and monitored as well as co-working with the Children & Young People Subgroup to address national areas of concern around children and young people (e.g., peer on peer sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours¹⁶)

Training – holding the oversight of the National Training Framework in Gwent, advising and arranging training plans and assessing need and solutions for Specialist Syllabus training requirements

In addition to the above subgroups, the regional structure will also include a:

Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) Planning Group – taking learning from DHR findings and looking at what information and at what level needs to be disseminated, how and to whom in light of the review and developing an action plan to implement this. In the context of changes afoot with the introduction of the Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR), this group will also consider how the learning can be shared with the Wales Safeguarding Repository for the learning to be incorporated beyond the region

Communities of Practice forum – a new, more focused way of working, providing opportunities for Practitioner’s to build confidence, skills and knowledge, collaborate and network across the sector. Communities of Practice will support engagement with providers, survivors, voices from seldom heard communities and experts to share experiences, problem solve and enable better visibility of and access to available support; ultimately facilitating a more joined-up experience to deliver prevention, protection and support for VAWDASV within the community

¹⁶ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-report/we-dont-tell-our-teachers-experiences-peer-peer-sexual-harassment-among-secondary>

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan below outlines how the Fundamentals and Focus Areas will be prioritised across the region for the next three years. A Delivery Plan will be produced on an annual basis to reflect the actions required, expertise needed and establish how progress will be measured to achieve the goals under each year of the Strategic Plan.

Fundamentals

	Goals		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Section 3)	Undertake an Evidence-Based Needs Assessment on Children and Young People impact by VAWDASV	Collaborative Commissioning of Services to Address Gaps	Collaborative Commissioning of Services to Address Gaps
	Raising Awareness of Services, Pathways of Support and Interventions for Children and Young People Impacted by VAWDASV		Reviewing the Role of Public Services for Further Development of Partnership Working to Meet the Needs of Children and Young People
Regional Structures Reform	Embedding VAWDASV into Governance Arrangements in Community Safety	Reviewing Structures for Partnership Delivery of Sustainable Services	
	Embedding VAWDASV into Governance Arrangements in Gwent Public Services Board		
	Supporting the implementation of the Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR)		
Infrastructure for Regional Services and Delivery	Establishing 'Benchmark' Needs Assessments that Outline Prevalence, Scale, Good Practice and Resource Deficits	Reviewing and Updating Needs Assessments to Support 'Live' Priorities	
	Establishing a VAWDASV Commissioning Group	Focus on Maintaining, Sustaining and Developing Services	Planning and Methodology for Whole System Approach VAWDASV Services

Focus Areas

	Goals		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Tackling Perpetration	Undertaking a Regional Needs Assessment That Will Inform a Whole System Approach to Tackling Perpetration	Planning Solutions in Response to Regional Needs Assessment	Commissioning of Perpetrator Programmes and Interventions
		Supporting Identification and Response to Perpetration Identified in Education Based Settings	
Children and Young People	Empowering and Educating Young People to Support VAWDASV Prevention and Early Intervention		
	Developing a 'Knowledge Hub' of Evidence-Based Programmes and Interventions for Children and Young People	Developing a 'Knowledge Hub' of Evidence-Based Programmes and Interventions for Children and Young People	Commissioning of Programmes and Interventions for Children and Young People
	Developing a Framework for Participation and Child/Young Person Voice for the Planning and Delivery of Services		Influencing and Planning for Sustainable Funding of Children/Young Person Programmes and Interventions
Misogyny and Harassment	Delivering Campaign and Communication Activities that Raise Awareness of Misogyny and Harassment		
	Supporting Identification and Reporting of Workplace Harassment		
	Supporting Identification and Reporting of Abuse of Power, Position or Perpetration by Public Bodies		
Multiple or Co-Occurring Needs	Developing Collaboration Arrangements between Agencies and Providers to Establish and Support Cross Specialism Trained Practitioners	Establishing Pathways and Resources to Support Solution Focused Approaches to Challenges that Exist	Influencing and Planning for Continued Sustainability of Collaboration Support Services
	Understanding Trauma Informed Approaches Required to Appropriately Respond to VAWDASV Issues Where There are Co-existing Support Needs		

Annex A: Definitions and Glossary

Definitions

Violence Against Women

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations and others as acts of violence which are suffered disproportionately by women that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Violence against women shall be understood to encompass but not be limited to:

- a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Domestic Abuse

The UK Government definition of domestic abuse is 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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.'

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual act or activity. According to the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 sexual violence means sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or threats of violence of a sexual nature. The act further defines sexual exploitation as something that is done to or in respect of a person which warrants an offence under Part 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. This includes the following definitions:

- a) Rape - when a person intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person with his penis when that other person does not consent to the penetration, and/or he does not reasonably believe that the other person consents.
- b) Assault by penetration - the intentional sexual penetration of the vagina or anus of another person with a part of the person's body or anything else, when that other person does not consent to the penetration, and/or he does not reasonably believe that the other person consents.
- c) Sexual assault - a person intentionally touching another person sexually in a manner to which the other person does not consent to the touching, and/or the person does not reasonably believe that the other person consents.

- d) Child sex offences - rape or any sexual activity with a child, familial child sex offences and meeting a child following sexual grooming.

Sexual Harassment

The legal definition of sexual harassment is when someone carries out unwanted sexual behaviour towards another person that makes them feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated. It is also when someone carries out this behaviour with the intention of making someone else feel that way.

Harassment

Harassment is used to cover the 'causing alarm or distress' offences under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and 'putting people in fear of violence'.

Forced Marriage

Forcing a person (whether by physical force or coercion by threats or other psychological means) to enter into a religious or civil ceremony of marriage (whether or not legally binding). The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family).

Honour Based Abuse (HBA)

Honour-based abuse is a crime or incident committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM also known as female circumcision or female genital cutting, is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons". Female genital mutilation is an act that is an offence under sections 1, 2 or 3 of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003.

Gender Based Violence

Gender-based Violence is violence, threats of violence or harassment arising directly or indirectly from values, beliefs or customs relating to gender or sexual orientation.

Glossary

Ask and Act

A process of targeted enquiry across the Welsh Public Service in relation to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

BME

Black and Minority Ethnic or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic is the terminology used to describe people of non-white descent.

Incel¹⁷

Incel is short for Involuntary Celibate. People who define themselves as incels say they cannot get a sex life despite the fact they want to be in a relationship.

Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA)

Trained specialist worker who provides short to medium-term casework support for high-risk victims of domestic abuse.

Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA)

Trained specialist worker who provides support to victims/survivors of rape and sexual assault.

MARAC

A MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Victim/Survivor

The term used to describe the person who is potentially experiencing Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. Other terms encompassed may include; 'service user' 'client' and 'patient' and reflect the terms used by different organisations to define their relationship to the person at risk. In practical terms it is suggested that the person experiencing these issues selects the term they prefer, where a term is required.

Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Specialist Sector

Third sector organisations whose core business is Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

¹⁷ [Incels: Inside a dark world of online hate - BBC News](#)