

# Rape and Sexual Violence Strategic Governance Group Standards

I'm no longer a  
VICTIM  
I'm a  
SURVIVOR



## Vision

'Our vision is to reduce and prevent all forms of sexual violence and abuse, and reduce the incidents of rape and sexual assault.

We will work to ensure the West Midlands area offers a multi-agency, holistic and seamless service to the victims of rape and sexual violence and abuse; to enhance the service provided to victims through the criminal justice pathway, to provide therapeutic support to victims to help them rebuild their lives, and to hold offenders to account'.

## Core Standards in Tackling Sexual Violence

All relevant partner organisations across the West Midlands, including statutory partners and specialist sexual abuse services, subscribe to the following standards in their individual and collective practice. These should provide a basis for organisations to develop their professional practice, improve services, shape commissioning of future services and deliver the right response across all settings and sectors. This recognises that how services are delivered is as important as what is delivered.

Those affected by sexual violence and abuse should be able to expect a good response wherever they are, and whichever agency they present to. These standards aim to achieve a minimum level of service and consistency, and should ensure:

- A criminal justice response: protecting the safety of victims and children and controlling abusers
- Protecting the safety and needs of adults and children.
- An informing and supportive response: providing women and child-centred advice and information, help lines, outreach, group work, early identification and signposting
- A health and therapeutic response: dealing with crisis, short and long term physical and mental health consequences and counselling
- An employer's response: providing a safe and supportive working environment
- A preventative response: public education campaigns, community engagement, educating children and young people, school and youth programmes

Decisions on how to implement and monitor the standards will remain with local partnerships, reporting periodically to the regional Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People Board. These standards were developed by members of the West Midlands Rape and Sexual Violence Strategic Governance Group.

## Definition

'Sexual violence' and/or 'sexual abuse' can both be defined as any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature that takes place without consent or without understanding. It encompasses a broad range of activities, physical, visual and verbal, that are: of a sexual nature; take place without consent or without understanding; are experienced, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault and that take away the ability to control intimate contact. Whilst sexual violence and abuse has been recognised as a cause and a consequence of gender inequality disproportionately affecting women and girls, we recognise there are heterosexual male victims, and victims within the LGBT community.

Sexual violence and abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Rape – including within marriage, civil partnerships, and dating relationships
- Sexual Assault
- Unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment
- Sexual acts through coercion, manipulation or exploitation
- Sexual abuse of children/incest
- Abuse linked to faith or belief
- Sexual abuse of vulnerable adults
- Forced watching/participation in pornography
- Forced prostitution
- Indecent exposure
- Trafficking of people for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- Pressure or coercion into sexual activity
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Sexting, sexual abuse via social media and online technology
- Unwanted sexual touching



## Terminology

The word 'victim' is used to reflect a point in time when a person believes they have been harmed as a result of a crime. The term 'survivor' is often used to reflect our vision of providing timely, expert and high quality support to anyone who has suffered sexual violence and abuse.

## Principles: Understanding sexual violence & abuse

Our responses to sexual violence and abuse are underpinned by the following understanding:

- Sexual violence and abuse is widespread throughout every socio-economic group and occurs across all neighbourhoods and communities, amongst all ethnicities, gender identities, ages, disabilities, sexualities, immigration statuses, religions or beliefs and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Sexual violence and abuse is most commonly gendered, and is caused by societal attitudes rooted in gender inequality, and the misuse of power and control. Gender inequality contributes to a victim blaming culture

- Although the vast majority of sexual violence and abuse is perpetrated by men on women and girls, men can be victims of sexual violence and abuse, as can other groups including LGBT.
- Sexual violence and abuse is intentional behaviour and the responsibility for the abuse lies with the abuser. The responsibility to end violence lies with the abuser and with partner agencies as we shape a culture where abuse is not tolerated.
- Combating sexual violence and abuse requires a comprehensive and coordinated inter-agency response. Victims do not experience violence and abuse in silos and neither should agencies respond in silos.
- Those who have experienced sexual violence and abuse are significantly more likely to experience depression, anxiety, despair, trauma symptoms, self-harm and suicide and be service users of mental health services.

We will demonstrate an appropriate and informed approach to responding to sexual violence and abuse in our communities, informed by key data regularly and scrutinised by the Rape and Sexual Violence Strategic Governance Group to inform our understanding of local needs.

## West Midlands Sexual Violence and Abuse Standards



### Safety, security and dignity

- We will ensure that all interventions prioritise the safety, security and dignity of people using our services and staff/volunteers.
  - Needs of and risks to service users are assessed prior to or just after taking up the service and reviews are carried out at regular intervals if appropriate.
  - Up to date, accessible public information is provided in public spaces and via websites providing clear signposting information to services.
  - Signposting and referral mechanisms are in place for those victims who require support from specialist organisations to meet cultural needs and further facilitate safe space.
- A choice of female or male Forensic Examiners is available whenever possible.
  - Professional and confidential interpreting services should be used where needed, ideally having undergone sexual violence & abuse training. Family, friends or children are not used to interpret for victims/ survivors.
  - The workplace is risk assessed for sexual violence & abuse to protect staff and victims.

### Diversity and fair access to services

We will respect the diversity of service users and positively engage in anti-discriminatory practice. Agencies will ensure that they are able to respond to diversity and identify any needs with particular reference to –

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity

- Race
- Religion or belief
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Mental Health
- Substance misuse
- Victims with care and support needs
- Victims with complex needs
- Immigration status
- Sex Workers

We will also –

- Identify under reporting within sections of the community and raise awareness of reporting options within those groups via specialist sector partners.
- Provide access to interpreter services, intermediaries and support for those with disabilities.
- Ensure through training staff awareness of diversity and cultural issues.

### **Advocacy and support**

- We will provide independent, specialist advocacy and support services to promote the needs and rights of victims.
- Victim interactions with Police and the Criminal Justice process will be supported and managed where possible by specialist staff within appropriate environments.
- We will provide secure and discreet SARC Centres, including for children, with 24/7 crisis worker support.

### **Empowerment and participation**

- We will promote empowerment and self-help to enable service users to take control of their lives and inform the delivery and development of services.
- Organisations will have a mechanism to capture feedback to capture service gaps, areas for improvement and best practice.
- Vulnerable victims will be referred to the local authority for safeguarding as necessary.
- We will facilitate clear lines of communication for victims to be able to raise concerns, challenge decisions and make formal complaints.

### **Confidentiality**

We will respect and observe service users' rights to confidentiality, and all service users will be informed of situations where that confidentiality may be limited.

### **An Integrated multi-agency response**

We will do all we can to maximise inter-agency cooperation, collaboration and coordinated service delivery.

We will:

- Ensure clear information sharing guidance and protocols are in place to ensure confidentiality and minimise risk to victims.
- Maintain formal referral pathways to other services.
- Encourage regular informal interactions between agencies, forging effective local links at an operational and strategic level.



- Share (non personal) data within the group to identify current needs and service gaps.
- Ensure joint training opportunities between agencies.
- Hold quarterly Rape and Sexual Violence Strategic Governance Board meetings.
- Provide regular update to the PWP board and Safeguarding Boards.

## **Challenging social and professional tolerance of sexual violence and abuse, and holding perpetrators to account**

We will:

- Vigorously challenge any tolerance of sexual violence and abuse, and work from the core belief that it is unacceptable and preventable. We will do this to strive to change the victim blaming culture that exists.
- Run joint media campaigns to highlight and challenge issues of social tolerance of abuse.
- Encourage organisations to have a victim contact policy and conduct regular dip samples to ensure compliance to the Standards.
- Ensure staff recruitment processes and training include victim empathy and awareness and understanding of the victim experience.
- Ensure the provision of trauma informed and gender responsive services.

## **Commissioning & Service Design**

All agencies take account of these standards when commissioning, contracting or designing services which may impact upon sexual violence & abuse victims to include assessment within:

- Procurement and contracting processes
- Contract and performance management
- Service re-designs

## **Staff are trained, supervised and supported in sexual violence and abuse to a level commensurate with their role**

- Training needs are identified in a systematic way
- Training is provided for all staff and volunteers to an appropriate level commensurate with their role. This includes supervisors, managers, human resources staff, decision makers, commissioners, management committee members and political representatives
- Training is provided for those who come into contact with the public in order to identify and signpost people who are victims at the earliest opportunity. Training is also provided to those working with potential abusers to screen for sexual violence & abuse
- Training complies with any relevant organisational guidance, such as NICE or the College of Policing, and is systematically evaluated for impact
- Training is not held in isolation but reinforced in the workplace through effective supervision and workplace policies and procedures

## **Data Collection**

Agencies providing direct services have systems in place to generate data and information on sexual violence & abuse including:

- Number and nature of reported incidents
- Repeat offenders
- Anonymised demographic information for victims and offenders
- Referral pathways

Agencies will share appropriate, anonymous data to contribute to our shared understanding of sexual violence and abuse in our region.

## **Outcomes and Actions**

We will focus on delivering outcomes that meet the requirements of victims of sexual violence. Additionally, we will support robust offender management, effective criminal justice interventions and any prevention work which can engage those at risk of becoming the next generation of perpetrators.

## **Outcomes victims want from services**

Victims within the West Midlands have told us that the outcomes they want from interacting with public services are:

### **1. Professionalism**

When presenting to services, victims reported that they require staff to know what to do and who to contact to access the support they need. Victims also reported that timely and sensitive feedback was important.

### **2. Effective Communication**

There is effective Information sharing and communication within and between agencies. Agencies should be aware of how to access specialist sexual violence and abuse services

### **3. Conveying Belief**

Victims highlighted the need to feel that professionals believed them and that they conveyed this belief to victims and treated them with sensitivity.

### **4. Understanding the Impact of Sexual Violence and Abuse**

Victims reported that professionals demonstrating an understanding of the impact of sexual violence and abuse on them helped them to feel less judged/more likely to stay within services

### **5. Feeling a Priority**

Victims want to know that the services they are accessing will address their needs as a matter of priority, recognising the complexity and severity of impact of sexual violence and abuse

## **Overall Outcomes**

- Our communities have a culture of equality and respect where sexual violence and abuse is not condoned or tolerated
- Reduced overall levels of sexual violence and abuse
- Increased public confidence to disclose sexual violence and abuse, and access support
- Bringing offenders to justice

Activity to achieve these outcomes are within the Rape and Sexual Assault Strategic Group Action Plan will measurable and based on actions under the 4 P's banner : Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Pursue.

## **Governance**

The 4 P's action plan will be maintained within a working document that will be monitored and updated by the Rape and Sexual Violence Strategic Governance Group.

There is a requirement for all attendees to sign up to the core standards and the principles of this strategy.

## **Signatories**

PCC  
Met Leaders  
Chairs of HWBs  
Chairs Local Safeguarding Boards  
PVWP Board  
Local authority partnerships  
Representatives of the specialist voluntary sector  
RSVSGG members

## **Glossary of terms**

HWB – Health and Wellbeing Boards  
ISVA – Independent Sexual Violence Advisor  
LSAB – Local Safeguarding Adult Board  
LSCB – Local Safeguarding Children Board  
LGBT- Lesbian, Gay, Bi sexual, Transgender  
MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements  
MARAC- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference  
MASH- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub  
PCC – Police and Crime Commissioner  
PVWP Board – Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People  
RSVSGG - Rape and Sexual Violence Strategic Governance Group  
SARC – Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Photographic Images kindly provided by the CRASAC Young People's Advisory Group.

Information on 'outcomes victims want' is provided thanks to ISVA groups and feedback from survivors working with specialist agencies.