Portsmouth CITY COUNCIL

Portsmouth's Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAWG) strategy

A vision for action 2024 – 2029

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN PORTSMOUTH

Women and girls make up just over half the population

Portsmouth England

Female 50.4% (England 51%)

Male 49.6% (England 49%)

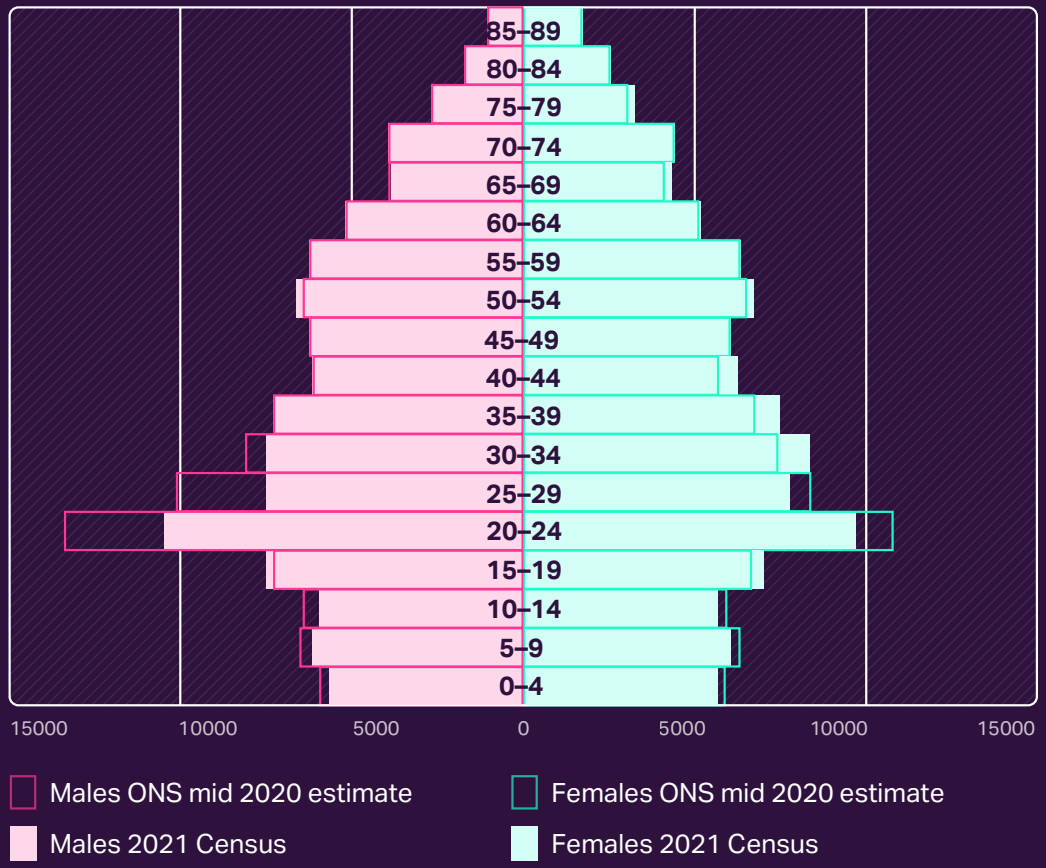
Total number of females

104,480

Living here

Portsmouth has been ranked as one of the toughest communities to be a girl in the UK.

Resident population by gender and 5 year age band from Census 2021 compared to ONS mid-2020 estimate



Mental Health

Females in Portsmouth are over **1.5X** more likely to have common mental health disorders.

In 2023, an **estimated 26,557 people were predicted to have a common mental health disorder** - this equates to

although rates were higher for females than males.

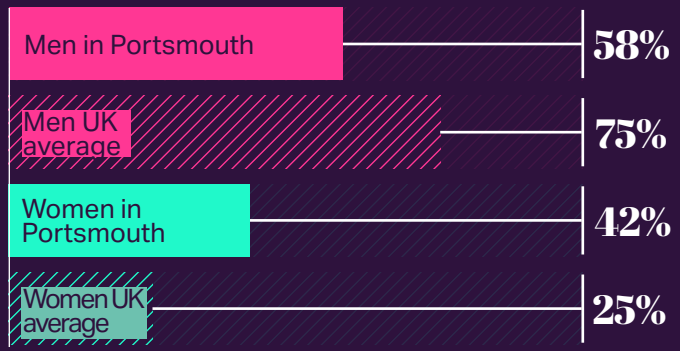
Suicide

Women in Portsmouth are **nearly twice as likely to die by suicide** than the national average.

In 2020 there were **34** deaths due to suicide or undetermined intent in Portsmouth, and death by suicide stood at

10.3 per 100,000

Percentage of suicide cases in 2018-19



There is a higher rate of suicide deaths in women in Portsmouth (42%) compared to a national average of 25% in 2018-2019.

Employment

In 2023/24

76.7%

adult women in Portsmouth in employment.

71.9%

adult women in the UK in employment.

77.6%

adult men in Portsmouth in employment.

The number of men employed at **77.6%** is lower than South East **(80.7%)** and national **(78.7%)**.

Continued on next page

Gender Pay Gap

In Portsmouth women earn on average **9% less** than men.

Based upon the mean earnings for full time workers in the city that equates to:

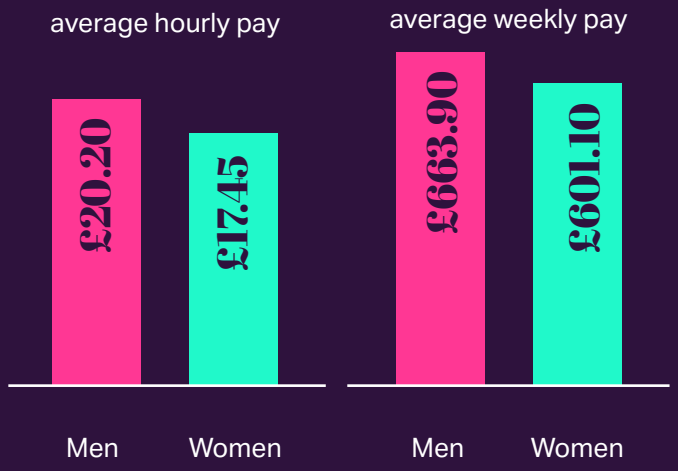
£2.75 less per hour

£62.80 per week

£3,014.40 per year

less on average than men.

This gap will follow women into retirement as any work-related pension will also be lower.

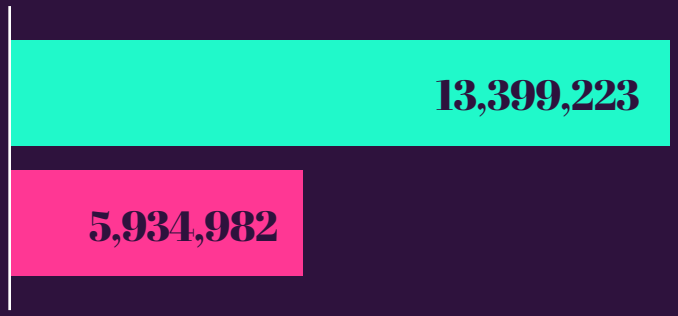


Unpaid Care

Females provide **2.3 times** more unpaid care than males.

2.3X

Females in Portsmouth provided 13,399,223 hours of help/support to someone else because of their long term physical or mental health condition, or illness or problems related to old age. Males provide 5,934,982 hours of help/support.



Domestic Abuse

Nationally Women are **twice as likely** to experience domestic abuse.

In Portsmouth in 2023/24 over two thirds of domestic abuse crime offences recorded by the Police were against women.

It's estimated that in Portsmouth approximately 5,200 females and 2,500 males experienced domestic abuse in the last year.

Domestic abuse continues to be the **largest known driver for violent crime in Portsmouth**.

Sexual Violence

Women and girls are overwhelmingly more likely to be affected by sexual violence.

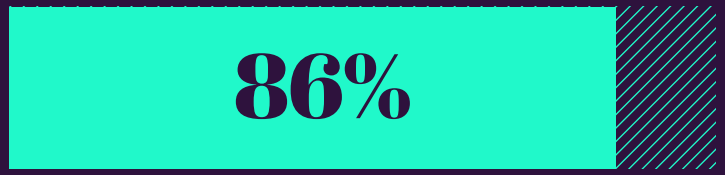
of victims were 17 years or younger

Victims of sexual offences were overwhelmingly young women

Most suspects were male

Most suspects were adults between 18 and 44 years

Victims of sexual offences were more likely to be female than male



and the peak age range for offences with a female victim was **between 12 and 21 years.**

Domestic Tasks

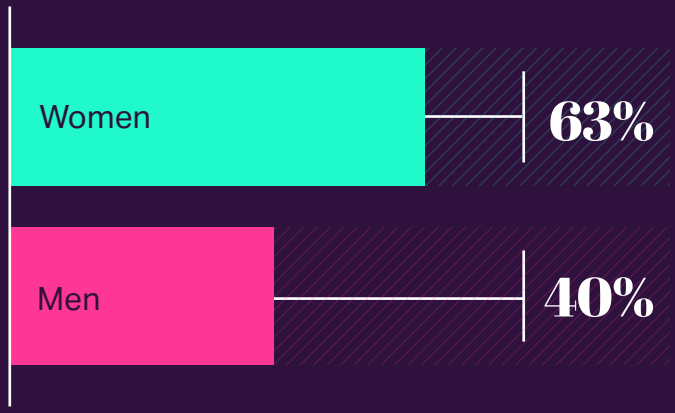
Women spend nearly **an hour a day more** on unpaid tasks including housework and childcare, than men.

Gender Discrimination

In Portsmouth female students in years 8-10 are **three times more likely** to experience discrimination on the grounds of gender than male students. In some year groups and parts of the city this raises to **four times higher.**

Community Safety

Women are less likely to feel safe and are more likely to avoid parts of the city than men.



The cost of fear

The negative economic effects of women and girls feeling unsafe is estimated to be costing Portsmouth's economy,

£309M each year

Data sources on pg 32

Our vision

In Portsmouth we want everyone to look out for one another and take positive action. We want everyone to feel safe to talk about and address unhealthy behaviours. Together we will progress towards a safer, healthier, and happier city for everyone.

Prepared on behalf of Portsmouth's Health & Wellbeing Board

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Our priorities

Violence against women and girls is not inevitable, but for too many women and girls in our city, it is a part of their daily life, shaping their understanding of our world and their place within it, curtailing the opportunities available to them, preventing them from engaging in activities for fear of abuse, and causing serious and sustained harm to individuals, their families and the wider community, with some paying with their lives.

Whilst anyone can experience domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or harassment, women and girls are disproportionally affected. This strategy exists in recognition that the only way to make any meaningful impact on the current situation is to address gender-based violence. This means we need to proactively challenge ourselves and each other, to consider how long held beliefs and attitudes have helped create this situation. We also need to strive to ensure that all people, have parity of access to the opportunities that this city has to offer.

Together we will end the violence that commonly affects women and girls in Portsmouth, to enable every person to live to their full potential.

Central to this vision is **addressing abusive and/or unhealthy behaviours**. We have focused on ensuring the best possible support for victims, and we will continue to strive to ensure that those who experience harm have the support they need to be safe and recover. But we need to do more to engage people who use abusive/unhealthy

behaviours, and without a proactive focus on making it safe and easy to seek help earlier, we will only ever be reactive.

Engaging friends and family is essential. Tragically we know from exploring the cases of those who have lost their lives that the people closest to them often knew something, but through lack of knowledge and/or support were rendered powerless to make a difference to the outcome. We will seek to change that and place communities at the heart of the changes we need to make, emboldening them to step up and be active participants in this agenda.

Our city, should be **a place where everyone feels safe**, but we know that fear of harm and abuse has made some spaces feel less safe for women and girls more so than other people, and that's why we need a continued focus on standing up to abuse and harassment within public places, and to use the powers that we have, to ensure opportunities for abuse to occur are reduced.

We all own this. These are not issues that any one agency can address, we cannot enforce our way of this, this is not someone else's issue. The only way forward is for **everyone and every agency to take responsibility** for their own role in holding each other accountable, for challenging abusive and harmful attitudes and behaviours, to ensure a better future for everyone.

This strategy has been developed in partnership with a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations from across Portsmouth. We have utilised existing evidence around 'what works' in addressing and preventing violence against women and girls and will ensure that our outcomes are developed with the evidence in mind. We also undertook a city-wide survey to further enrich this strategy and are thankful to the over 800 people who came forward to share their experiences with us.

What is violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls, as set out by the United Nations, is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life[1].

That is not to say that men and boys, and others who may not identify as women or girls, do not similarly experience these types of abuse and violence, and we recognise this in both our strategic community safety assessment, our community safety plan, and the services we commission.

However, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is not a series of isolated incidents or assaults which an individual experiences. It occurs as part of a system of oppressive patterns of behaviour and practises, that achieve power and control over women and girls, making them more susceptible to harm. This is why women and girls are disproportionately affected by these offences.

In keeping with the National VAWG Strategy and National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) definition of VAWG[2] the following will be considered within the scope of the strategy:

- Domestic abuse
- Rape and serious sexual offences
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation[3]
- Modern slavery and human trafficking
- Honour based abuse
- Stalking and harassment
- Adult sexual exploitation and sex work
- Tech enabled VAWG which includes online harassment
- VAWG in different space types: public, private and in places of education
- Spiking (with alcohol or any other substances)

The impact of these offences is far reaching. When women and girls are harmed, so are their families, their children and the wider community. This is why a specific strategy is needed to address violence against women and girls.

1 UN Women (2024) **Ending violence against women: Global norms and standards | What we do | UN Women – Headquarters**

2 NPCC (2023) Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023

3 For female victims aged 10 years and over in line with the NPCC VAWG definition which incorporates victims aged 10+

Findings from the Portsmouth Sexual Violence, Abuse and Harassment Survey

In 2023 to support the development of this strategy we launched a city-wide survey. Questions focused on what influenced participants beliefs around healthy/unhealthy relationships, identifying the types of unhealthy behaviours participants had experienced (either as a victim, a person using abusive or unhealthy behaviours or both or witness), possible motivation for abusive or unhealthy behaviours, location of incidents, experience of seeking help, effectiveness of support received, what could be done to improve the response, barriers to support and factors which were the most important to address the issue of Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence within society. The Survey received a total of 800 eligible (18+) participants. 79% lived in Portsmouth, 13% lived outside but worked in Portsmouth, 1% studied in Portsmouth and 5% visited Portsmouth often. 84% were female and 16% were male.

More than 80% of participants felt their beliefs were shaped by either being directly in a relationship or by their immediate and wider family and friends.

Unwanted gender-based remarks in a public place, feeling controlled, sexually suggestive jokes at work/educational spaces, unwanted attention, abusive/harassing messages were the most unhealthy/abusive behaviours that were either experienced or witnessed.

Other forms of unhealthy/abusive behaviours experienced included controlling behaviour (controlling and coercive behaviour, controlling where they go and control via children), financial abuse and gaslighting/manipulation.

Work acquaintance was the predominant relationship type (between victims and people who use abusive behaviours) for sexually suggestive jokes within a workplace or education setting.

Insecurity/no confidence, control and jealousy were the most identified factors which may lead to someone using unhealthy/abusive behaviours and majority of participants (47%) said they would advise someone using these behaviours to seek professional help.

Participants demonstrated a good understanding of unhealthy/abusive behaviours, however 15-26% agreed or had no opinions in relation to statements that suggested forms of controlling, jealousy and harassing behaviours were okay.

67% of participants were aware of Right to Ask ('Clares Law)[4] although only 7% had used the RTA disclosure scheme. Out of those who did use the scheme, 53% found that it was useful.

4 Clare's Law enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's previous abusive or violent offending.

The highest proportion of all unhealthy/abusive behaviours occurred in participants own homes/shelter/accommodation (34%; n491) followed by in a building anyone can access (31%; n451).

Those who experienced unhealthy/abusive behaviours said they were more likely to inform friends or family suggesting that friends and family are possible paths to early intervention and support.

Why don't you report it...

"It is normalised. Nobody cares and nobody will be punished".

Gender Based Remarks in Public Places

"It happens all the time, there's no point telling anyone".

Unwanted attention

"There is a culture that this should be accepted, so I didn't want to be seen as overreacting".

Sexual touching without consent

"I was afraid of losing my job".

Sexual harassment

"Worried I wouldn't be believed; I've seen how woman are treated whom come forward".

Sexual touching without consent

"It was hard to know where to turn to".

Online abuse

What would help you to report...

"Being educated that these behaviours are not normal and its okay to get out of these situations and relationships".

Physical Abuse

"Better support in childhood, school to understand covert abuse–I tolerated abuse in my marriage because it felt normal after abuse in my childhood".

Controlling behaviour

"Knowing what to do and my rights".

Filming under clothing without consent

"An easier way to report it".

Sexual touching without consent

"These behaviours in themselves individually may not seem like a lot, but when a woman is cat called or harassed 2-3 times a week (which happens to a lot of people I know) it leads to a feeling of not being safe and feeling down".

Approaches that underpin our work

This strategy has been developed in alignment with the following approaches that will underpin work across Portsmouth, to normalise and support healthy conversations about healthy relationships, boundaries, and equity:

- **Relational practice** – Relationships are powerful and they are central to the learning process. Trusting relationships help build a safe environment, where everyone can be honest, and explore new ways of working together.
- **Restorative practice (RP)** – Provides a framework of values, thinking and language that is helpful when 'something' needs to be restored. RP recognises that people are the experts of their own solutions. This approach is about helping everyone to take personal responsibility and be accountable for their own actions.
- **Trauma informed** – this approach is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's development in many ways, including their ability to feel safe, and/or develop trusting relationships. Trauma-informed practice acknowledges the need to see beyond the presenting behaviours and to ask, 'What does this person need?' rather than 'What is wrong with this person?'
- **Ecological model** – this model recognises multiple levels of influence on a person's behaviour including, beliefs, values, education, skills and other individual factors, relationships with others, how institutions are organised, community attitudes, and regulations/the law. It focuses on changing personal behaviours while accounting for wider influences.
- **Systems Approach** – Is a way of exploring and developing a plan of action in complex circumstances. It looks at things in terms of wholes and relationships rather than splitting things down into single actions. It encourages us to ask questions before jumping to conclusions, and to think about how one thing, links to another.

Our vision

Together we will end the violence that commonly affects women and girls in Portsmouth. We want everyone to look out for one another and take positive action. We want everyone to feel safe to talk about unhelpful attitudes and unhealthy behaviours that underpin violence. Together we will progress towards a safer, healthier, and happier city for everyone.

Over the next 5 years we will work towards this vision by:

- Ensuring everyone is empowered to work towards ending violence against women and girls.
- Using our partnerships and shared messaging to reach everyone in our diverse communities.
- Calling in and working with those who use unhealthy and abusive behaviours.
- Making our city feel safe, welcoming and equitable to all, especially women and girls

Who is this strategy for

This strategy is not just for women and girls who are victims/ survivors of abuse, it is for everyone who has a stake in changing the narrative of violence against women and girls within our city:

- Women and girls (including transgender), with all their diversity, that shapes their experience of violence.
- Men, boys, and others that do not identify as female, that have been harmed and would need or want to use services because of VAWG offences.
- Men, boys and others that do not identify as female who recognise that ending VAWG benefits everyone and want to be part of the solution.
- Any individual who uses abusive or unhealthy VAWG behaviours within their intimate relationships, familial relationships, public spaces, and/or workplaces.
- Friends and Family of anyone experiencing or causing VAWG that want to support those they love to be safe and happy
- Neighbours and wider community groups who are uniquely placed to offer counsel to those in need
- Public services, anchor institutions and the voluntary sector whose workforces make up the frontline response
- Businesses that are also are key influencers such as those within the leisure, entertainment, nighttime economy, and hospitality sector, those who provide transport, and those in industries where women remain underrepresented.

What are we are proposing to do, in partnership, over the next five years?

We are going to develop a city-wide response to violence against women and girls where:

1. Friends, family and community groups play a key role in delivering a victim/survivor centred response and have the support they need to do this.
2. Training that enables all services to recognise and respond to different types of VAWG is available and mandatory for frontline workers.
3. All services are equipped to support those affected by VAWG in a way that is trauma informed and delivers lasting improvement to them.
4. Those working in frontline services, are equally confident to have healthy conversations about relationships with those they think may be experiencing abuse, and those they think maybe using abusive/ unhealthy relationship behaviours.
5. Restorative approaches enable people that harm to recognise and take responsibility for their actions and change their behaviour.
6. Stronger systems to hold those who don't accept they cause harm to account.
7. There is a network spaces across the city, where people are trained to recognise and respond to instances of poor behaviour.
8. Education and community initiatives promote positive attitudes, and equity.
9. Within workplaces behaviours and attitudes that condone or support violence against women and girls are challenged and changed.
10. There is a proactive approach to placemaking within the build environment that improves feelings of safety and reduces opportunity for VAWG crime to occur.

Our principles

We will be…

United

Working together with all partners as equal stakeholders in this agenda.

Determined

Working with integrity, transparency, and with challenge as required, to ensure VAWG is eradicated without exception.

Person centred

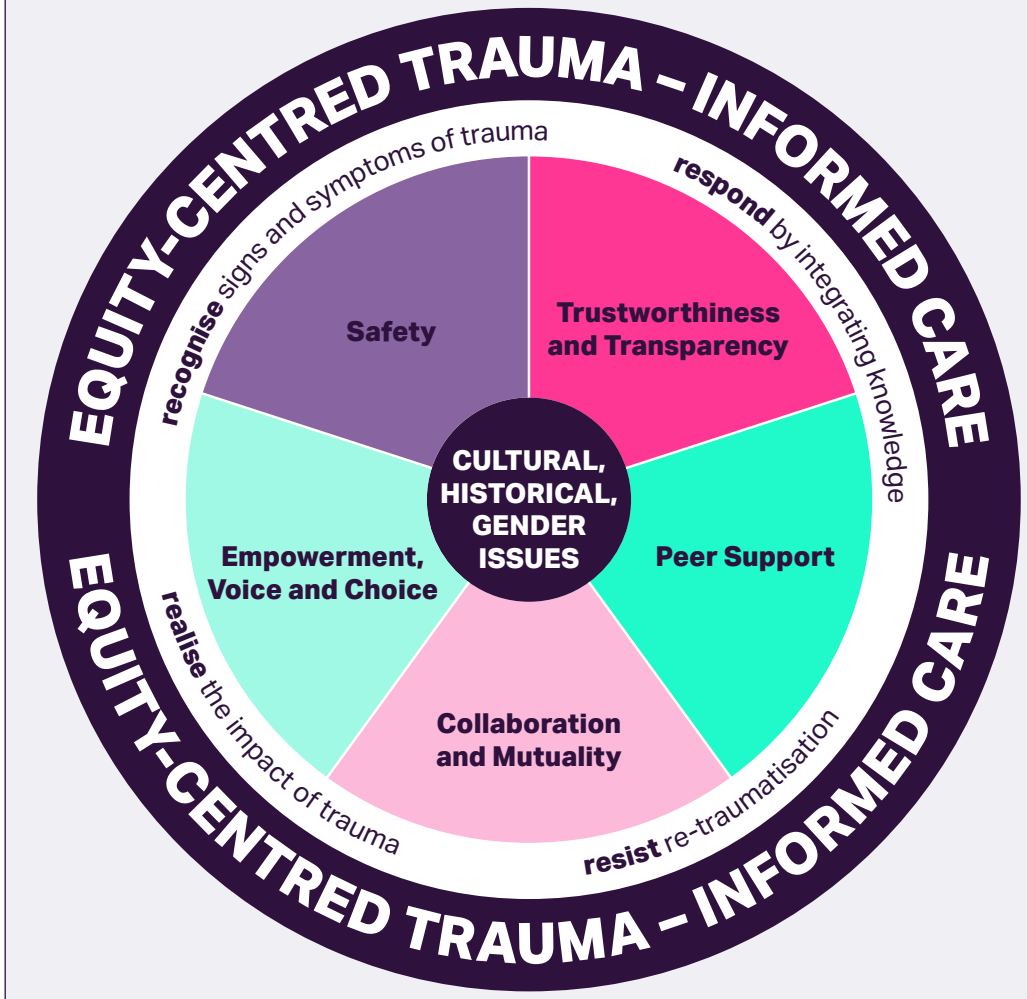
VAWG causes prevailing and on-going distress, and we will ensure all interventions are respectful, connected, and do no further harm.

Community focused

We respect the specialism of services delivered by and for the communities they serve and will work to develop the local offer.

Listening to those with lived experience

SafeLives 2024, model for engaging those with lived experience



Nobody knows everything, and through this strategy, we want to learn and develop together. We want to avoid making assumptions about what will be best for others, or assuming that because something has been a certain way before, that's the way it should be moving forward. To do this, we need to understand people who have suffered, and those who have harmed, so that we can solve some of the most difficult and complex issues that we face.

We recognise that everyone will have something different to bring, and that those experiences will be affected by different identities. We want to do more to engage people with lived experience and reach into as many of our communities as possible, reducing barriers to engagement, and ensuring people have a choice about how they become involved in our work. In doing this our focus will be working in partnership with existing groups to make interactions safe, meaningful and in the principle of do no harm.

Connection to other local work

This strategy is connected to several other strategies that are seeking to address inequalities, reduce harm, and promote healthy outcomes across the city:

- Portsmouth City Council Corporate Plan (2024-2026)
- Portsmouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership (PSCP) Safeguarding Children Strategy (2023-2026)
- Portsmouth Children's Trust Plan (2024-2029)
- Portsmouth Public Health Strategy (2023-2026)
- Portsmouth Suicide Prevention Plan (2022-2025)
- Portsmouth City Council, Homelessness Strategy (2024-2029)
- Portsmouth Safeguarding Adults Board strategic plan (2023-2028)
- Safer Portsmouth Partnership Priorities for action
- Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioners Police and Crime plan (2021-2024)

Someone told me I can't dance or sing because I'm a boy.

My dad telling me I'm not able to do things because I'm a girl.

When I was playing football all these boys said you can't play football because you're a girl.

People get teased if boys are friends with girls and vice versa.

It's not fair that boys only like girls because of their bodies.

I get told I can't play the joker in our dance because I'm a girl.

Priority 1 – Addressing Domestic Abuse

People that have experienced the trauma of domestic abuse, will face a prevailing lack of safety throughout their lives, and need a workforce that is equipped to understand, respond to keep them safe, and offer on-going support to them, as they rebuild their lives. But working with victims and survivors is not enough, we need to do more to engage people who use abusive and unhealthy behaviours, to ensure they get the support they need to prevent further harm, hold to account those who don't accept their behaviours are abusive and at the core of this, is making it safe to talk about those behaviours.

In Portsmouth **domestic abuse continues to be the largest known driver of violent crime, accounting for 37% (n2,477) of assaults**.[5] In 2023/24, there were 5,696 domestic abuse incidents and 3,882 of these were recorded as domestic crimes.[6] Where victim details were recorded by police, over two thirds of offences were against women (72%, n.2,837[7]). There was a gradual increase in the proportion of offences against males from 20% in 2013/14 to 27% in 2016/17 and 30% in 2020/21 and this proportion has remained fairly stable. This could reflect better identification of co-perpetration or male victims, male victims having more confidence to report incidents or an increase in retaliatory accusations. There were suspect details for 3,326 crimes in 2023/24, and over two thirds (72%, n2,387) were male.

There were 1,713 arrests for domestic abuse crimes in 2023/24, and 18% of them (n316) resulted in a charge with an additional 6% (n88) resulting in a caution. This is an 8-percentage point increase in charges and cautions combined since 2022/23 (from 16% to 24%) but is still lower than 2019/20 and the years preceding 2019/20. Despite these increases it is **estimated that only 7% of domestic abuse crimes result in a successful court outcome**.

Demand to access accommodation due to domestic abuse has increased. In 2023/24 There was a 57% increase in the number of homeless applications due to domestic abuse (DA) made. Most victims accommodated were female (83%). **Referrals to access Portsmouth Refuge increased by 23%**. At the same time there has been a reduction in referrals for home safety interventions, which may signify that more victims are now looking to flee rather than to remain in their own home.

Feedback from safe accommodation service users (Refuge) and Navigators indicate there is a continuing need to provide support around mental health, counselling and trauma

5 As a proportion of all assaults, not just where the relationship is known.

6 This is just for incidents and crimes where the victim is over 16 years

7 Victims aged 16+

informed support for children and other support to address wellbeing. There are also cohorts of victims that difficult to access safe accommodation and more work is needed to support those groups.

When it comes to promoting healthy relationships there is room for improvement. The numbers of people completing any form of support to change their behaviours remains low, with **only 67 people completing interventions during 2023/24** across all available services (National Probation Service clients who started domestic abuse interventions, Up2U Creating Healthy Relationships programme, and CARA workshops).

Demand for domestic abuse services remains stable, however analysis across services has demonstrated a mixed picture when it comes to support referrals, with lower levels of engagement for medium & high-risk victims, whilst referrals to refuge and those accommodated in refuge have increased.

Training to support frontline workers to recognise and respond to domestic abuse continues to be offered but take up has declined by 19% and more is needed to understand if this reflects the stability of the workforce, or reduced focus amongst agencies. There are examples where having a dedicated role based within a service has made a difference, such as the Independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) provided by Stop Domestic Abuse, at QA Hospital, who has supported awareness raising, and provided on-site support to staff to respond to cases that have presented.

The most recent national research has found that more people have died by suspected victim suicide following domestic abuse then were killed by their intimate partner in 2022/23. Domestic abuse related death reviews have identified friends and family as key people, who often know about abuse that is occurring before any service is engaged, and the role that they and front line services can play to reduce all all types of domestic abuse related deaths.

What are we going to do to address domestic abuse?

- Respond to domestic abuse across a continuum of behaviours, risk and needs.
- Create a culture across the workforce that see people in the whole, with professionals who can work across a range of issues with confidence.
- Make it easier for family and friends to support victims known to them
- Increase residents trust in services particularly amongst people who feel they have been let down in the past.
- Have a universal offer, open to all residents, particularly when referrals for support are declined by either the victim or the person being abusive.
- Create a commissioning culture that ensures responding to domestic abuse is everybody's responsibility.
- Strengthen and manage the refer-on culture within the city, particularly in respect of health services.

Priority 2 – Early Intervention, Prevention & Messaging

This priority will include programmes of work across different life stages to strengthen healthy conversations; access to accurate and useful information; and suitable pathways to optimise on the resources within the city and available more widely.

Violence against women and girls is a continuum of abuse (from sexual harassment through to homicide) defined by power and control, which reinforces gender inequality. Prevention is fundamentally about facilitating the key building blocks for healthy, respectful relationships, in all contexts, and encouraging healthy ways of relating. It is also about challenging and changing unhealthy views and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women and girls. Without early intervention, we risk continuing to normalise some behaviours and attitudes that we know, when left unchecked create the space for more serious abuse and violence to occur.

Whilst it can be difficult to establish a general sense of public opinion and attitudes locally, there is evidence to suggest that more work needs to be done within places of education. The Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (June 2021)[8] identified there is not a clear picture of the level of abuse, violence and harassment occurring between children in Portsmouth schools and colleges and currently there is no central recording or monitoring mechanism for this information. However, suspension and permanent exclusion data indicates that sexual misconduct and abuse against sexual orientation and gender identify are reasons listed for suspensions in Portsmouth education settings (2020/21)[9].

Initiatives like 'Bee Well' are supporting understanding into key issues that Portsmouth children and young people face. Within their 2023 survey, Portsmouth female students consistently reported higher levels of experience of gender discrimination (often or always, some of the time, and occasionally) than Portsmouth male students. With 15% of female students having experienced discrimination, compared to 5% of male. Whilst work with Unloc and the Portsmouth Youth Cabinet provided an insight into the everyday experiences of children locally that included mainstream use of sexist derogatory language e.g. '**Oh you're such a girl' or 'Man up**', a sense of gender separation within society with clear messages about what girls/boys should be like and/or how they should appear which extended to things like participation in sport and what jobs they could do. There is a clear link to the local work related to the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) agenda in the city for children and young people which will be scoped and optimised on.

In July 2024 a study published by the charity Plan International UK analysed data including rates of teenage pregnancy,

8 **Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, Ofsted June 2021. Available GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**

9 Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England – Academic year 2020/21 downloads. Available **GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)**

sexual assault, attainment at KS4, as well as how many girls are taking STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths), gender pay gaps, and life expectancy to ascertain the toughest and best places to be a girl in the UK. Within this study **Portsmouth is ranked as one of the toughest communities to be a girl in the UK (ranking 364th out of 372 local authority areas nationally)**[10].

Whilst friends and family remain children's most enduring influencers, media and popular culture have a role to play, with a recent survey report from the Youth Endowment Fund (2023)[11] highlighting increasing concerns about social media content promoting gender-based violence with 26% of respondents said they had seen content that encourages violence against women and girls.

Locally there are some good examples of preventative campaigns such as 'Is This Love?' targeted at healthy relationships, and the annual White Ribbon campaign calling for people to promise to never use, excuse, or remain silent about men's violence against women. However, a more focused piece of work is required to ensure we are making the most of the channels available across the city, including health, education, culture, leisure, and the arts, to raise awareness and enable all residents of all ages to have the information they need to support them in making the healthiest choice available to them or to support family and friends who are experiencing abuse or being abusive.

There needs to be an offer for all residents, alongside more targeted support, that reflects intersectionality, peoples changing contexts, and reaches into parts of the community where there are additional barriers to seeking help and accessing support.

What are we going to do about prevention and early intervention?

Be person centred, trauma informed and inclusive.

- Make connections between strategies to optimise on healthy conversations, messaging and make every contact count.
- Ensure that early intervention and prevention opportunities and messaging is a continuum, targeted across different life stages and towards specific vulnerabilities.
- Increase individuals' ability to make informed choices, and critically appraise wider messaging in society and popular culture, that can negatively reinforce unhealthy behaviours.

How does your relationship affect you?

How did that behaviour impact you?

What action do you think would be more suitable?

How will you act differently in the future?

10 Plan international (2024) The state of Girls Rights in the UK 2024 available from: **state-of-girls-rights-report.pdf (plan-uk.org)**

11 **Children, violence & vulnerability 2023 Summary | Youth Endowment Fund**

Priority 3 – A Place Everyone Feels Safe

There is a perception that sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces, happens too frequently and often goes unchecked. Instances of harassment can happen on streets, in and around public transport, places of education, workplaces, public toilets, commercial and hospitality venues, in leisure venues and open spaces.

Nationally there is a lack of data and research on both the impact and prevalence of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places in the UK. Work undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2022 showed that in the previous 12 months, 27% of women and 16% of men had experienced at least one form of harassment.[12] Catcalls, unwanted sexual comments, and whistles were the most common form of harassment for women aged 16 to 34 years.[13] However, fear of violence can be more pervasive, preventing people from accessing opportunities and services, and it is estimated that nationally up to 3.7% of GDP per year, is lost through women avoiding using public transport to access employment, tourism, and leisure opportunities[14].

Since 2022 we have been seeking to understand women's experience of crime and feelings of safety through our bi-annual community safety survey. This has shown us that there are places in the city where women were more likely to feel unsafe / avoid than men (64% and 44% respectively in 2022, and 63% and 40% in 2024)[15,16] and the gap between women and men's fear had increased by 15%. However, it was not just feeling unsafe in certain areas of the city where women were more fearful than men. Throughout the 2024 survey where gender was analysed women showed increased fear of crime and or experience of certain types of crime than men: women were more likely to mention witnessing or experiencing ASB than men (67% compared with 60%), women were more likely to fear being victimized than men (45% compared with 29%), and women were more likely to think knife crime was a problem than men (50% compared with 38%).

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12 The harassment data collected by the ONS includes all types of harassment, not just sexual harassment, which occurs in public and private spaces.
Experiences of harassment in England and Wales – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

13 ONS (2022) Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).
Available from **Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain – Office for National Statistics**

14 Transport for West Midlands (2021) Transport Champions for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: Recommendations to make our transport networks safer for women and girls

15 Portsmouth Community Safety Survey (2024) DRAFT

16 Portsmouth Community Safety Survey (2022) available from **Survey (saferportsmouth.org.uk)**

Women being more worried about crime than men, is a recognised issue, and there are several reasons why this may be. These include:

- Women's higher physical and social vulnerability.
- Social learning about gender whereby family, media and other sources emphasise women's vulnerability.
- The shadow of sexual crime as an ever-present danger that increases women's worry about other crime.
- The hidden nature of victimisation in which issues like catcalling are normalised, and fear and shame prevent reporting of harassment.

For these reasons the **gap in worry about crime can also been seen as an indicator of gender inequity**.

We want all people, especially women and girls to feel safe to access all the opportunities this city has to offer. This is why we need a continued focus on standing up to abuse and harassment within public places, and to use the powers that we have, to ensure opportunities for abuse to occur are reduced.

Through programmes such Community in Motion (CiM) and We Stand Together (WST) we have been working to increase confidence to recognise and respond to instances of gender-based violence, harassment and abuse, to prevent situations escalating and improve equity of access on public transport, in public spaces, the nighttime economy and community settings. As a result of this work, we now have 30 We Stand Together (WST) venues across the city that have received intersectional training focused on responding to sexual violence regardless of the gender of the victim. Work undertaken by the University of Portsmouth (UoP) to evaluate the scheme in 2023[17] concluded that:

- The number and severity of incidents occurring inside venues is not worsening.
- We Stand Together has increased awareness and self-efficacy for trained staff to challenge incidents.
- Interventions such as We Stand Together make a good business case for venues.

We have also used safer streets funding to target specific locations where women feel less safe, using environmental visual audits (EVA) to design out these crimes, through better lighting, installing CCTV and targeted projects to transform spaces, improving community ownership and guardianship, and enabling residents to enjoy them. Creative events such as the LOOK UP Portsmouth and We Shine Festivals have also presented an opportunity to transform spaces and foster positive social interaction, whilst also working to improve female representation within the genera.

17 Whybro. K, Middleton. K & Fletcher-Brown. J (2024) We Stand Together Evaluation Report

What are we going to do to make our city feel safer?

- Seek out ways to reinforce our city vision by encouraging positive representation of women and understanding of women's needs in the built environment
- Extend opportunities for training to address VAWG to a wider range of stakeholders including security staff, and those in the transport industry.
- Look at opportunities to make training mandatory for key groups, including taxi drivers, bus drivers and licenced premises.
- Extend the use of environmental visual audits to consider how to design out crime in key locations within the city centre where women feel less safe.
- Refresh design guidance for developers, and those supporting placemaking in the city, to further encourage holistic crime prevention through environmental design principles, alongside function of space, and a persona approach to usage, to maximise what can be achieved.
- Encourage the use of the healthy streets index within transport planning.

Priority 4 – Organisational Change

Employment is integral to individuals' economic security, sense of identity and relationships with others, making workplaces a key enabler when it comes to addressing violence against women and girls. In Portsmouth in 2023/24 the level of adult women in employment was 75.9%, which whilst lower than men, was higher than the national average.[18] However, whilst there has been progress over recent years to address the gender pay gap locally, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring women can enter and remain in higher-paying roles.[19]

Most of the gross added value (GVA) in Portsmouth comes from industry including aerospace and defence, marine and maritime, digital media, and advanced engineering.[20] These are also areas of industry where women are underrepresented for a range of reasons including gender stereotyping, a lack of role models, unconscious bias, work-life balance and male dominated cultures. Only 27% of girls in Portsmouth take a STEM subject at A-Level of KS5 equivalent[21], and the City Vision event in July 2024 provided an insight into some of the barriers girls are facing, when a member of Portsmouth's Youth Cabinet shared her own recent experience of asking for a work placement in aerospace, only to be advised to explore childcare.

Secure employment has wider benefits for women, supporting financial independence and helping address issues such as child poverty. Research from Women's Aid and others has shown that many women who face domestic abuse experience economic control by their abuser. The recent rise in cost of living has compounded this situation, with two thirds (66%) of survivors surveyed nationally by Women's Aid in 2022, sharing that abusers were using the cost-of-living increase and concerns about financial hardship, as a tool for coercive control, including to justify further restricting access to money[22].

For those affected by issues such as domestic abuse, workplaces can also offer respite and an opportunity to access support services. Whilst there are no specific legal requirements to support staff affected by Domestic abuse, above and beyond existing health and safety responsibilities, supporting staff affected by domestic abuse makes sense, given the impact this issue can have on productivity, work absence, lost earnings and economic output.

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18 ONS annual Population survey.

19 Review of published gender pay gap information 2017-2024. Only companies with registered address PO1 to PO6 included.

20 Portsmouth economic development and regeneration strategy 2019-2036 **Portsmouths economic development and regeneration strategy 2019-2026**

21 PLAN international (2024) Parliamentary briefing Girls' experiences in Portsmouth

22 Women's Aid (2022) Cost of Living and the impact on survivors of domestic abuse **Cost-of-Living-Crisis-Impact-on-Survivors-of-DA.docx.pdf**

Findings from the Portsmouth Sexual violence, Domestic Abuse and Harassment survey identified sexual harassment in the form of sexually suggestive jokes at work/educational spaces to be an issue. New legislation came into effect in October 2024, placing a new duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of workers in the course of their employment, providing a catalysis work to address workplace culture.

Outside of direct support to employees, those working across industries in Portsmouth are uniquely placed to recognise and respond to issues including trafficking, modern slavery and sexual exploitation. Making every contact count requires an organisational commitment, and there are positive examples of local employers that have become supporters of campaigns such as White Ribbon, and following on from this, their staff have been empowered to go above and beyond to safeguard vulnerable women.

Whilst the scale of the task is large, Portsmouth benefits from being a compact city with some key institutions that collectively employ a reasonable proportion of the city's adult population, as well as delivering services to many more. For example, Portsmouth Hospital University Trust (PHUT) and Portsmouth City Council collectively employ 12,700 people and deliver public services to residents across the city. There are 13,000 Royal Navy personnel based at Portsmouth Naval Base, and the MOD also have an estate that includes family service accommodation units. The University of Portsmouth employs 3,500 staff supporting a community of 18,000 of students' that are resident within the city each academic year. The city also benefits from organisations and forums that can be used as vehicles for working together to bring about a change, such as the Local Estates forum, and Shaping Portsmouth.

What are we going to do to support organisational change?

- Invite all organisations and businesses within the city to make a public commitment to tackling VAWG
- Build upon existing work to ensure that women and girls are being encouraged and given opportunities to enter STEM careers
- Encourage the use of integrated impact assessments to support organisational decision making
- Develop a bank of training, resources and good practice examples to support organisational change at all levels
- Seek out ways to ensure that delivering this strategy is integrated into organisations vision and change plans.
- Invite agencies to benchmark performance against the Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance[23]
- Encourage the use of schemes such as White Ribbon, Purple Flag and We Stand together as mechanisms for supporting change.

23 **https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c6df068fa8f54e855dfe31/Domestic_Abuse_Act_2021_Statutory_Guidance.pdf**

What are our next steps?

We will establish a VAWG strategy group that will oversee the co-production of staged delivery plans to ensure we are working towards our vision in a coordinated way.

We will develop these plans in partnership with as many local stakeholders as possible to make sure that we have meaningful engagement for our approach.

We will develop a range of community engagement mechanisms, including communication campaigns across the city to engage local residents and professionals to support the delivery plans and work towards a whole community response.

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Portsmouth CITY COUNCIL

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