



Working in partnership to tackle  
**Violence Against Women and Girls**  
**(VAWG)** across Merseyside

**Delivery Plan**  
2022 - 2025



**EMILY SPURRELL**  
MERSEYSIDE POLICE  
& CRIME COMMISSIONER

# Foreword

## **There is an epidemic of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in this country.**

Recent tragic and high-profile cases have brought this into sharp focus, highlighting just how far we still must go to eradicate such crimes.

We know women and girls experience violence in our communities every day. It is culturally embedded – deep-rooted in a society that was designed for men, and which enables misogynistic attitudes and sexism to fester.

Whilst violence towards any person is unacceptable, evidence shows that this is still largely a gendered issue, and the vast majority of victims continue to be women.

As Merseyside's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) my priority is to create a safe region for everyone. That means for all women and girls.

This epidemic cannot be tackled by any one agency or in isolation; we must respond collectively, urgently and with meaningful action if we are to make a genuine difference.

This Delivery Plan is the product of extensive consultation with professional partners and women and girls across all five boroughs of Merseyside.

I recognise the dedicated and determined work already being undertaken to tackle VAWG - and will continue to support the work of individual agencies – but far more still needs to be done.

This Delivery Plan is designed to sit over the individual local and organisational strategies focused on tackling VAWG and complement the existing national plans. This includes:

- The Government's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy – UK Government
- Merseyside Police - Our commitment to keeping women and girls safe in Merseyside
- Crown Prosecution Service's Violence Against Women and Girls
- Individual Merseyside Local Authority Strategies



**Emily Spurrell**

Police and Crime Commissioner

It identifies common themes that we are collectively working on to challenge, prevent and tackle VAWG, and sets out clear actions based on the honest feedback of professionals and brave accounts of victim-survivors.

**It is a shared commitment between me, our region's key leaders and partners to do better - to take action and be a force for positive change on behalf of all women and girls across Merseyside.**

My heartfelt thanks go to all the women and girls who shared their experiences and challenges with me. While I cannot remove their pain, this Delivery Plan is the physical product of the collective pledge we have taken to ensure women and girls are safer in our region.

Together we can learn from their experiences to be more responsive and provide impactful, and high-quality services which will increase their safety and build their trust and confidence.

This is just the start.

These shared commitments will be followed up with tangible and measurable actions driven by our partnerships.

**We must ensure that tackling VAWG remains a priority and together we make Merseyside a safer place for women and girls to live, work and visit.**

# Signatories

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**Together, we will make Merseyside a safer place for women and girls to live, work and visit.**



**Emily Spurrell**  
Police and Crime Commissioner



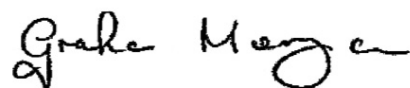
**Steve Rotherham**  
Metro Mayor for the Liverpool City Region



**Joanne Anderson**  
Mayor of Liverpool



**Cllr Jan Williamson**  
Leader of Wirral Council and Deputy Metro Mayor for the Liverpool City Region



**Cllr Graham Morgan,**  
Leader Knowsley Council

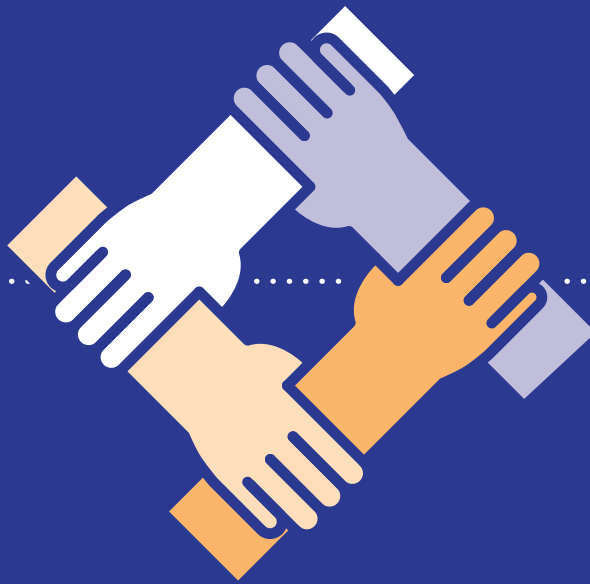


**Cllr David Baines Signature**  
Leader St Helens



**Cllr Ian Maher**  
Leader of Sefton Council

# Working in Partnership



**EMILY SPURRELL**  
MERSEYSIDE POLICE  
& CRIME COMMISSIONER



**Liverpool**  
**City Council**



**MERSEYSIDE**  
**POLICE**



**LIVERPOOL**  
**CITY REGION**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY



**MERSEYSIDE**  
**FIRE & RESCUE**  
SERVICE



**Knowsley Council**



**Cheshire and**  
**Merseyside**  
Health and Care Partnership

**Sefton Council**



**victim care**  
Merseyside  
making a real difference to victims of crime

**WIRRAL**

**MERSEYSIDE**  
**Violence**  
**Reduction**  
**Partnership**



**MERSEYSIDE**  
**CRIMINAL JUSTICE BOARD**

Criminal Justice System: working together for the public



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Our vision for Merseyside

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## PREVENT:

Work towards a society in which misogyny and sexism are not tolerated, and break down intergenerational norms of VAWG through education and proactive challenging.

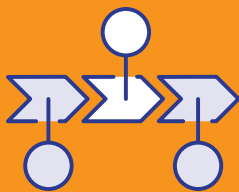
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## PURSUE:

Be relentless in the pursuit of perpetrators and through enforcement of protective powers held in Policing, Courts and the Probation Service.

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## PREPARE:

Underpin organisations across Merseyside with an understanding of VAWG and a commitment to challenging it through aligned strategies, with clear direction and governance. Ensure that legislation is in place to prioritise VAWG with urgency and tackle cases robustly.

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## PROTECT:

Increase women and girls' confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS) by improving the CJS journey and crucially, use their voices and experiences to shape improvements. Ensure that support services have the resources to support any victim that presents to them.

# Tackling VAWG

## Introduction

The scale of Violence against Women and Girls cannot be underestimated. One in three women will be affected in their lifetime.

Defined by the UN as *'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty'* it covers a huge breadth of crimes from online and digital violence to domestic abuse, rape and femicide.

In the UK, a woman was killed by a man on average every three days between 2009 and 2019. Millions of crimes of violence, abuse and exploitation are recorded every year. Yet we know we are still only seeing the very tip of the iceberg.

In the wake of recent tragic, high-profile murders, we have seen an outpouring of grief and anger from women across our region and the country who have spoken about their own personal experiences of VAWG which reveals just how endemic VAWG is in our society.

### action 1

Embed trauma-informed training for frontline officers and detectives, including direct conversations with victim-survivors, to ensure they consistently use a sensitive, trauma-informed approach (Police)

### action 6

All partners to respond to changing legislation adequately and in a timely manner (Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership)

### action 2

Improve the response to breaches of VAWG-related orders with increased oversight of force action and enforcement (Police)

### action 7

Ensure that agencies work together to robustly investigate VAWG offences and maximise the opportunity for improved outcomes (VAWG and Vulnerabilities)

### action 3

Continue to lobby to make misogyny a hate crime to improve women and girls' safety (PCC)

### action 8

Work in partnership to ensure education is delivered in schools throughout Merseyside on healthy relationships, breaking down gender stereotypes and challenging misogyny (PCC)

### action 4

Continually engage with victim-survivors to improve practice and identify gaps in provision across sectors (VAWG and Vulnerabilities)

### action 9

Expand and coordinate VAWG Campaigns, such as Safer Streets, to tackle harmful attitudes towards women and girls (VAWG and Vulnerabilities and PCC)

### action 5

A commitment to ensuring that social service and health staff have sufficient training to understand how to respond to women and girls who are victim-survivors of VAWG (VAWG and Vulnerabilities)

### action 10

Provide appropriate support for victims of VAWG-related crimes through the Victim Care Merseyside service and monitor victim-survivor feedback to ensure it is meeting their needs (PCC)

# Domestic Abuse

## Introduction

We know domestic abuse is very common in our communities. Nationally, the police are called every single minute in relation to domestic abuse, yet we know the vast majority of incidents remain hidden behind closed doors.

The impact of domestic abuse is staggering. On victim-survivors, their children and families and the wider communities. It leads to mental, emotional, physical, social, and financial suffering, and it is crucial that we consider the challenges and barriers many women face when trying to escape abuse or access support or justice.

In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act created a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time, crucially emphasising the non-physical elements of abuse including coercive control, and emotional and economic abuse – a significant step in ensuring we can bring more offenders to justice.

action  
1

Review funding arrangements for specialist support services to ensure sustainable funding (Local Authorities and PCC)

action  
2

Ensure appropriate and safe accommodation for any woman who is fleeing domestic abuse (Local Authorities)

action  
3

Expansion of the Domestic Abuse Workplace Champion Scheme across sectors in Merseyside (PCC)

action  
4

Commission an observation of Specialist Domestic Violence Courts on Merseyside (PCC)

action  
5

Ensure that staff and prosecutors are trained to respond appropriately, sensitively and consistently to domestic abuse cases in both criminal and family courts across Merseyside (HMCTS and CPS)

action  
6

Ensure that offender management of perpetrators is considerate of the victim, and that information sharing pathways are in place between relevant partners (The Probation Service)

action  
7

Complete a pan-Merseyside mapping exercise of VAWG Services and ensure this is accessible to partners - and regularly updated (PCC)

action  
8

Recognise the vulnerabilities of diverse communities, including older women and same-sex relationships, and respond to the additional barriers they may have to support (SDVAG)

action  
9

Following the Child to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA) conference event, commission research to inform a public health approach to tackling it (Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership)

action  
10

Relentlessly and robustly pursue perpetrators of domestic abuse to ensure that offenders are held to account (Police and CPS)

action  
11

Coordinate perpetrator programmes across Merseyside to deliver a whole-systems approach (PCC, Local Authorities and Police)

action  
12

Review the MARAC process across Merseyside to ensure that it is operating effectively and efficiently (SDVAG)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- Merseyside Police respond to over 3,000 domestic abuse incidents per month
- Positive outcomes (number of charges) are low at between 5 and 8%
- Specialist victim support services are reporting considerably more women and girls who do not report to police
- The average caseload for an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser is 46
- The average conviction rate for 2021/2022 was 82%
- 70% of domestic abuse victims decline or withdraw support for a prosecution.



# Sexual Violence

## Introduction

Sexual Violence can affect anyone. Yet we know it is still largely a gendered issue, with the overwhelming majority of victim-survivors being women.

In 2021, the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated 144,000 women were victims of rape or attempted rape in the last year. That equates to more than 16 of the most serious sexual offences every single hour, with many more incidents of sexual assault, sexual abuse and grooming taking place every day in our communities.

The impact of these crimes is very often devastating, life-long and life-changing. Survivors deserve the highest quality support and care. As a society, we owe it to all women to eradicate all types of sexual violence for good.

action  
1

Commission an observation pilot of rape trials on Merseyside (PCC)

action  
2

Continue to source and lobby for sustainable, long-term funding for sexual violence and abuse support services (PCC and Local Authorities)

action  
3

Improving information and data sharing between statutory and non-statutory partners (SVSG)

action  
4

Improved communication with sex workers and sex work support services to understand their experiences and build relationships, to encourage reporting (Police)

action  
5

Ensure that Prosecutors within the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Unit are trained to recognise the nature and impact of trauma on victims, and ensure that special measures are widely advertised and readily available (Police and CPS)

action  
6

Provide training to all first responders to recognise the signs of trauma to ensure they can respond appropriately (Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership)

action  
7

Continue to embed Operation Soteria to focus RASSO investigations on the offender, and improve partnership working with Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) (Police and CPS)

action  
8

Explore opportunities for interventions working with perpetrators of sexual violence, in particular young people (SVSG)

action  
9

Recognise the vulnerabilities of diverse communities, including older women and same-sex relationships, and respond to the additional barriers they may have to support (SVSG)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- In the first quarter of 2022, 394 rapes and 876 other sexual offences were reported to Merseyside Police
- 75% and 80% conviction rate in rape cases (CPS)
- But overall positive outcomes (number of charges) are only 3-4%
- RASA and RASASC saw an increase of 33% with 3,271 new referrals between 2021-22
- Average caseload for an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser is 52.



# Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

## Introduction

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking is not a distant or historic issue. It is happening right now, right here, in communities on Merseyside and across the country. It is estimated 70% of the 40.3 million people currently enslaved across the world are women and girls.

Women are often promised a brighter future, a good job or better opportunities, but instead find themselves exploited, deceived, coerced or abused into selling sex or providing forced labour. Often living in slum-like conditions and completely dependent on their abuser, women and girls subjected to this abhorrent and hidden crime are stripped of their liberty and dignity. We must do much more to prevent these crimes in the first place and recognise and rescue those enslaved in our communities.

### action 1

Relaunch the Modern Slavery Network to enhance the partnership across Merseyside and improve consistency in approach and awareness (PCC)

### action 2

Ensure that victims of Modern Slavery have access to safe accommodation (Local Authorities)

### action 3

Provide sufficient language interpretation services to remove barriers to victims of Modern Slavery disclosing and accessing support (Police and Local Authorities)

### action 4

Develop stronger links with border control to ensure that risks are detected and victims protected (Police)

### action 5

Increase awareness of the national referral mechanism and its processes across the partnership, and monitor its usage (Modern Slavery Network)

### action 6

Work to improve the data picture of modern slavery and human trafficking in Merseyside to give greater insight into the scale and depth of the issue (Modern Slavery Network)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- 266 referrals have been made this year by Police to the National Referral Mechanism used to identify and refer victims of modern slavery for appropriate support.
- It is estimated that the number of modern slavery and human trafficking is significantly higher, and data continues to be limited.

# Harmful Practices

## Introduction

Harmful practices have no place in our society. Including, but not limited to, forced marriage, 'honour'-based abuse, and female genital mutilation (FGM), these practices are used to control behaviour to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs, particularly when it is felt that shame or dishonour has been brought against a family or community.

'Honour' or culture is never an acceptable excuse for these practices, which are not only illegal, but often have hugely damaging and in some cases have life-threatening consequences. We must do all we can to raise awareness of these harmful practices and protect those at risk.

action  
1

Partners to coordinate a cross-sector commitment to understanding cultural impacts on abuse and the nature of harmful practices (Harmful Practice Group)

action  
4

Ensure education is provided in schools across Merseyside with a specific focus on harmful practices and 'honour'-based abuse (Harmful Practices Group)

action  
2

Ensure that specialist services for harmful practices have access to sufficient funding for them to support any woman or girl who is a victim of any form of 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) (PCC and Local Authorities)

action  
5

Provide sufficient language interpretation services to remove barriers to those at risk, and survivors of harmful practices (Police and Local Authorities)

action  
3

Continue to monitor police response to 'honour'-based abuse cases through scrutiny (PCC)

action  
6

Ensure frontline workers are sufficiently trained to respond appropriately to victims of 'honour'-based abuse taking into account the 'one-chance rule' (Harmful Practices Group)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- In the first quarter of 2022, six FGM crimes were reported to police
- 18 reports of honour-based abuse
- Savera UK seen a significant increase in referrals from 160 in 2018/19 to 340 in 2020/21.

# Stalking and Harassment

## Introduction

Stalking and harassment are similar, but differing, offences that both have the capacity to bring huge physical, psychological, and emotional harm to victim-survivors, their families and loved ones.

They can both happen with or without a fear of violence but involve a repeated and unwanted pattern of behaviour which can cause significant distress, anxiety and intimidation, causing people to live in fear.

action  
1

Work closely with other Forces to share best practice around stalking/harassment (Police)

action  
4

Lobby for specific cyber-stalking legislation in Government with greater onus on social media companies to take responsibility for the safety of their users online (PCC)

action  
2

Ensure thorough investigations into stalking and/or harassment cases that considers pattern of behaviour and risk (Police)

action  
5

Ensure that target hardening measures are readily available to victims to increase their feelings of safety (Local Authority and Police)

action  
3

Increased use of Stalking Orders across Merseyside (Police)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- In the first quarter of 2022,
  - 2,715 reports of harassment
  - 800 reports of stalking
- 59% increase in cyber offences linked to stalking and harassment in the last 12 months
- Merseyside Domestic Violence Service (MDVS) believe a victim will encounter more than 100 incidents before reporting to police
- MDVS have employed a dedicated Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker (ISAC) to risk assess and advocate for victims.

# Street Harassment

## Introduction

All too often, street harassment, such as catcalling, wolf-whistling and groping, is dismissed as 'lower level', but this demonstrates a huge misunderstanding of the scale and impact of this kind of behaviour on an individual, as well as wider society.

According to a survey by UN Women UK, 86% of young women (18-24) have been sexually harassed in a public space, with only 3% not able to recall ever having experienced sexual harassing behaviour.

This is all evidence of a culture that tolerates misogynistic mindsets and normalises the objectification of women. These are attitudes which make it easier for sexual violence to occur, and it is vital we act to put a stop to it.

### action 1

Make streets feel safer for women and girls and consistently respond practically to reports stating feelings of unsafety (LCRCA and Local Authorities)

### action 2

Continue to increase the profile of the Street Safe App; encouraging the public to utilise it more frequently across Merseyside and respond accordingly to reports of street harassment (Police and Local Authorities)

### action 3

Ensure safe routes home for women and girls working in partnership with British Transport Police and transport and taxi companies (LCRCA and Local Authorities)

### action 4

Provide appropriate infrastructure, such as street lighting and CCTV, to promote feelings of safety (Local Authorities)

### action 5

Identify additional funding opportunities to expand bystander intervention programmes (PCC)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- In the PCC's Safer Streets survey, 54% of women felt unsafe using public transport at night and 42% during the day
- More than 55% of women respondents said they had experienced streets harassment in the city centre
- Respondents indicated that an increased police presence, more CCTV and improved street lighting would increase their feelings of safety
- £1.3 million invested to improve safety through the installation of new CCTV, street lighting and fencing, as well as a text-message service for reporting and a wide-spread communications campaign rolled out as part of Safer Streets Liverpool campaign.

# Child Sexual Exploitation

## Introduction

Keeping our young people safe is a priority for us all. They deserve our protection and care.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a despicable crime which robs a young person of their innocence and their childhood and can have serious long-term effects on every aspect of their life.

As a partnership, we must do everything possible to reduce the risk of young people being exploited or abused and ensure all young people across Merseyside are safeguarded.



Continue to raise the profile of child sexual exploitation across sectors, and an awareness of spotting and supporting those vulnerable to it (MACE)



Continue to lobby for consistent and sustainable funding sources for youth diversionary projects across Merseyside (PCC and Local Authorities)



Ensure that officers are trained to recognise signs of vulnerability to recognise victims of child sexual exploitation, and ensure that investigations are targeted at the primary offender (Police)



Work to improve the data picture of child sexual exploitation in Merseyside to give greater insight into the scale and depth of the issue (MACE)

## The picture here on Merseyside

- Catch 22 report 42 of their referrals between 2021 and 2022 were victims of child sexual exploitation, all of whom have received intensive and tailored support
- Crime recording related to child sexual exploitation is difficult to ascertain and as such the data picture is limited.

# Evidence Base

In addition to analysis of the data, a series of consultations were held to establish the current picture of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) across Merseyside, capturing the feedback of expert partners and providers, and crucially, the views and experiences of women and girls with lived experience:

**VAWG Summit** – the PCC convened a major summit of more than 80 partners from across Merseyside, and representing many key sectors working across VAWG, examining key issues to drive change and push improvements. The event included a series of workshops that included; a review of Merseyside Police's VAWG Framework, increasing awareness and early education, and best practice for victims. Partners represented areas of work including:

**Domestic Abuse**

**Sexual Violence**

**Sex Work**

**Harmful Practices**

**Child Sexual Exploitation**

**Modern Slavery**

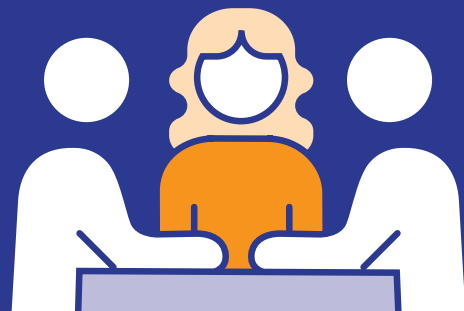
**Stalking and Harassment**



## FOCUS GROUPS

**Lived experience consultation** – the further PCC focus groups were hosted with women across Merseyside with lived experience of VAWG. They were provided an opportunity to share their views and experiences of the police and the criminal justice process, where they think the system works well and where there are issues or blockages, as well as the support currently on offer across the region. Additional workshops were held with young and older women who have been victims of abuse to capture their specific concerns around safety and engagement with support services.

**Wider consultation** – a series of questions were distributed to wider partners with a commitment to tackling VAWG/working directly with women and girls to ensure that the picture of VAWG was fully captured across sectors. This included: Sorooptimists, women's centres and other charities.



# Governance and Measuring Success

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls across Merseyside relies on a governance framework that is committed to actioning strategy and delivering change. The Police and Crime Commissioner will oversee delivery of the plan via the Strategic Policing and Partnership Board (MSPPB) comprised of senior leaders supporting the work of the Commissioner's priorities and focussed on three main themes:

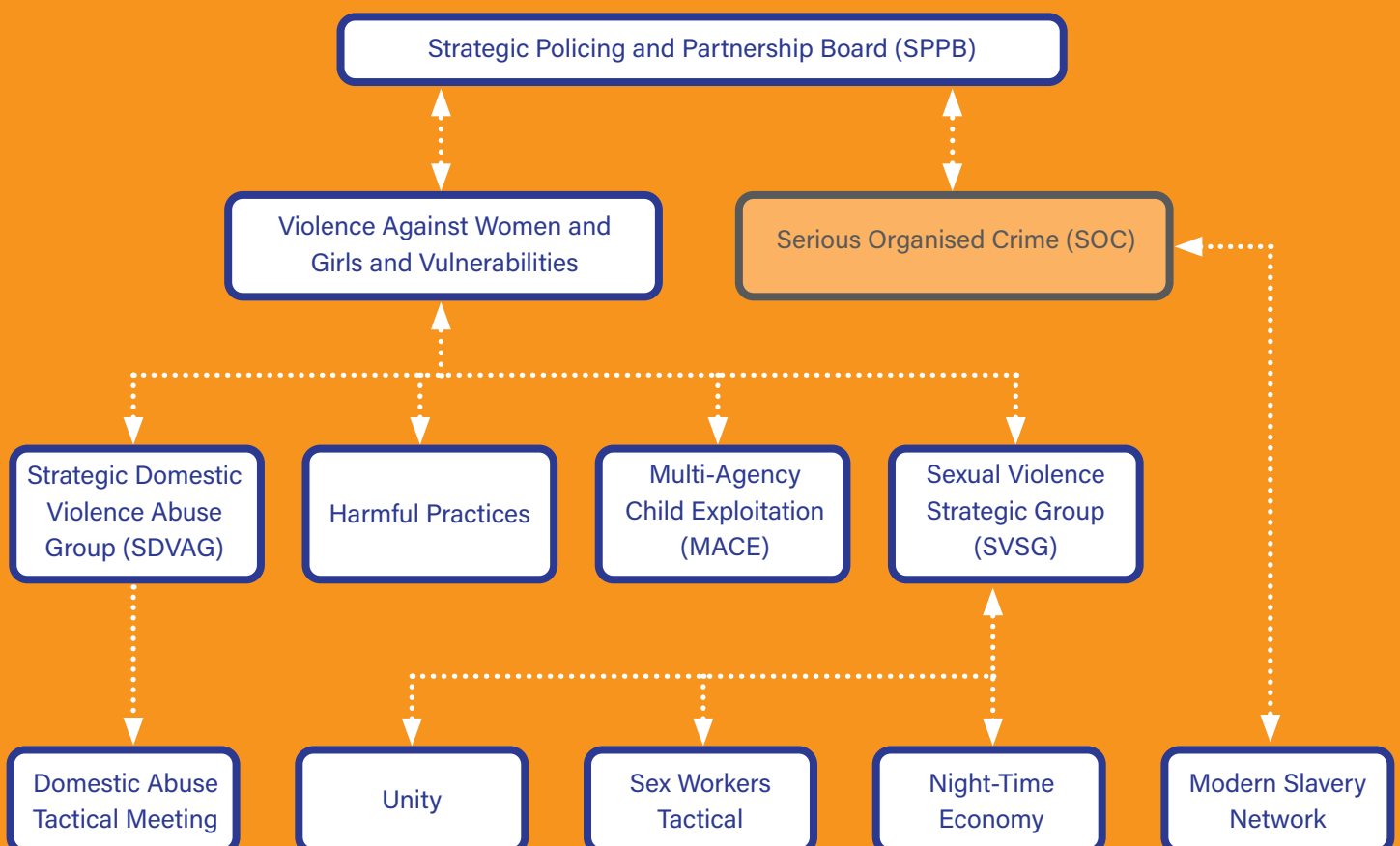
- **Serious Violence**
- **Serious and Organised Crime**
- **Violence Against Women and Girls**

The MSPPB acts as an overseeing body for dedicated subgroups, and the VAWG Delivery Plan will sit within the 'Violence Against Women and Girls and Vulnerability' group; delivering against the ambitions of the plan, with input from various strategic and operational groups driving the actions forward.

Each of the dedicated subgroups will be responsible for measuring the results against their priorities and for achieving the key milestones set out in this report.

A yearly progress report will also be produced by the PCC's office and presented to victim-survivors.

Victim-survivor voice will be key to measuring change and monitoring success, and the partnership are committed to continuous engagement with women, girls and third sector support services.





# Thank you



**EMILY SPURRELL**  
MERSEYSIDE POLICE  
& CRIME COMMISSIONER



IRISH  
COMMUNITY  
CARE



Liverpool  
City Council



MERSEYSIDE  
**POLICE**



Mayor of  
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MERSEYSIDE  
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Merseyside  
Health and Care Partnership



Soroptimist  
International

Sefton Council



COMMUNITY  
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For Merseyside

WE STAND  UP  
FOR **WOMEN!**



ST HELENS  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**i**nvolve northwest  
involving communities & inspiring change



**TO FREEDOM FROM  
DOMESTIC ABUSE**

 **WIRRAL**



**South Liverpool Domestic Abuse Services**  
*challenging domestic abuse in the home*

**DRIVE** 









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***victim care***  
**Merseyside**  
making a real difference to victims of crime

If you have been affected by crime, **Victim Care Merseyside** is here to provide support.

For free, confidential advice speak to one of our team on **Freephone 0808 175 3080** on weekdays between 8am and 6pm. Alternatively, you can submit a contact form at **[www.victimcaremerseyside.org](http://www.victimcaremerseyside.org)** at any time.

You can contact Victim Care Merseyside for help whether you have reported a crime to the police or not.