

Non-Executive Report of the: COUNCIL 23 January 2019	
Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer	Classification: Unrestricted
Motion for debate submitted by the Administration	

Originating Officer(s)	Matthew Mannion, Committee Services Manager, Democratic Services.
Wards affected	All wards

SUMMARY

1. Council Procedure Rule 11 allows for time at each Ordinary Council meeting for the discussion of one specific Motion submitted by the Administration. The debate will follow the rules of debate at Council Procedure Rule 13 and will last no more than 30 minutes.
2. The motion submitted is listed overleaf. The Administration Motion is submitted by the Labour Group.
3. Motions must be about matters for which the Council or its partners has a direct responsibility. A motion may not be moved which is substantially the same as a motion which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the previous six months; or which proposes that a decision of the Council taken in the previous six months be rescinded; unless notice of the motion is given signed by at least twenty Members.
4. Notice of any proposed amendments to the Motions must be given to the Monitoring Officer by Noon the day before the meeting.

MOTION

Set out overleaf is the motion that has been submitted.

7 – Administration Motion regarding Violence against Women and Girls services (VAWG)

Proposer: Councillor Eve McQuillan

Seconder: Councillor Asma Begum

This Council notes:

Addressing violence against women and girls is a priority for London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Approximately 70% of all known victims of interpersonal violence in Tower Hamlets are female and 1 in 3 women and girls will experience gender based violence in their lifetime with similar levels of domestic abuse in LGBT relationships and in heterosexual relationships, regardless of gender. In the UK, two women are murdered each week by a current or former partner, and 1 in 5 will be raped in her lifetime.

Since 2010, VAWG services have been decimated. Nationally, the majority of women who seek a refuge space are turned away because there is not enough space. Since 2015, this administration has chosen not to cut funding for VAWG services. The council launched its VAWG charter in November, as part of our manifesto commitments to tackle violence against women and girls.

Tower Hamlets has a multi-agency strategy in place to address violence against women and girls. As a council

- We have maintained all of our specialist refuge provision for women and girls fleeing abuse
- We have piloted and commissioned innovative new programmes, such as Female Genital Mutilation Community Engagement Programme and a Multiple Disadvantages VAWG Project
- We have maintained provision of life saving Independent Domestic Violence Advocates and Serious and Violent Crime Caseworkers.
- We have maintained our resources for our Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, Specialist Domestic Violence Courts, Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop, Sanctuary Scheme and Positive Change Services, including work with children living with domestic abuse
- We have developed the VAWG Champions Programmes and preventative VAWG programmes within schools and with young people across the borough.
- We run campaigns such as 16 Days of Activism, reaching around 1,000 residents each year, Ask for Angela in the night time economy and our Domestic Abuse No Excuse campaign.

Refuges are currently partly funded by housing benefit. This excludes those who are ineligible for housing benefit because they have no recourse to public funds. It also excludes those who are ineligible because they are working; leading to the perverse situation where people needing to access refuge spaces may have to leave their jobs, making themselves more vulnerable, in order to access help, or have to pay extremely high costs themselves. The government has tried ring-fence funding for 'supported housing services'. This funding structure is unsuitable for refuge provision because it incentivises councils to provide generic supportive housing services for older people, people with drug and alcohol dependencies, street homeless people and domestic violence survivors, rather than specialised services.

Refuge spaces are allocated on a multi-local authority basis, meaning that people likely won't be placed in the local authority in which they live. This means that when other councils cut funding for refuge services, women from Tower Hamlets are affected.

The biggest barrier to women leaving abusive situations is housing, with domestic abuse one of the leading causes of homelessness amongst women. The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) and Women's Aid have created the Make a Stand pledge which includes the following 4 commitments:

1. To put in place and embed a policy to support residents who are experiencing domestic abuse
2. To make information about national and local domestic abuse support services available on your website and in other places which are easily accessible to residents and staff
3. To put in place a HR policy and procedure on domestic abuse, or to incorporate this into an existing policy, to support members of staff who are experiencing domestic abuse
4. Appoint a champion in your organisation to own the activity you are doing to support people experiencing domestic abuse.

Universal credit payments to a single account for a whole household present a risk that perpetrators will gain control over a victim's finances.

This Council believes:

It is alarming that other councils have chosen to cut VAWG provision which has led to a reduction in refuge spaces.

Housing benefit should not be used to fund refuge spaces. Instead there should be ring-fenced funding for domestic violence services so that they are available for anyone who needs them, regardless of immigration status or income.

Whilst LBTH cannot deal with this issue alone, as councillors we are able to play a role by championing VAWG initiatives in our casework and our communities, and as a council we can campaign for better funding.

Universal credit makes those experiencing domestic abuse more vulnerable.

It is wrong that it is often the victim who loses the secure tenancy, rather than the perpetrator.

This Council resolves:

1. To call on all members of the council to become VAWG champions.
2. We will campaign for adequate funding for refuges and call on the council to champion this issue.
3. To call on the mayor and the lead member to advise other boroughs of the dangers of reducing funding for refuge services.
4. To ensure that this borough has adequate refuge spaces that meet the level of need.

5. To campaign to encourage all RSLs in Tower Hamlets to sign up to the Make a Stand pledges, improving their services for victims and survivors of domestic violence.
6. To call on MPs to advocate for increases to funding levels to domestic violence services so that funding at least matches 2010 levels. We call on them to campaign for changes to the funding structure for refuge provision in parliament, so that funding is ring-fenced specifically for refuges. We also call on them to campaign for split payments to reduce the risk of financial abuse.