

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS STRATEGY 2023-2025



2023

 KIM MCGUINNESS
NORTHUMBRIA
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER





NORTHUMBRIA VAWG STRATEGY
.....
TACKLING VAWG ACROSS NORTHUMBRIA



NORTHUMBRIA VAWG STRATEGY
.....
TACKLING VAWG ACROSS NORTHUMBRIA

Contents

05 - 06	Foreword
07 - 11	About this strategy
12 - 13	The current picture
15 - 16	Our priorities at a glance
17 - 20	Priority 1: Prioritising prevention
21 - 25	Priority 2: Supporting victim-survivors
26 - 29	Priority 3: Action against perpetrators
30 - 33	Priority 4: Creating stronger systems to address VAWG
34	Taking the strategy forward

Foreword from the Commissioner

Too many women are abused, attacked and killed by too many men. Too many children grow up in homes where domestic abuse is the norm. Too many women feel unsafe just getting on with their daily lives.

We need this VAWG strategy because there is a problem. There has long been a problem; and it's just not going away. This document is about solutions.

I know that feeling of walking home in the dark and gripping your keys in your fist as an emergency weapon. I know the paths to avoid when walking home because there aren't enough people nearby that you could run to if there was a problem. I know that worry you feel that if you tell a man you're not interested his attitude will change and you're in trouble.

Things desperately need to change, whether it's in the court room or the workplace. And this means every workplace – including our police forces. Recent VAWG related cases in London have thrown police misconduct into the spotlight and have caused damage to public confidence in policing nationwide. The public rightly expects the highest of standards from individuals employed by Northumbria Police and I support continued efforts to improve scrutiny and vetting across the workforce to build trust and promote positive culture change.

It's fair to say the whole of society needs a reset. In recent years we have started to see a positive shift. The message is evolving from 'protect your daughter' to 'educate your son' and we need this to cut through and make real progress for future generations.

Men absolutely need calling out when they make women feel uncomfortable. I want their friends to challenge their mate's behaviour or actions not pump them up or egg them on. You see, even those who wouldn't make the remark or touch a woman inappropriately, are still there – they're the bystander allowing it to happen. Society's misogyny problem runs deeper than many realise, and we need to get ahead of that and not let vulnerable, impressionable young boys succumb to the toxic masculine mindsets that need eradicating once and for all.

As ever, we need to reach victims with the best support possible to improve their experience of the criminal justice system and help them to cope with and recover from their experience. But equally we need to put perpetrators under the spotlight and take a proactive approach, so we prevent there being any victims in the first place. That's my priority and that's a priority for Northumbria Police too.

Foreword from the Commissioner

There is no question that the focus must be on education to stop young people becoming perpetrators. Today's young boys will be men soon, and they'll be in our bars, on our streets and in relationships, and sadly some of them will end up in our police cells. But our conversation has to go much further than "what are the police doing about it?". For a start, we need a government that's not only prepared to invest in our police but invest in all sectors of the state, otherwise our police are left to pick up the pieces further down the line, as are our incredible support services.

I want change. I hope you're reading this because you want change. The North East wants change. You only need to look at the turn out for the Reclaim the Night march in Newcastle or the These Girls Can Run event in North Tyneside. We get out there in the masses demanding change. Change won't happen overnight, but I want you to know I will keep fighting for it and so will my office. This strategy sets out how together we can bring about the lasting change we all want to see.

Kim McGuinness
Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner



1

About this strategy

What is Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)?

VAWG includes crime and incidents of violence and abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls. It encompasses but is not limited to:

- Domestic abuse including controlling or coercive behaviour
- Rape and other sexual offences, including child sexual abuse
- Stalking and harassment
- So called 'honour' based abuse
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation
- Modern slavery and human trafficking, focusing on sexual exploitation
- Pornography offences for example revenge porn and up-skirting

VAWG is rooted in the inequality of women and girls and is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and girls. In the year ending March 2020 alone, there were an estimated 618,000 female victim-survivors (aged 16-74) and 155,000 male victim-survivors of sexual assault. 98.3% of perpetrators were male.

I acknowledge that men and boys can also be victim-survivors of most of those crimes listed above. While we use the term 'violence against women and girls', this refers to all victim-survivors of any of these offences. As set out in the government's position statement on male victim-survivors:

"The use of this term cannot and should not negate the experiences of, or provisions for, male victims of these crimes. The government is committed to ensuring that all victims/survivors of these crimes, of all protected characteristics, receive the support they deserve, and recognises its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty provided for in the Equality Act 2010".

I take the same position. I am committed to tackling VAWG crimes in any form and ensuring support for all victim-survivors, regardless of sex or gender, or any other characteristic.

A note on language – throughout this strategy I use the phrase ‘victim-survivor’ to refer to somebody who has experienced VAWG, instead of ‘victim’, ‘survivor’ or any other phrase. This is to acknowledge that each victim-survivor has their own preferred terminology and so as not to enforce any phraseology that some will not feel comfortable with. Each victim-survivor will have their own preferred language and that should be respected.

The Role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)

Police and Crime Commissioners have a key role to play in tackling VAWG and this is a key priority for me in my Police and Crime Plan. As an elected PCC it is my responsibility to be the voice of the people and to hold Northumbria Police to account for delivery of a police service that meets the public need and expectations. Together with the Chief Constable I am committed to tackling VAWG in all its forms and delivering a service that communities can have trust and confidence in.

Some of the ways I do this:

- **Setting objectives**

I listen to the public, partners and other key professionals to help me work out the policing and community safety priorities for Northumbria – tackling VAWG continues to be one of the most important priorities which you can see featured in my Police and Crime Plan (northumbria-pcc.gov.uk).

- **Partnerships**

I chair the Northumbria Local Criminal Justice Board and work with partners to improve the criminal justice system for everyone. I have also set up a Violence Reduction Unit, bringing together all local partners with a stake in reducing violence to deliver prevention and early intervention work that aims to reduce VAWG related crimes. The new Serious Violence Duty placed on responsible authorities sees much of this partnership work placed on a statutory footing.

- **Commissioning**

I have a responsibility to commission victim services, to help those who have experienced VAWG to cope and recover from that. I work closely with local authority and health partners to get that right.

- **Lobbying**

I am passionate about driving forward change where it is needed to tackle VAWG, I continue to lobby the government for fairer funding settlements, and legal and policy changes to ensure victim – survivors are at the heart of everything we do.

- **Innovation**

Developing innovative solutions and projects to tackle VAWG is also something I continue to do, whether that be through securing additional government funding or changing the way we work locally.

- **Scrutiny**

I routinely examine and challenge the work of Northumbria Police to tackle VAWG, considering key measures for example such as victim satisfaction, crime and charge rates, victim attrition and findings from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS).



Holding Northumbria Police to account

Northumbria Police is a separate organisation in its own right and has a clear commitment to tackling VAWG through delivery of the Police and Crime Plan and its own strategy, framework and action plan. My strategy complements that and goes further into the areas where I can make a real difference.

Confidence in policing across the country has been shaken following the horrific cases that have come to our attention across policing over the last few years. We have to acknowledge this and that misogyny has no place in our police service or society and we will work together to eradicate this.

I will do this by:

- Focusing in on the HMICFRS report into vetting, misogyny and misconduct – this is an area of significant interest.
- Seeking assurance that now and in the future work continues to ensure that the right people are entering the police and that complaints/reports from the public and staff are taken seriously. I will seek assurance that they are addressed in line with the principles of Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) super-complaint in respect of police perpetrated domestic abuse – which can just as easily relate to sexual violence.
- Championing the need for ethical recording, investigation management and support for victim-survivors.



Shaping the strategy

Local context

When I was elected in 2019, I made a clear commitment to putting victims first, and at the heart of everything we do. This is what people told me was important to them and my position remains the same. I am committed to ensuring that dedicated support is in place for victims of crime, especially those escaping the horrors of domestic abuse or sexual violence. Since being elected my focus on this area remains, people continue to tell me through my engagement work, local Safer Streets and police and crime plan surveys that tackling violence against women and girls is vital and needs to be challenged head on.

Last year I consulted specifically with the public and those professionals working in the VAWG sector in Northumbria and the insights from this survey, and my other engagement work, have played a vital part in the creation of my VAWG priorities and many of the actions that are included in this strategy.

National context

Nationally (and internationally) it is widely accepted that VAWG is a pandemic that affects a huge number in our society and can affect anyone and everyone regardless of sex, gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, religion or disability.

This is why so many national documents, policies, and strategies concerning VAWG have been introduced in recent years. These include the government's VAWG strategy, the government's End-to-End Rape Review report, HMICFRS final inspection report on the police response to VAWG, HMICFRS super complaints, and the APCC VAWG strategy and key pledges amongst many others. My strategy aims to reflect national ambitions that are relevant and of importance to us locally.

There are some common themes emerging:

1. **Criminal justice outcomes** – the criminal justice system is failing victims of rape, and widespread reform is needed to build trust and secure justice. Court waiting lists are at an all time high due to Covid-19 and lack of investment. The introduction of the government's end to end rape review and Operation Soteria go some way to making a positive difference but more must be done.
2. **Online abuse** – there is a growing need to tackle online VAWG as well as that perpetrated in public and private. We will continue to track developments around the Online Safety Bill.

2

The current picture

Prevalence

The Northumbria Police force area comprises 6 separate local authority areas – Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Gateshead, South Tyneside, and Sunderland. It is the largest force area in England and Wales, covering 2,141 square miles, and serving a population of 1.46 million people. Home to 3 universities and many vibrant night-time economies, Northumbria is an excellent place to live, work and study. But unfortunately, our communities are not immune to the scourge of violent and abusive crimes perpetrated disproportionately against women and girls.

VAWG causes high levels of harm and is prevalent across all communities in Northumbria and beyond, but is often hidden. Although the time ranges differ across the key statistics below it offers a broad picture of the extent of the issues we are facing.

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that nationally 5.0% of adults (6.9% women and 3.0% men) aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse (DA) in the year ending March 2022; this equates to an estimated 2.4 million adults (1.7 million women and 699,000 men). In the 12 months to August 2022, there were 38,748 DA incidents reported in Northumbria alone, though we know that DA is underreported.
- An estimated 1 in 3 women and girls will experience some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime – that’s around 736 million women worldwide.
 - Northumbria Police recorded 5,030 sexual offences in the year ending June 2022 alone (196,889 were recorded a cross England and Wales in total).
 - However, we know that only around 15% of victim-survivors report sexual offences.
- In the 12 months to July 2021 in England and Wales:
 - 20% of women experienced unwanted sexual comments.
 - 6% experienced being followed or threatened.
 - 14% experienced unwanted non-sexual touching.
- 2,024 ‘honour’-based abuse offences were recorded by the police in 2019/20. 40 of those incidents were recorded in Northumbria.
- Between 2015 and 2021, NHS services examined 27,255 women and girls who had undergone female genital mutilation.

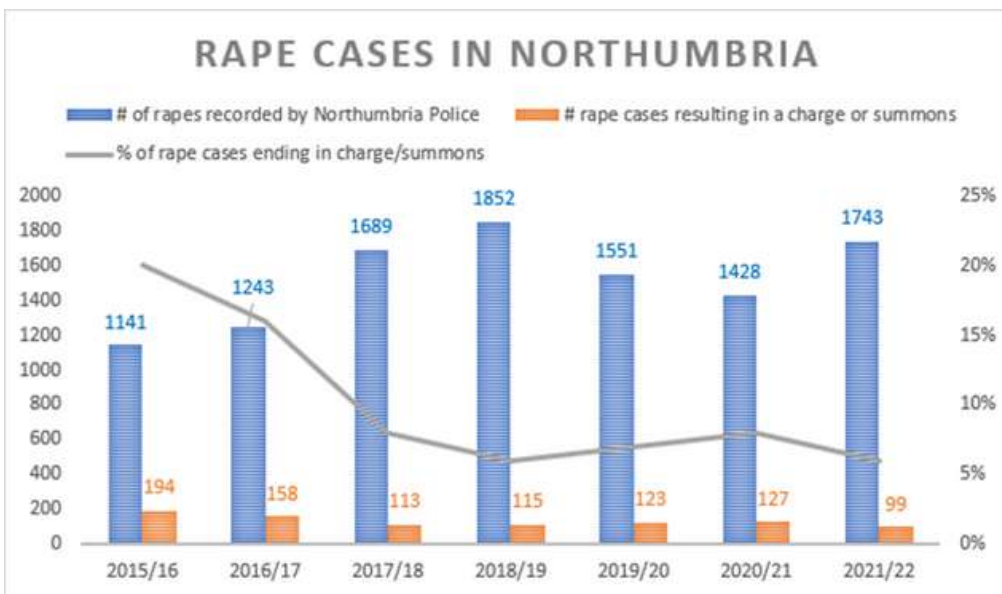
- Two women a week are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales alone. Since 2011, there have been 64 domestic homicides in Northumbria. Since 2019 this figure includes suicides where the deceased was known to be in an abusive relationship.



Criminal justice outcomes

The numbers of VAWG reports to police are increasing each year. This may be because there are more victim-survivors, or because people have more confidence to report. Either way, it is vital that we do all we can to address this violence and abuse as early as possible, and to ensure that where victim-survivors do wish to pursue a criminal justice pathway, they are supported and face as few barriers as possible.

In the year ending March 2020, there were 52,210 rapes recorded by police in England and Wales, however only 843 cases processed that year resulted in a charge or a summons – a rate of 1.6%, often referred to as the report to court rate. The picture in Northumbria is not much brighter. As shown below, the number of rapes recorded by Northumbria Police remains high but the number of cases each year with a charge or summons has fallen – from 20% (194 cases) in 2015/6 to 6% in 2021/22 (99 cases).



There are many reasons that rape cases do not end in a charge or summons, for example the suspect cannot be identified. More commonly, victim-survivors disengage after reporting the crime, and this is concerning. I am working with Northumbria Police and partners to understand why victim-survivors are discontinuing their engagement with the criminal justice process. We can then work to reduce attrition rates and improve outcomes across all VAWG crimes.



3

Our priorities at a glance

Priorities	Commitments
<p>Prioritising prevention</p>	<p>1. EDUCATION: I will lobby government to provide more funding for important prevention work and education programmes, in particular those that engage with children and young people.</p> <p>2. ACTIVE BYSTANDER TRAINING: I am committed to developing active bystander training to give people in our communities the knowledge and skills to challenge problematic attitudes – including misogyny, sexism and harmful gender norms – and behaviours where possible and safe.</p> <p>3. EARLY INTERVENTION: I will ensure that Northumbria Police and the VRU are focussed on early intervention to prevent further/escalation of VAWG offences.</p> <p>4. CAMPAIGNING: I will continue our Northumbria-wide campaign work aimed at preventing VAWG.</p>
<p>Supporting victim-survivors</p>	<p>5. SUPPORT FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS: I will continue to ensure that victim-survivors of VAWG have access to specialist support at the point of need, regardless of whether or not they report the offence to the police. This will include lobbying government for additional funding for support services.</p> <p>6. RAISING AWARENESS OF SUPPORT FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS: I will work to improve awareness of the support available to VAWG victim-survivors in Northumbria.</p> <p>7. ADDRESSING ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO RECEIVING SUPPORT/REPORTING: I will identify and address any additional barriers to obtaining support or reporting crimes that certain cohorts of victim-survivors may face, including but not limited to domestic abuse and sexual violence survivors, and migrant victim-survivors with no recourse to public funds.</p>

Priorities	Commitments
<p>Action against perpetrators</p>	<p>8. EARLY ACTION AGAINST PERPETRATORS: I will ensure that Northumbria Police takes early and appropriate action against perpetrators of VAWG.</p> <p>9. PERPETRATOR PROGRAMMES: I will continue to support the use of perpetrator programmes, alongside local authorities, such as the Northumbria Hub & Spoke Model, wherever possible, whilst lobbying government on the need for more funding for this work and the need for perpetrator programmes to target other VAWG offenders, not only domestic abuse offenders.</p>
<p>Creating Stronger Systems to address VAWG</p>	<p>10. LISTENING TO VICTIM-SURVIVORS: I am committed ensuring all voices are heard when it comes to improving trust and confidence of VAWG victim-survivors to report to the police, and to improve experiences of seeking help and support. I will continue to listen to victim-survivors through my Victim & Witness Improvement Board and the work of my Victims' Champion.</p> <p>11. VAWG OVERSIGHT PANEL: I will launch a new VAWG Oversight Panel, with independent members who can support me to scrutinise police performance in VAWG identifying trends which can be fed back into processes to make improvements.</p> <p>12: REDUCING VICTIM-SURVIVOR ATTRITION: I will work to build stronger systems which support victim-survivors through the Criminal Justice System and help them to cope and recover from their experience.</p>

4

Priority 1: Prioritising prevention

“As your Police and Crime Commissioner, I’m keen to see a big focus on prevention here in the North East. Educating everyone in society and working with our schools is a big part of the wider steps we must take to tackle violence against women and girls. We have to take things right back to the beginning and look at the examples being set and the attitudes that society is allowing to grow. We are in a situation where children are bombarded with sexualised images everywhere – images that teach boys and girls that this is how a woman should look or behave, that they should accept harassment or be blamed when something goes wrong. We need to help our young people to stand up to toxic attitudes, help them develop an understanding of good relationships, respect and consent, and most important of all help them to make VAWG a thing of the past.”

YOU SAID

In 2022, I consulted residents from across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear as well as professionals who work in the VAWG sector in our area. Based on this feedback, I have identified four priority areas:

EDUCATION

Men and boys need to be part of the solution to VAWG. So, we asked, ‘how can we best involve them in preventing men’s violence?’. Many respondents mentioned the need for education, both of boys and adult men, and of women and girls. It is not acceptable for anyone in our society to believe that women and girls are ‘lesser’. As well as being untrue, studies have identified inequitable gender beliefs and permissive attitudes about VAWG as important risk factors for male perpetration of VAWG.

You said: *“I believe teaching young boys from school age about domestic violence could minimise the learnt behaviours and false beliefs”.*

ACTIVE BYSTANDER INTERVENTIONS

Many respondents highlighted the need for active bystander training – in particular for men and boys in their own peer groups. They need to be encouraged to overcome any barriers to talking to their friends/peer groups about harmful beliefs and attitudes towards women and girls. They need to be educated on the importance of speaking out whenever they see or hear problematic behaviour.

You said: "Men and boys can help prevent VAWG. They can speak up when others make inappropriate comments and jokes. They can lead by example".

EARLY INTERVENTION

Respondents to our public consultation mentioned the need for early intervention when it comes to preventing VAWG, whether through early years education, or by responding to all instances of VAWG to prevent further/escalating abuse.

You said: "Don't wait until an offence or number of offences have occurred".

CAMPAIGNING AND AWARENESS-RAISING

Many respondents to our consultation stated the need for more public awareness-raising on the issues of VAWG in order to prevent it. Ideas included that this could take the form of a public campaign.

You said: "Men and boys could be part of a local campaign, especially given the 'typical' impression of North East males and lifestyle".



Work in action

Women are safer in the night-time economy

Funding secured from the Home Office Safer Streets Fund has contributed to the Women’s Safety in Public Places (WSiPP) project. One strand of this work is Operation Cloak. Plain clothed police officers work in our busy night-time economies (NTEs) identifying vulnerable people at risk of being victimised. Where a risk is spotted, officers intervene to confirm the safety of women, and speak to potential or actual perpetrators about their behaviour to prevent, preventing any violence or abuse.



Communities are confident to challenge behaviour

I am commissioning a range of active bystander training. An active bystander is someone who recognises that a situation is potentially problematic or harmful and takes steps to intervene in a harmful situation making a positive difference. This approach helps shift responsibility away from victim-survivors onto the wider community.



Early help and support for victim-survivors

People who are in controlling and potentially dangerous relationships often tell their families or friends before they ask for help from specialist services. It’s important that those they turn to for support have the skills and confidence to help. That’s why I am helping to fund the Findaway project which equips families, friends, colleagues and neighbours with the skills needed to offer the best possible support to those they care about.



Commitments and calls to action

1) I will lobby government to provide more funding for important prevention work and education programmes, in particular those that engage with children and young people.

2) I will fund active bystander training to give people, including men and boys, in our communities the knowledge and skills to challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours where this is possible and safe.

3) I will ensure that Northumbria Police are focussed on early intervention to prevent further/escalation of VAWG offences through my scrutiny processes and projects like the Women’s Safety in Public Places (WSiPP) project.

4) I will continue our Northumbria-wide campaign work aimed at preventing VAWG, speaking directly to anybody in our community who still believes that VAWG is acceptable or excusable. I will ensure men and boys are involved in the development of this prevention campaign.



5

Priority 2: Supporting victim-survivors

"There is still so much wrong with the world when it comes to gender equality and the prevalence of VAWG. Preventing VAWG has to be the ultimate aim, but we must also make sure we get the support right for those who experience it. The importance of ensuring specialist, trauma-informed support for victim-survivors at the point of need cannot be underestimated. Experiencing VAWG can have a long-lasting impact on a victim-survivor, both physically and mentally, as well as those around them. We must make sure there are no gaps in the support available to victim-survivors. In particular, I want to make sure support is there for children. They must not be the forgotten victims in domestic abuse and other forms of violence and abuse."

YOU SAID

Feedback from my consultation was clear you want; more easily accessible support for victim-survivors, increased funding for specialist services, and shorter waiting lists. I agree and highlight two priorities for my office moving forward, below:

COMMISSIONING SUPPORT FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS IN NORTHUMBRIA

The more we invest in victim-survivor support services, the greater chance victim-survivors have of coping with the impact of crime and recovering from their experience – that's what everyone wants. My team oversees the distribution of millions of pounds in grant funding for victim-survivor services every year – they identify gaps and bid for additional funds where possible. The nature of support offered varies to meet all needs. Whether victim-survivors choose to report the crime to the police or not, it's about getting people the help that's right for them – be it practical and emotional, therapeutic or another form of support. Further information on the services that I commission can be found on my [website](#).

You said: *"There needs to be long term funding for specialist VAWG services."*

FURTHER SUPPORT FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS FACING ADDITIONAL BARRIERS

As well as ensuring that specialist support services are commissioned for VAWG victim-survivors, I recognise that there are other issues that must be resolved to ensure victim-survivors have the best chances of success should they choose to report and/or reach out for help. I set out below some examples of additional work my office is doing to improve the experiences of DA victim-survivors, sexual violence victim-survivors, and migrant victim-survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), black and minority ethnic survivors and those with a disability or are elderly, who all face various and intersecting additional barriers to receiving support.

You said: "We need to ensure that adult and child victim-survivors have access to specialist VAWG services that meet their intersectional and specific needs."



Work in action

Supporting victims to cope and recover from their experience

My Supporting Victims Programme (SVP) has been providing much needed funding to our local specialist victim support organisations since 2015. This year to bring greater stability to our victim support providers I have introduced three year funding agreements – helping to ensure sustainable provision. I am proud that we have specialist VAWG provision in place right across the six local authority areas in Northumbria and that these services can provide support for women and girls, men and boys, black and minority ethnic victim-survivors, for those who have a mental or physical disability and for all other protected characteristics. This year I have introduced a new service for stalking and harassment victim-survivors which will be developed alongside the work of Northumbria Police, Probation and Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust to ensure a whole system approach to protecting and supporting victims and working with perpetrators.



Women feel safer on public transport and in public places

My office has successfully secured Home Office Safer Streets funding, enabling us to deliver millions of pounds worth of solutions to help make public spaces safer for women and girls. The cash injection for the region has not just enhanced police operations, it has also meant more street volunteers and wardens are on hand. Their roles are to support victim-survivors and to help them access specialist services when needed. Keeping our public transport safe for women is key and we have rolled out a Safer Transport Northumbria reporting app making it easier for victim-survivors to report crime, raise concerns and protect others. This investment has been a real win for women’s safety in the North East and we want to build on this area of work.



Enhanced specialist services

Since 2021 my office has successfully secured two rounds of additional funding for more Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) & Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) in Northumbria. IDVAs and ISVAs are crucial supporters for victim-survivors, particularly those going through the CJS. They offer assistance at court, as well as providing practical and emotional support. Research has found that victim-survivors with an IDVA/ISVA are less likely to drop out of the CJS. I am pleased to share that in the most recent round of funding, my office was able to secure financing for specialist ISVAs and IDVAs to support black and minority ethnic women, LGBTQ+ victim-survivors, victim-survivors with learning disabilities/difficulties, and women involved in sex work. These specialist posts will focus on the additional barriers faced by these victim-survivors.



Improving the life chances of children affected by domestic abuse

Children see, hear and experience DA at home, and it can deeply affect them and cause problems throughout their lives. Children living with DA are victim-survivors in their own right. We successfully secured Children Affected by Domestic Abuse (CADA) funding which has enabled over 1,100 children and young people to receive therapeutic support to help them cope and recover from the impact of abuse they've experienced or seen. We've been successful in our bid for a further £982,335 for the region from the same fund and will roll out a further programme of specialist support aiming to reach 1500 children and non-offending parents with therapies and interventions like play therapy, counselling, and group support.

Connecting victim-survivors to specialist support at the earliest opportunity

Our Domestic Abuse Control Room Pilot puts DA specialists into the police control rooms to offer support at times of crisis. This approach is designed to enhance the safeguarding advice given to victim-survivors and build trust in police action. Early findings show that for 45% of victims spoken to by the DA specialists, this was the first time they'd spoken to a specialist DA worker providing an early opportunity for victim-survivors to engage with support. I will continue this work over the next 12 months.



Support in the workplace

Over the years, the OPCC has developed a Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions Network which has gone from strength to strength. To date, more than 2000 people from 370 different organisations across Northumbria have been trained to become a workplace champion, primarily in the private sector and over 900 are currently active. This helps to ensure anyone affected by DA can find confidential support at work and be helped to safety.



Commitments and calls to action

5) I will continue to ensure that victim-survivors of VAWG have access to specialist support at the point of need, regardless of whether or not they report the offence to the police. This will include lobbying government for additional funding for support services, as the current demand far outstrips what is available despite all the additional funding my office has secured over the past few years.

6) I commit to improving general awareness of the support available to VAWG victim-survivors in Northumbria. I already publish information on my website about support and will do more to share this widely with partners including local authorities, schools, GP practices, hospitals etc.

7) I will ensure that my team continues to listen to victim-survivors, and their supporters, to understand the barriers to accessing support or reporting crimes and ensure specific needs are addressed. This includes working with diverse communities and migrant victim-survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) to ensure that they can access specialist support.



6

Priority 3: Action against perpetrators

“Over 90% of the people prosecuted for domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking offences in 2020 were male. There is a problem and things need to change. We need to put perpetrators under the spotlight rather than victim-survivors. In Northumbria, we’re proactive with this approach, which is already a key priority for our force. We have to intervene when there are signs of violence and abuse, and we have to educate men and boys at the earliest opportunity. As a society, we cannot tolerate or normalise behaviours that are wholly unacceptable. We need to look at the whole picture and drive a shift in prosecution practice, court attitudes, misogyny and the sexism women face as they go about their daily lives. We all have a role to play in breaking the cycle, stopping young people becoming perpetrators and improving lives.”

YOU SAID

The opinion of those who live in Northumbria and professionals was clear in the consultation and when it comes to pursuing perpetrators, your priorities are as follows:

ENSURE EARLY POLICE ACTION

When asked how we can improve the response to perpetrators of VAWG, 90 respondents to our public consultation stated the need to take swifter, more meaningful criminal justice action against perpetrators.

You said: “Arrest and charge them. Do something about perpetrators and hold them responsible for their actions instead of victim blaming”.

PERPETRATOR PROGRAMMES TO CHANGE BEHAVIOURS

It was also clear that you see the benefit in providing education and behaviour change programmes for perpetrators, alongside criminal justice action. When asked how we can improve the response to perpetrators of VAWG, you said you wanted:

You said: "More programmes to support perpetrators to understand and change their behaviours. This needs to start young so that boys/ young men do not develop into serial perpetrators".

Work in action

Understanding the landscape

My Violence Reduction Unit took a public health approach to reviewing and identifying where existing responses to domestic abuse perpetration in Northumbria could be enhanced and where gaps need to be filled. Recommendations from this review are being taken forward by partners including the VRU, Northumbria Police and the 6 Domestic Abuse Partnerships. This will help drive forward improved primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and strengthen our whole systems responses.

Shining a spotlight on perpetrator behaviours

Operation Soteria is a national project dedicated to changing the way sexual offences are investigated. Acknowledging past failures the change to investigation methods includes a focus on the alleged offence including the suspects relevant behaviour without over investigating the victim. Soteria aims to develop a new, flexible operating model which will make great improvements to how sexual offence cases are dealt with. My office, including my Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) Champion is working closely with Northumbria Police and CPS North East, to ensure the project is successfully implemented here in Northumbria.

Enhancing capability

The Domestic Abuse Practitioner Standards (DAPS) training programme, devised by my office, continues to provide three levels of training to practitioners who come into contact with potential victim-survivors of VAWG. In addition, my staff are currently piloting the delivery of two national courses which aim to increase the skills and confidence of staff who must engage with perpetrators of DA as part of their core work, but who are not DA specialists. Pilot outcomes will allow staff to identify future options for the creation of a fourth level of DAPS training which meets this important area of need.

Perpetrator behaviour change

In 2020 I secured funding to pilot the Drive Project - a behaviour change approach incorporating 1:1 work with high risk, high harm, and serial perpetrators of DA. Further funding was secured this year to develop the learning from this pilot and to create the Northumbria Hub & Spoke Model, which focusses on supporting the development of 1:1 services for this high-risk group of perpetrators. This work is supported by fully integrated victim services and is embedded within the work of our Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordinating Panels (MATACs) that coordinate the work needed to disrupt the offending of these abusers and secure the safety of their adult and child victims.





Commitments and calls to action

8) I will ensure that Northumbria Police takes early and appropriate action against perpetrators of VAWG and I will monitor the 'report to court' journey through my regular scrutiny process, as well as through supporting initiatives such as Operation Soteria which seeks to refocus sexual violence investigations on perpetrators rather than victim-survivors.

9) I will continue to support perpetrator programmes, such as the Northumbria Hub & Spoke Model, wherever possible, whilst lobbying government on the need for more funding for this work and the need for perpetrator programmes to target other VAWG offenders, not only DA offenders. Through my Safer Streets work we are piloting a brief intervention for actual and potential sex offenders whose behaviours in the night-time economy have been identified as problematic and this is something I will be looking to build on and explore further possibilities.

10) More suspects are likely to be released on pre-charge bail, rather than released under investigation, thanks to recent legal changes. Conditions can be attached to pre-charge bail, limiting contact with alleged victims-survivors and imposing other restrictions. This is a vital development to further protect victim-survivors of VAWG crimes and I am committed to holding Northumbria Police to account to ensure this change is implemented swiftly and unreservedly and victims are updated regularly.

11) I will take every opportunity to bid to the Home Office for further funding for our region to support our work to tackle perpetrators of VAWG crimes. I have recently secured funding to help develop our work to support perpetrators of domestic abuse who are given a diversionary caution. We hope to be in a position to commission an early 'awareness raising diversionary' intervention to support the two tier out of court disposal framework that new legislation will implement.

7

Priority 4: Creating stronger systems to address VAWG

“The more joined up we make the response when people reach out for help, the better, and the more likely they are to reach out in future if needed – that’s what we want. For me, anything that increases the chance of a victim-survivor taking up specialist support is worth doing, as this can really improve lives for both victim-survivors and their children. We know the investigative response to awful crimes like sexual offences is improving, but I want to see a really proactive approach, where we get ahead of these problems before they lead to there being victim-survivors. We have to protect vulnerable people - recognising that anybody can be vulnerable at some stage in their life - and we know that the sooner a victim-survivor engages with specialist support services the more likely to get the help they need to cope and recover, and the more likely they are to support a prosecution.”

YOU SAID

Some respondents to our public consultation stated that they would not feel confident to report violence and abuse to the police, and some were unsure. Their reasons ranged from believing they wouldn’t be taken seriously, to fearing repercussions from perpetrators and perpetrators’ family and friends. Others were confident to make a report but their reasoning in some cases highlighted additional concerns. People said they want a police service that serves all. The consultation made it clear there is still more to do to engage with our region’s diverse communities and to build and rebuild trust.

MAKE IT EASY TO REPORT AND NAVIGATE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

There is a lot of work happening to improve services but it can be better. It was clear from consultation responses that you want more investment in systems to make it easier for victim-survivors to come forward.

You said: “More should be done to encourage women to come forward, because when you hear the statistics about how unlikely you are to get a conviction, why would you bother?”

WORK BETTER TOGETHER

Respondents to my survey recognised that to make change, key partners must work together. My office cannot work in isolation from other agencies involved in VAWG. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to strengthen systems and collaborations such as pooling budgets and learning from partners perspectives. There is a lot more we want to build upon to improve VAWG victim-survivors' experiences. When asked what more you think the PCC needs to do to tackle VAWG, you said:

You said: "Increased partnership and strategic work with specialist organisations".



Work in action

Listening to the views of victim-survivors and specialist VAWG organisations

I recently established a Victim & Witness Improvement Board to understand how we can achieve better outcomes for victim-survivors and explore how our victim-survivor services are performing. The Board is attended by victim-survivors and witnesses from different crime types (including VAWG), thematic specialists from across the CJS and staff from my office, including the newly appointed Victim's Champion, whose role it is to listen and amplify the voices of victim-survivors and create stronger systems in Northumbria. The Board provides useful insight and constructive feedback to feed into system improvements.



Shared goals and action focused approach

I chair the Northumbria Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) – a multi-agency meeting of all key partners involved in the proper functioning of the criminal justice system (CJS). Through the LCJB I have a first hand understanding around the work of criminal justice organisations in Northumbria, delivery of the National Victims' Code of Practice and the criminal justice outcomes progressing through the CJS and I am pleased to bring everyone together to deliver improvements for a better system. An example of a recent project is the Specialist Sexual Violence Court pilot scheme. Newcastle is one of three Crown Courts in England and Wales to participate in this pilot, aimed at driving up sexual offence prosecutions and convictions. All stakeholders that sit on the LCJB are crucial to this work, which seeks to ensure victim-survivors feel more supported at Court and are more likely to stay engaged with the criminal justice system.

Smarter and more joined up commissioning

This year I established the Northumbria VAWG Commissioning Forum to bring together commissioners of VAWG services across Northumbria, including local authorities, NHS England, and Integrated Care Boards. The forum aims to help improve co-ordination and collaboration across the region and to support co-commissioning where possible, ensuring VAWG services in Northumbria are as good as they can be.





Commitments and calls to action

12) I will continue to listen to victim-survivors at my Victim & Witness Service Improvement Board, and through my Victims' Champion. I am committed to ensuring all voices are heard when it comes to improving the trust and confidence of VAWG victim-survivors to report to the police, and to improve their experiences of seeking help and support.

13) I am committed to launching a new VAWG Oversight Panel, where independent members can consider and advice on police performance on the handling of VAWG cases from a variety of different perspectives, identifying trends which can be fed back into force processes to make improvements. This scrutiny is essential in supporting me in my role holding Northumbria Police to account and working to improve trust and confidence in policing.

14) I will continue to work to build stronger systems which support victim-survivors to both seek support, and a criminal justice outcome, should they wish to. I will continue to monitor victim-survivors attrition statistics, as well as other feedback, to determine whether this work is impacting on victim-survivor confidence.



8 Taking the strategy forward

I am committed to doing all that I can to end VAWG, and to support those affected. In this strategy I have set out 12 key commitments across 4 priorities. These priorities are informed by what Northumbria residents and professionals working in our local VAWG sector asked me to focus on. I am committed to reporting back to the public on the progress my office is making.

I will:

- Scrutinise the work of Northumbria Police through my existing scrutiny framework, to ensure they are delivering on all VAWG priorities and restoring public confidence where it may have been impacted.
- Share progress against this Strategy to the Police and Crime Panel, as part of my Police and Crime Plan 'Improving Lives' updates.
- Publish an Annual VAWG Strategy Position Statement at the end of each financial year to update on progress and report on the impact our work is having. I will share this with my Northumbria Victim and Witness Service Improvement Board, so those with lived experience and expert professional knowledge can provide their feedback and views on our progress.
- Utilise insights from the annual refresh of my Police and Crime Plan, to keep the VAWG strategy current and in line with Northumbria residents' priorities.
- Talk to and engage with people from all backgrounds to better understand their needs and priorities for tackling VAWG and support for victims. Making sure our actions have a positive impact and don't discriminate or alienate those with a protected characteristic.



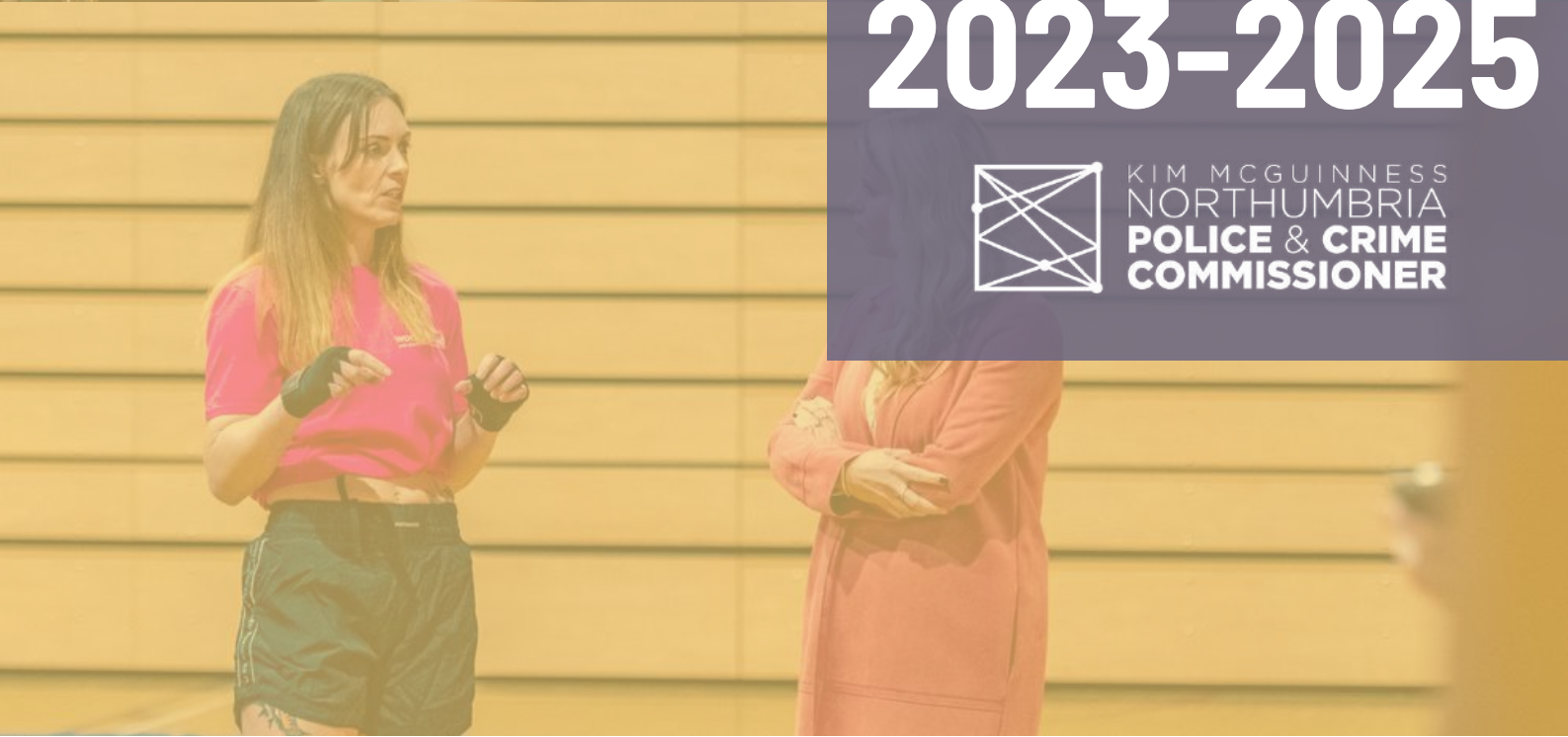
If you want to know more about anything you have read in this document or if you have any comments about our work in this area, please check out or make contact via the following channels.

 enquiries@northumbria-pcc.gov.uk

 [Twitter](#)

 [Facebook](#)

 [Instagram](#)



**VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN &
GIRLS
STRATEGY
2023-2025**



KIM MCGUINNESS
NORTHUMBRIA
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER