

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER



For Information

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the Fire Authority of the publication of the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy.
- 1.2 Inform Members of the Fire Authority of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Guidance: Statement of Commitment.
- 1.3 To provide Members of the Fire Authority information on Cleveland Fire Brigade's (CFB) commitment to White Ribbon.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

- Note the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Guidance: Statement of Commitment and development of guidance
- Note the update provided on both the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy.
- Consider becoming White Ribbon Ambassadors or Champions.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 25 November 2025 the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) approved the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Guidance: Statement of Commitment.
- 3.2 The NFCC Statement of Commitment has been produced to provide a high-level overview of VAWG, and guidance for the sector on approaches to reducing it. The guidance has three main sections: purpose, definition and prevalence of VAWG, internal considerations, and external considerations. The guidance focuses on the actions fire and rescue services can take towards reducing VAWG both internally, connected to our workforce, and externally, connected to the community. The statement also recognises that each service will be at a different stage in their approach.

- 3.3 It is recognised that fire and rescue services are all at different stages of their engagement in VAWG work. As such, the NFCC has produced guidance that provides suggestions of ways to either introduce or enhance existing work both internally with the workforce and externally with the community. A NFCC working group was formed of cross sector colleagues and held meetings in May, June, July and early September of 2025 to draft the guidance. This was approved at NFCC Chiefs Council in November. A closed consultation process took place during September with a group of identified specialists (PCL and Safeguarding), internal stakeholders, external stakeholders and partner organisations who provided feedback. Respondents included trade unions, national staff networks, Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, College of Policing, White Ribbon UK, Equality and Human Rights Commission and academics at Nottingham Trent University.
- 3.4 On 30 December 2025, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Kristine Ward was appointed as Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) VAWG lead officer feeding back into the NFCC.
- 3.5 The government set themselves a target of halving VAWG and consider that public sector organisations have a role to play in achieving this. The government on the 18 December 2025 published its violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy.
- 3.6 This has been welcomed by many, such as the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), who welcomed the publication of this strategy. They said this was “*The first of its kind under the Labour government. This is an important milestone in our mission to build a world where women and girls are free from violence and abuse*”.
- 3.7 The Strategy is built on three objectives: prevention & early intervention to address the root causes of abuse; the relentless pursuit of its perpetrators; and support for all those affected by violence and abuse when it happens.
- 3.8 Within the government VAWG strategy, Fire is directly only mentioned in relation to this in His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). For context, this is in relation to Police Reform and Prioritisation (page 43) and the Endnotes.
- 3.9 This said however, we clearly do have a number of duties in relation to supporting this strategy. For example, the duty for individuals undertaking key roles with responsibility for children in England to report sexual abuse and creating a new criminal offence of obstructing an individual from making a report under this duty. This will support the coordinated approach, as set out from page 45 of the strategy.
- 3.10 Within the fire service we come into contact with our communities in many different ways. In 2024/25 CFB completed 21,797 Safer Homes Visits. For each of these, CFB staff were going into people’s homes and could identify signs of VAWG crimes. Additionally, our staff may be subjected to violence in relation to VAWG and we have a duty to look after and protect them.

- 3.11 The strategy is clear when reading the Joint Ministerial Forward, for which the below is an extract from:

“Violence against women and girls must become a mainstream responsibility of every institution that interacts with people. It should no longer be an add on when someone dies or lessons learned after a tragedy”

- 3.12 White Ribbon UK is the leading charity in England and Wales engaging men and boys to end men’s violence against women and girls. White Ribbon aims to prevent violence against women and girls by addressing the root causes of men’s violence against women: harmful attitudes, behaviours and systems around rigid gender norms and harmful expressions of masculinity that perpetuate gender inequality and gender-based violence.
- 3.13 The White Ribbon is the globally recognised symbol to end men’s violence against women and girls. Since the inception of the White Ribbon movement 34 years ago in Canada, the White Ribbon has become an important symbol in the fight to end gender-based violence.
- 3.14 Allyship is a central message of the White Ribbon; it represents men taking responsibility to challenge this issue and being allies, every day, to stop violence against women and girls before it starts.
- 3.15 On 4 December 2024, Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Peter Rickard, was selected as one of 16 advocates supporting the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland campaign for White Ribbon UK’s #16DaysOfActivism to challenge and eliminate violence against women and girls.
- 3.16 Since taking on this role, the CFO had a number of staff members speak to him about White Ribbon in relation to how the Brigade can support the campaign and share their ideas and experiences.
- 3.17 The CFO took the decision, supported by Human Resources, to develop and grow the Brigade support of White Ribbon in 2025. Very quickly, staff across all areas, including the Communications Team, took ownership of this resulting in:
- Over 20 members of staff becoming White Ribbon Ambassador or Champions. More may have joined, however this is the number of staff who have informed us.
 - A series of presentations produced by staff of the topic, including a presentation to the Executive Leadership Team.
 - In 2025 the Brigade developed a plan and strategy to support our recognition of the 16 Days of Activism. This included a number of activities throughout the campaign including:
 - Temporary Station Manager Mark Fisher was a guest speaker at the 2025 “Break the Silence Event” held across the North East. Mark was also a winner of the CFB 2025 People Awards. This was in recognition for the work he is doing to raise awareness of White Ribbon and educating men around violence against women and girls.
 - The Launch of our White Ribbon Steering Group.
 - The first of our coffee and catch-up meetings which are open to all staff.

- 3.18 Some of the above was covered in the December 2025 edition of FireWire, which has been shared with all Members of the Fire Authority.

4. SUPPORT FROM CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY MEMBERS

- 4.1 At the White Ribbon Coffee and Catch-up event on 4 December 2025 Ambassadors and Champions made two requests from the Fire Authority which were:
- For Members to receive a presentation from the Brigade's White Ribbon Steering Group outlining the work being undertaken
 - That Members of the Fire Authority consider becoming White Ribbon Ambassadors or Champions

5. FUTURE UPDATES

- 5.1 Members of the Fire Authority will be provided with a further update on the work of CFB in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the next 12 months.

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