

Report to Overview Select Committee

Date of Committee meeting: 15th July 2021

Enhancing Women's Safety

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood & Environmental
Services



Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Daxa Pancholi, Head of Community Safety & Protection
- Author contact details: 0116 454 0203
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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to;
- a) outline the current community safety work around ensuring women's safety,
 - b) the process to be used to improve women's safety further within Leicester city,
 - c) outline the opportunity to access government funding to undertake proactive community safety work which will make a difference to the daily lives of women and girls, particularly in parks and open spaces and
 - d) Share demographic data on women's safety in relation to sexual offences for over the last 5 years.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The issue around women safety has become more prevalent over recent years. Leicester City Council takes this matter seriously and as such has undertaken considerable work around the domestic and sexual violence agenda. Whilst domestic and sexual violence and abuse issues affect both men and women, the majority of victims tend to be women and girls. In addition to this stream of work, existing community safety work undertaken to date, whilst not focussed on women's safety solely enhances women's safety e.g. work around prostitution, night-time economy, target hardening of homes and public spaces.
- 2.2 Safer Leicester Partnership (the city's community safety partnership) will be reviewing the work that it currently undertakes around this agenda and identify any further strategic steps that can be taken within a partnership context. In terms of the actual delivery, the Safer Leicester Partnership's Community Safety Tasking Group (CSTG) will identify a programme of work that can be undertaken to improve women safety.
- 2.3 Furthermore, the Government has faced mounting pressure to make our streets safer following the murder of Sarah Everard. In a bid to improve security, the Home Office has made available £25 million through a programme called the Safer Streets fund. This fund will be allocated through a bidding round where police authority areas will be invited to submit bids, with costed proposals against the type of issues which are to be addressed.
- 2.4 This funding can be used, for instance on better lighting and CCTV facilities in the streets so women feel safer walking through streets, parks etc. Following meetings and conversations with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC); the bids will be focused on women's safety in parks

and open spaces. The Home Office will be looking for innovative and creative set of actions that bring together and involve both local communities and the voluntary sector in the identification of solutions.

- 2.5 Sexual offences demographic data, over the last 5 years show that;
- there have been 690 sexual offences against women and 107 against men. Men account for 418 of the suspects or offenders where they have been identified. This is compared to 15 women shown as suspects and offenders.
 - Over the last 12 months there have been 141 sexual offences against women and 24 against men in public and open spaces. All 87 offenders over the last 12 months are male.
 - The overall number of sexual offences against women in all settings including in a domestic setting over 5 years is 4424 with male victims being 869.
- 2.6 As the overall work around women's safety progresses, a further report with detailed plans and activities will be brought to the Committee for comments later in the year.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that members of the Committee note the current work being undertaken on this agenda and comment on the proposed way forward identifying any additional steps that can be taken to address the issue of women's safety.

4. Report

- 4.1 Leicester City Council has for some time taken the issue of women's safety seriously, and with this in mind resourced considerable work around the domestic and sexual violence and abuse (DSVA) agenda.
- 4.2 The current four Leicester City Council DSVA services (all delivered by UAVA) started on 1/12/15, these are;
- Children, young people and families service (CYPFS) for sexual and domestic violence. This incorporates practical and emotional support and is for children and young people of any age.
 - Safe Home Service, which is for those who do not have safe housing due to sexual or domestic violence. This service can secure homes where appropriate, give housing advice and support and provide emergency supported accommodation (refuge provision).
 - Domestic Violence Perpetrator Interventions service. This is for men and women and is aimed at those who want to change their behaviour (they have not been ordered by a court to do so). This includes partner/ ex-partner support and a variety of individual and group work programmes.

- Information and Support Service. This includes helpline, individual and group support across all levels of risk (of harm) and need and includes counselling, recovery, crisis and advocacy work.

4.3 In addition to this the city council and partners have undertaken work within the night-time economy such as “Ask Angela” which provides women with an opportunity to alert bar staff should they feel vulnerable and unsafe. A further initiative, involved the establishment of a safe haven via the use of the CityBus by the Clock Tower in the city centre, where individuals are able to report crime, minor cuts etc. Furthermore, significant work has been undertaken to safeguard sex workers by offering health and safety advice as well as advice on how to stay safe on the street.

4.4 Officers are also exploring the use of a digital platform and applications to help make city spaces safer, particularly for women. An example of this is the use of MySafetipin app which helps inform decisions about moving around a city, based on the safety score of an area. The app is free and uses crowd-sourced data.

4.5 A recent bid was submitted through the “Changing Futures” funding stream, it is expected that the funding will improve outcomes for adults experiencing multiple disadvantages. Leicester’s submission specifically includes the following with a significant emphasis on women;

- a) Women with Multiple Disadvantage particularly sex workers
- b) Prison leavers including short term/revolving door offenders
- c) Those with a dual diagnosis or proposed dual diagnosis
- d) Complex mental health cases

This bid was submitted on 6th of May, it is expected that a decision will be announced in July.

4.6 The Safer Leicester Partnership produce a 3-year plan which contains a number of priorities. These priorities are determined through identifying threat, harm, and risks that the city faces which partners agree should be addressed through joint effort. These priorities are reviewed annually to ensure they remain focussed and that appropriate joint planning and resourcing allocation around these key issues is being undertaken. When undertaking a review, consultation takes place with key stakeholders, members of the public and elected members.

4.7 Keeping women safe has always been an important matter; to ensure and given recent national concerns this is to be further considered by the Safer Leicester Partnership at its next meeting, and will be taking on board any feedback from Overview Scrutiny Committee.

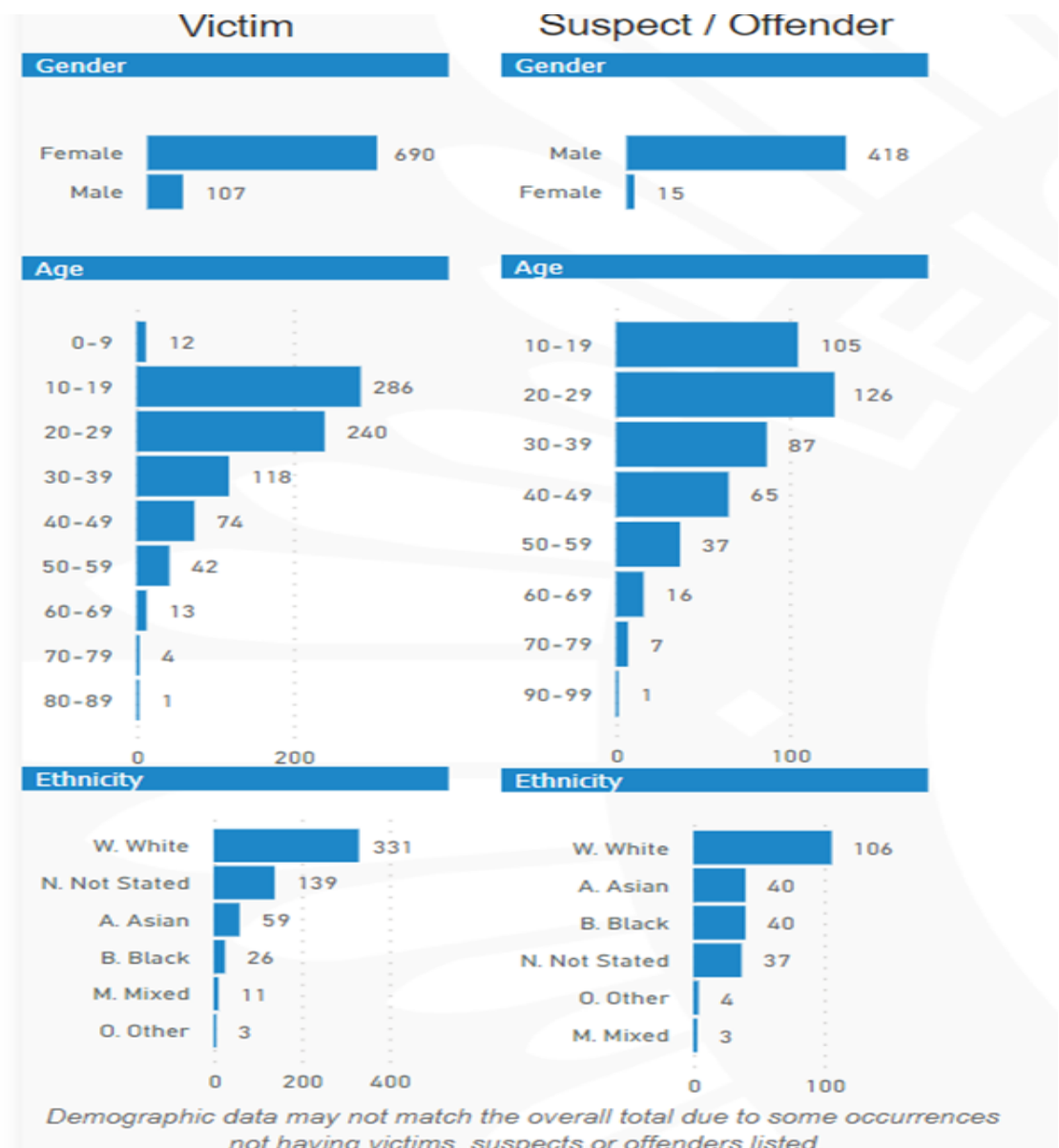
4.8 Once an area of work has been added and recognised as a priority for the Safer Leicester Partnership, this will ensure that there is additional activity and resourcing to address the priority that has been agreed. In order to then achieve a difference on the ground, the priority will be addressed via a multi-

agency group; as such, it is expected that this workstream will be delivered through the community safety tasking group. This group consists of officers from, the city council, the blue light services, the two universities, university hospitals of Leicester etc

- 4.9 Further to the above, the Home Office will be providing support under the Safer Streets Fund round 3, towards addressing women's safety concerns. This initiative was previously focussed purely on serious acquisitive crime e.g. robbery, burglary, theft of vehicle. In the wake of Sarah Everard's death, the Government announced an additional £25m for the Safer Streets fund specifically around Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG); this additional funding has been made available to specifically focus on the safety of women and as the Home Office term it by "*increasing the safety of public spaces of concern for women and girls*". The funding opportunity formally opened in June with a bid deadline of 15th July.
- 4.10 As this round of Safer Streets funding is being specifically focussed around "*increasing the safety of public spaces of concern for women and girls*"; in order to co-ordinate activities around Leicestershire; local stakeholders have come together to discuss three potential innovative approaches/ bids.
- 4.11 Requirements of the fund include;
- a) Reduce VAWG and increase women and girls' feelings of safety in public spaces
 - b) Build the evidence base for what works on reducing VAWG crimes and increasing women and girls' feelings of safety in the public domain
 - c) Improve the national and local data picture regarding VAWG crimes in public spaces, which could include increased reporting for some crime types; and
 - d) Make public spaces safer for all
 - e) Ensuring area selection is supported by local or national VAWG stakeholders and organisations such as schools with responsibility for groups of women and girls
 - f) Identifying evidence that the area is persistently and disproportionately affected by VAWG and/or low feelings of public safety
 - g) Selecting areas with a defined, but not necessarily adjoined, geography.
- 4.12 The fund will specifically target the following crimes which are known to disproportionately be perpetrated against women and girls:
- Rape
 - Causing sexual activity without consent
 - Sexual coercion
 - Sexual assault/ indecent assault
 - Abduction
 - Street harassment
 - Stalking
 - Indecent exposure and voyeurism
 - Unwanted sexual touching
 - Up-skirting

4.13 Outlined below is sexual offences demographic data for the last 5 years, the pandemic has skewed the data and as such it is difficult to compare year-on-year figures. The 5-year data show that women are more likely to be victims of sexual offences than men and conversely men are more likely to be offenders of sexual offences than women;

- there have been 690 sexual offences against women and 107 against men. Men account for 418 of the suspects or offenders where they have been identified. This is compared to 15 women shown as suspects and offenders.
- Over the last 12 months there have been 141 sexual offences against women and 24 against men in public and open spaces. All 87 offenders over the last 12 months are male.
- The overall number of sexual offences against women in all settings including in a domestic setting over 5 years is 4424 with male victims being 869.



- 4.14 Further data shows that women are victims of stalking and harassment to a significantly higher level than men. Over the last 12 months the number of female victims is recorded as 3981 with male victims being 2161.
- 4.15 Stalking and Harassment in public and open spaces over the last 5 years again shows that women are more likely to victims of stalking and harassment in public than men. Over the last 12 months women are recorded as victims for 204 crimes where men are recorded victims for 136 crimes.
- 4.16 With the above in mind, the focus of the bid will be on parks and opens spaces within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland; with the majority of the focus and areas being considered are on city's parks, that is;
- Victoria Park
 - Braunstone Park
 - Abbey Park
 - Western Park
 - Bede Park
 - Aylestone Meadows,
 - Rally Park and
 - Knighton Park
- 4.17 Possible interventions could include;
- Improving sight lines (could be replacing walls with fences, cutting back/removing bushes etc)
 - Improved lighting for night time visibility
 - CCTV to dissuade/capture any offenders
 - Women supporting other women in accessing/using the parks
 - Bystander approach elements
 - Communications campaign (centralised campaign across all the parks – may contain bystander elements)
- 4.18 The officers in the City have been asked to work up proposals for parks and open spaces identified for up to £350,000, with the above in mind.

5.0 Way Forward

- 5.1 Officers will bring a further report to a future meeting of the Overview Select Committee with detailed plans of how this area of work is to be delivered via the Safer Leicester Partnership.
- 5.2 Partners will have also had an opportunity to discuss and submit proposals towards the Safer Streets Fund programme; this information too, will be shared with Overview Select Committee.

5. Financial, legal, and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications contained in this report, that said depending on the proposals contained within the bid submitted to the Home Office, city council teams may receive funding to deliver activities on the ground which support women's safety. This decision on how the funding will be utilised will be made by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Furthermore should the Safer Leicester Partnership deem this area of work a priority, then a proportion of the monies received from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, (that is, Partnership Locality Fund of £238k) may be utilised to fund activities to enhance women's safety.

Amy Oliver, Interim Head of Finance Ext. 454 5667

5.2 Legal implications

In terms of any funding, the Council must comply with the funding conditions specified and if the funding is used to procure any services then the Council will be required to comply with internal rules and ensure the funding is used for the specified purpose.

Legal Services can advise on any terms and conditions relating to the funding agreement. Any funding will need to be assessed against subsidy rules.

Seema Patel, Principal Lawyer 454 1406

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are no significant climate change implications associated with this report. The implications of specific projects proposed or applied for should be considered separately as appropriate.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

5.4 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report provides an outline of the opportunity to access government funding to undertake proactive community safety work which will make a difference to the daily lives of women and girls. Whilst this is likely to have a positive impact it is important that going forward so that consideration of equalities impacts is taken into account in

the development of any plans/proposals and as an integral part of the decision making process, it is recommended that an Equalities Impact Assessment is undertaken.

Surinder Singh, Equalities Officer, Ext 37 4148

5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

Section 17 Crime & Disorder Act: implications with regards to the duty of local authorities to consider the impact of their decisions and actions on crime and disorder in the local area.

Daxa Pancholi,
Head of Community Safety,
Ext 37 0203

6. Background information and other papers:

7. Summary of appendices:

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”?

No

10. If a key decision please explain reason