

## COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

<b>DATE</b>	04/09/2025
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Carolina Borgstrom, Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Violence Against Women and Girls progress update
<b>STATUS</b>	Open

### CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Violence against women and girls contributes towards one of the Community Safety Partnership's four key priority areas, namely to reduce serious violence as established in the Police, Crime, Court and Sentencing Act 2022. This also contributes to the Council's ambition to nurture stronger communities as set out in the Council Plan 2025 to 2028.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of data and consultation findings in relation to violence against women and girls, describes the work undertaken to date to reduce these offences, and summarises the council's delivery plan in relation to White Ribbon accreditation.

### MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Panel members are requested to make any recommendations or observations for consideration to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Councils White Ribbon Delivery Group.

#### 1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

##### 1.1 Context

1.2 Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is any act of gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women by men, including threats of these acts and coercion or deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public, private or online. As an umbrella term, VAWG includes crimes and behaviour such as rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, so-called honour-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and honour killings) and intimate image abuse.

1.3 Local data tells us that the top reported VAWG crime types in North East Lincolnshire in 2024-25 were harassment, assault, stalking, threats, controlling or coercive behaviour, and malicious communications. Engagement with women and girls tells us the actions of boys and men influences their own behaviours – they are reluctant to travel or utilise public spaces after dark and feel intimidated by aggressive and anti-social activity. Sadly, they accept poor male behaviour as 'the norm', but they also acknowledge the role of men in making them feel safer and in being the solution to the problem.

## 1.4 Data

- 1.5 In 2024-25 there were 3,733 VAWG offences in total, of which 1,373 (37%) related to domestic abuse and 2,360 (63%) to non-domestic abuse. To reflect the refreshed guidance from the national VAWG taskforce, VAWG offences now comprise the following crimes with a female victim over ten years old: homicide, rape, other sexual offences, violence with injury, exploitation of prostitution, stalking and harassment, modern slavery, public fear, alarm or distress, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and crimes with a domestic abuse marker. Data is not comparable with previous years, but it will be possible to do so moving forward. In 2024-25 VAWG accounted for 21% of the total reported crimes in North East Lincolnshire
- 1.6 The average age of victims of these offences was 34 years old, with 26% being committed by an acquaintance, 19% by an ex-partner, 12% by a stranger, 10% by a current partner and 9% by a neighbour. Although local data is not currently available on the sex of the offender, the National Audit Office states that, nationally, 97% of perpetrators of sexual offences in the year ending 2023 were male; Refuge reports that 93% of defendants in domestic abuse cases are male; and Women's Aid reports that 98% of offenders convicted of coercive or controlling behaviour in the year ending 2022 were male.
- 1.7 VAWG offences are categorised into three crime types – violence against the person accounted for the greatest number of incidents with 2,770 (74%), followed by public order offences with 552 (15%), then sexual offences at 411 (11%). Within these categories, the most prevalent offences were harassment (relating to a series of incidents such as stalking), assault occasioning actual bodily harm, and public order offences causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress.

## 1.8 Consultation

- 1.9 Engaging women and girls in discussions about their safety is crucial for developing effective strategies that address their specific needs and concerns. The North East Lincolnshire VAWG task group conducted focus groups and workshops with students at Franklin College and Grimsby Institute, females within the youth justice service, female shoppers in Grimsby town centre, female social groups, mums at a community centre, professionals, and females at the YMCA; plus a paper survey was offered. The results are summarised below.
- 1.10 Town centres, open spaces and public places
- 1.11 Women and girls feel less safe than men when visiting the town centre or parks and open spaces whilst this was only a few percentage points less during the day, after dark 29% of young females feel safe in the town centre compared with 59% of young males, and 29% of young females feel safe when visiting parks and open spaces compared with 51% of young males. Women indicated that they do not stay in Grimsby town centre longer than their visit necessitates.
- 1.12 Female gym users reported being stared at, receiving unwanted attention, being

inappropriately touched or brushed up against, and unconsented photos of them being taken. Women experienced men standing uncomfortably close to them and using their physical presence to assert dominance.

#### 1.13 Public transport

- 1.14 Women and girls of all ages are reluctant to use public transport, particularly after dark, with 35% of young females feeling safe using the bus after dark compared with 73% of young males. Concerns were raised around fellow passengers, with this cited as the main reason for feeling unsafe.

#### 1.15 Misogyny, behaviour change, and a culture of acceptance

- 1.16 Women change their behaviours as a result of male behaviours and accept this as normal. This includes avoiding activity after dark, adapting their routes to find well-lit paths, using only one earphone etc. In some circumstances, female gym users stopped working out, changed the times they attended, or only went with someone they knew. Younger women were more afraid of men in general than older women.

#### 1.17 The solutions

- 1.18 Solutions identified by women and girls include education in schools to affect long term behaviour change; self-defence classes being offered to build confidence and self-esteem; action taken against anti-social behaviour in a public place, including swearing and shouting; regeneration of the town centres in both the daytime and night time economy to encourage more people into those areas; increased uniform presence (including police and wider agencies); and campaigns to encourage bystanders to take action against any harassment they witness.

#### **1.19 Activity undertaken**

- 1.20 The North East Lincolnshire VAWG task group addresses sexual violence, abuse and exploitation; stalking; image-based offending and misogyny. It does not address domestic abuse; coercive control; so-called honour-based violence; forced marriage or female genital mutilation as these are all covered by robust partnership working via the Domestic Abuse Strategic Group. The VAWG Task group works towards the following five objectives:

- To listen to the voices of local women and girls;
- To work in partnership to implement solutions to issues within, or barriers to accessing public spaces;
- To address misogyny and gateway behaviours through culture change around offender behaviour;
- To encourage men to call out unacceptable behaviour and intervene when witnessing harassment or abuse;
- To represent the voices of women and girls in wider partnership considerations and activity.

- 1.21 In addition to extensive consultation and engagement with women and girls as

described above, this year the group has focused its efforts around education, environmental improvements, and awareness raising campaigns.

#### 1.22 Education and bystander intervention training

1.23 In 2023 the Community Safety Team was invited to Franklin College to deliver bystander intervention training to approximately 1,000 year 12 students (aged 16-17). The training was well received, and we have repeated this exercise to the new cohort in 2024 and again in 2025. In addition to this, we have extended our offer to Grimsby Institute and Humberside Engineering and Training Association (HETA), delivering to 4,000 young people in total who now have the skills to intervene in a safe way, whatever their level of confidence or ability, when witnessing sexual harassment. Before the training 46% of students said they would intervene if they witnessed street harassment, compared with 81% at the end.

1.24 Building on the success of bystander intervention training, workshops have been run at Franklin College to follow the interests of the students, as expressed during the original sessions. The Community Safety Team has devised and delivered sessions on:

- Societal norms, what it means to be masculine and feminine, online influencers, and role models;
- Banter, sexualised language, and when 'jokes' turn into misogyny or harassment;
- A specific session with Grimsby Town football students discussing the influence and appeal of Andrew Tate.

#### 1.25 Environmental improvements and personal safety initiatives

1.26 Safer Streets Ambassadors were introduced into Grimsby Town Centre in December 2023 to help increase feelings of safety and confidence in visiting the town centre at night. They provide a reassuring and highly visible presence on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. As well as patrolling the streets, they are linked to the Grimsby Retailers in Partnership (GRIP) radio scheme, which has been extended this year to include licenced premises operating in the night time economy. The ambassadors are in frequent contact with the CCTV control room which operates a two-way process to both direct the ambassadors to vulnerable individuals on the street and to respond to ambassadors' requests for monitoring of ongoing situations. Similarly, licenced premises can radio through to the ambassadors for assistance escorting lone females to their onward travel. Whilst the ambassadors are not employed in an enforcement role, they report criminal or suspicious activity to the Police to deal with as appropriate.

1.27 This year to date (April to July 2025) the ambassadors have dealt with 127 incidents. This includes giving first aid whilst waiting for paramedics to arrive; walking vulnerable people to taxis, train stations or bus stops; supporting intoxicated people to plan a safe journey home; alerting police and health services to missing people found; directing young people to the Haven hub and signposting people to other support services such as Harbour Place. In support

of this initiative, the Haven Arms public house has agreed to act as a safe space for the ambassadors to escort vulnerable people to if they need to get out of a difficult situation, providing access to space outside of the main bar area and through an alternative door.

- 1.28 'Operation Makesafe' has been introduced in North East Lincolnshire in the spring / summer season of 2025. This comprised of joint visits by police and the Community Safety Team to Thorpe Park, St James Hotel and the Holiday Inn Express to train staff working in the leisure industry in the signs of sexual exploitation within their accommodation. This has been received positively. Visits were also made to local gyms to ensure they had appropriate safeguards and policies in place to protect female customers.
- 1.29 Personal safety activity has continued which includes the ongoing promotion of *Ask for Angela* within licenced premises and retailers – a discrete method of obtaining help for members of the public which also serves to remind retail and bar staff of their duty of care to customers. Personal safety keyrings have been distributed to women and girls, alongside the allocation of *HollieGuard* personal safety app licences, funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 1.30 Communications
- 1.31 In 2024-25 we launched three communications campaigns:
  - Stalking awareness and support – based on the experiences of local women;
  - *Have you ever... It's not okay* – a series of posters asking men to consider whether they have ever engaged in unacceptable behaviour such as making a women feel uncomfortable in their presence or making suggestive or sexual comments to a woman or about a woman to their friends.
  - *Are you okay?* – a series of posters used on the sides of buses and billboards promoting easy methods of intervening or providing a distraction when witnessing sexual harassment, including asking "where is the nearest bus stop?".
- 1.32 We also held two large events – the inaugural Women's Empowerment and Networking event in February 2025, and the second *Reclaim These Streets* walk in March 2025.
- 1.33 The networking event incorporated nine speakers on topics including male allyship and positive masculinity, the stalking advocacy service, the domestic violence disclosure scheme *Clare's Law*, building confidence and resilience through relationships, and women in policing.
- 1.34 The *Reclaim These Streets* walk in Cleethorpes, attracted 200 participants. The aim was to reinforce the message that men and boys are essential in combatting the problem by speaking out against harm, challenging their peers, and acting as positive role models. A number of men were in attendance, although women comprised the overwhelming majority of attendees.

### 1.35 Learning from Victim Experience

- 1.36 Last month we were privileged to meet with a victim of non-domestic abuse stalking who talked us through her experiences, the support she received from agencies and where she felt she could have been supported better. We are currently working up plans to utilise this in as many ways as possible. This includes developing a tabletop exercise for professionals to examine missed opportunities and learning; working with local businesses to encourage the implementation of appropriate lone working procedures and promote the Community Safety Partnership's personal safety offer; and public awareness raising of how to access support, using the victim's own words of advice, for current and past victims of stalking.

### 1.37 Planned Future Activity

- 1.38 Work is continuing with Stagecoach to make women and girls whole journeys safer from waiting at the bus stop to arriving home. This includes partnering with the national phone line *Strut Safe* and promoting this on buses for people to use on their onward journey; arranging a safe transport promotional day using the *Get chatty with Hattie* engagement bus; promotion of the *Ask for Angela* Street assistance scheme; and marketing campaigns around acceptable male behaviour on buses and how to be an active bystander. An initial meeting has taken place with Regeneration colleagues to feed women's safety considerations into the design of the new transport hub. Matters for discussion include the presence of bus drivers and other uniformed capable guardians; quick charging phone points; an SOS point connected to CCTV; a safe area to be used as a base by partner organisations on joint operations; adequate lighting and visibility inside the hub; and multiple exit points.
- 1.39 Engagement is an essential part of continuous awareness raising and feedback. A community event was held in Nunsthorpe on 12<sup>th</sup> August and a further event is planned for Freshney Place on 22<sup>nd</sup> November to distribute personal safety advice and equipment, promote the ambassadors, *HollieGuard* personal safety app, and *Strut Safe* phone line. The Community Safety Team will continue to attend Freshers weeks and safeguarding weeks at the local colleges and continue to deliver education programmes. We are also attending the NLAG safeguarding week at Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital in November; and our third *Reclaim These Streets* walk will take place in early 2026.
- 1.40 Finally, we are exploring a project with the NSPCC to change the offender narrative used in awareness raising to young people from the outdated *stranger danger* message to messages which incorporate wider sources of abuse from partners, ex-partners and acquaintances

### 1.41 **White Ribbon**

- 1.42 Violence against women and girls is preventable by placing the focus on the men who are responsible for causing harm and holding them accountable. This includes the perpetrators of violence, but also the men who allow misogyny, harmful portrayals of women, and a culture which shifts the blame onto victims to persist. Therefore in December 2024 the Council successfully applied for

White Ribbon accreditation.

- 1.43 Men play the key role in the White Ribbon campaign and are asked to sign up as an ambassador, taking a stand against misogyny and violence by speaking out whenever they encounter such behaviours, and encouraging other men to do the same. The Council is required to deliver against White Ribbon's three-year action plan, which is being completed through a working group. This includes the following strands:
- Strategic Leadership – buy in at the highest level within the local authority, with the senior leadership and Elected Members signed up as ambassadors or champions;
  - Human Resources – ensuring existing policies adequately cover men's violence against women, and that these policies are shared and understood; providing training on sexual violence, coercive control, consent and domestic abuse; embedding a mechanism for reporting incidents of sexism, harassment, abuse, assault and domestic abuse within with workplace, including support for the victim and whistleblower;
  - Procurement – building in the White Ribbon accreditation into our commissioning process as a social value indicator;
  - Public Health – providing support and housing for women and children who are fleeing domestic abuse; work towards commissioning a domestic abuse perpetrator programme
  - Education – ensuring schools' healthy relationships programmes have specific content aimed at boys;
  - Partnership Working – ensuring there is a joined up approach across the Community Safety Partnership and wider agencies;
  - Communications – awareness raising of VAWG, misogyny, appropriate and unacceptable behaviours, White Ribbon, and how to become an ambassador; ensuring existing communications do not use abusive or sexist imagery; marking White Ribbon day and the International Day to End Male Violence against Women;
  - Recruitment Opportunities – encouraging men and boys to sign up to become an ambassador across the workforce, wider professional relationships, and beyond.

## **2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES**

- 2.1 Violence against women and girls is one of a number of priorities within the Community Safety Partnership which means resources need to be managed carefully to tackle all areas of crime and disorder and community safety.
- 2.2 Despite this, great strides have been made in this area of work in 2024-25 which can be used as a foundation to build upon. Excellent relationships have been developed with partner agencies such as Franklin College and Stagecoach and these will be developed further in 2025-26 to continue our work across the dual strands of quick time solutions to environmental issues, and longer-term culture change.
- 2.3 Although we refer to 'violence against women and girls' in line with national and

local definitions, many of the initiatives we have implemented bring benefits to all people who are feeling vulnerable at that time.

### **3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 Any public communications made, including press releases and campaigns, are written in conjunction with Council, Humberside Police and OPCC communications teams. Information on violence against women and girls is released in a proactive manner to reassure and increase community confidence. Communications will continue to be monitored to ensure awareness continues to be raised, positive activity is highlighted and women and girls continue to report concerns.

### **4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 Activity to reduce violence against women and girls is coordinated via the Community Safety Partnership Community Safety Team with wider input from Humberside Police. The Community Safety Partnership contributes £2,500 from the Community Safety Partnership's core funding, which is a grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner to pay for wider merchandise and initiatives. Safer Streets Ambassadors are paid for via external funding, also from the Police and Crime Commissioner.

### **5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report contains no recommended changes to policy or resource which affect children and young people. As indicated earlier in the report, work is ongoing with Young People to change attitudes and behaviours and offer wider information, support and awareness raising.

### **6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 This report contains no recommended changes to policy or resource which affect climate change or the environment.

### **8. MONITORING COMMENTS**

- 7.1 In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

### **9. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Affects all wards.

### **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Violence Against Women and Girls Annual Report 2024-25.](#)

[The five Ds of bystander intervention when witnessing unwanted sexual harassment.](#)



[Violence Against Women and Girls Involvement Menu](#)

**11. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

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