


Non-Executive Report of the: Health and Wellbeing Board 23 rd September 2024	
Report of: Simon Baxter, Corporate Director, Communities Ann Corbett, Director of Community Safety Simon Smith, Head of Community Safety	Classification: Unrestricted
Report Title: VAWG and Womens' Safety Strategy	

Originating Officer(s)	Adam Price, Strategy and Policy Lead HASC, Tower Hamlets Council
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

This item is for Health and Wellbeing Board to note Tower Hamlet's VAWG and Women's Safety Strategy and appendices ahead of this work completing the final stages of sign-off internally within Tower Hamlets Council, and for discussion thereof.

Recommendations:

That the Health & Wellbeing Board discuss their ownership, responsibility and contribution to this strategy as particular emphasis is placed on strengthening systems leadership to ensure preventing "VAWG is everyone's business".

Health and Wellbeing Strategy:

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy is grounded upon 6 principles that matter most to residents of Tower Hamlets. Detail how this report relates to these principles:

1. Resources to support health and wellbeing should go to those who most need it
VAWG services are need-led, and having experienced forms of VAWG is likely to significantly affect the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors.

2. Feeling connected and included is a foundation of wellbeing and the importance of this should be built into services and programme
The VAWG needs assessment process involved a great deal of engagement with those affected by VAWG crimes to seek their views and help shape our approach, and the results of this have been included within the needs assessment and strategy.
3. Being treated equally, respectfully and without discrimination should be the norm when using services
4. Health and wellbeing information and advice should be clear, simple, and produced with those who will benefit from them
5. People should feel that they have equal power in shaping and designing services and programme that impact on their health and wellbeing
The VAWG needs assessment process involved a great deal of engagement with those affected by VAWG crimes to seek their views and help shape our approach, and the results of this have been included within the needs assessment and strategy. This work will inform service development, and services themselves are committed to seeking the views of and involving experts by experience and those using services wherever possible and practicable.
6. We should all be working together to make the best use of the assets we already have that support people's health and wellbeing.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

1.1. N/A – No decision required.

2. ALTERNATOVE OPTIONS

2.1. N/A – No decision required.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1. This new Strategy has been informed by the detailed Public Health VAWG Needs Assessment carried out in 2023 which was published in January 2024. This document sets out the evidence of local need, makes recommendations for interventions and has been informed by consultation with over 370 residents and 120 professionals via surveys, face to face and focus groups. It is also supported by the Mayor's Advisor for Women and Equalities.
- 3.2. The Strategy document has been developed through workshops with a wide range of residents, those with lived experience and other stakeholders. Experts by experience have participated in the process and contributed in particular to the development of the equalities implications and the Equalities Impact Assessment process. This was delivered in collaboration with the Cornerstone Project.
- 3.3. Tower Hamlets is a young, diverse borough, with almost half of our residents between the ages of 20yrs and 39yrs, made up of a diverse population including the largest Bangladeshi population in the country.
- 3.4. We know that younger women, women with disabilities and Black, Asian and Minority ethnic women are more likely to experience gender-based violence and face added barriers in accessing support.
- 3.5. This is reflected in the fact that Tower Hamlets has the fourth highest rate of domestic abuse offences per 1,000 population in London in 2022-2023, and the second highest in North East London, after LB Barking and Dagenham, for the period 2019-2023 (Mayors Office Policing & Crime Report 2023).
- 3.6. In 2023-24, the Met Police received 4519 domestic abuse reports from LBTH residents. Tower Hamlets partnership features in the top five London boroughs for reported domestic abuse offences to police in terms of raw numbers. Five domestic homicides took place between 2019 and 2023 and have been reviewed in line with the legislation to understand learning across the system.
- 3.7. Significant work and achievements to tackle VAWG have been delivered under the previous strategy between 2019-2024. This has included:
 - Delivering 577 training and community outreach activities to raise awareness and tackle misogyny. Training 9817 professionals in a range of topics including coercive control, adult family violence, economic abuse, intimate partner violence, domestic abuse awareness, and good practice for housing professionals.
 - Mainstreaming and raising awareness of VAWG and misogyny through the training and development of 220 VAWG champions
 - Commissioning and providing specialist support for victims of VAWG. Tower Hamlets Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)

Provision received 6382 referrals during this period, with a 96% satisfaction rate and 93% of victims feeling safer post support. This offer is developed and includes culturally appropriate services such as Somali specific casework and a dedicated Sylheti speaking IDVA

3.8. Additional achievements and work during this period is set out in Appendix 5.

3.9. The new strategy for 2024-2029 aims to broaden the scope and the approach to all forms of gender-based violence. The new Strategy will now encompass the work that the Council is undertaking beyond the criminal justice and community safety VAWG service. This Strategy takes into consideration the findings from the recent groundbreaking Tower Hamlets gender-inclusive design report and its recommendations, the council's Equalities Action Plan, and there is a need to be flexible to ensure it is fully aligned with work that will arise from new and developing initiatives such as the Tower Hamlets Women's Commission.

3.10. Several significant ambitious developments are taking place during the lifetime of the new strategy. As highlighted below:

- Our newly created Women's Commission will be undertaking work to increase our understanding of the lived experience of women in Tower Hamlets. We will take forward their recommendations for ensuring greater participation within the borough and the Commission will lead on bold new initiatives related to the needs of all women locally
- We will deliver the Mayor's new flagship Women's Centre that will provide outreach programmes, workshops, and create a safe space for women in Tower Hamlets
- Our services will feed into and take forward actions from the forthcoming new Trans Needs Assessment to better understand and address gendered violence in the borough in relation to our trans community.
- Experts by experience - we will involve women's groups and networks more closely in the commissioning of services
- We will put in place additional tools including a toolkit and advisory hub to support professionals in working with perpetrators and address the training needs they have identified.
- Systemic change - professionals and practitioners across the organisation will understand the links between VAWG, serious youth violence, contextual harm, and modern slavery and will provide a safe, consistent and supportive response

3.11. Within the new strategy, particular emphasis is placed on:

- Strengthening systems leadership – “VAWG is everyone's business” and it will be crucial to ensure system change, responsibility and accountability and ownership from all stakeholders and services involved.
- An intersectional approach – recognising the way that different characteristics can compound vulnerabilities and ensuring that our offer addresses the specific or specialist needs that people will have

as a result. We will work to identify intersecting inequalities for those experiencing multiple disadvantages. And to ensure services address the connections between VAWG, discrimination, housing need substance use, mental ill-health and safeguarding.

3.12. The work within the strategy falls within three overarching priorities:

- 1) Prevention and Safety;
- 2) Supporting Victims and Survivors; and
- 3) Responding to Perpetrators.

3.13. Within each of these priorities we have identified key areas of focus where we will build on the significant good work done under the former strategy to improve on what is already in place, based on the evolving evidence of need with expert input from stakeholders, experts by experience, residents and professionals.

3.14. The strategy will be supported by a detailed action plan, which is in development in collaboration with the VAWG Steering Group, as well as the Mayor's Advisor for Women and Equalities, the council's VAWG Service and other key stakeholders. The Tower Hamlets Women's Commission commenced in June 2024. The Commission has been approached as part of this developmental strategy work. The Commission will provide a steer on the degree to which it will be involved in and/or inform the development of this detailed action plan to support the new strategy.

3.15. The Strategy will be delivered within current budgets and the existing resourcing envelope.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Equalities impact analysis was supported by a range of residents and members of local voluntary and community organisations, who between them covered a wide variety of different equalities characteristics, through the Cornerstone Project coordinated by Tower Hamlets CVS.

4.2. An Equalities Impact Screening Tool is provided at the end of this document and an Equalities Impact Assessment is provided in Appendix 2. In addressing support for victims and survivors the partnership recognises the importance of understanding the factors affecting each individual's journey and considering how questions of intersectionality can compound difficulties through discrimination, disability or disadvantage.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Effective partnership working and community engagement is an important way for councils to deliver their best value duty. Guidance on best value

standards is clear that “Authorities should have a clear understanding of and focus on the benefits that can be gained by effective collaborative working with local partners and community engagement in order to achieve its strategic objectives and key outcomes for local people”. This strategy supports the delivery of the Best Value duty via work with residents and partners to understand VAWG in the borough and tackle associated harms.

- 5.2. Since 2011, there have been 14 Domestic Homicide Reviews commissioned totalling approximately £130,000. This does not include the wider cost implications to service providers such as Social Care, schools, criminal justice agencies and health providers involved in managing the support provided to victims. The estimated cost to public services for a victim of domestic abuse is £34,015 and £58,860 for a victim of rape. Furthermore, the human cost of the physical and emotional impact of abuse significantly outweighs any immediate financial cost. Hence earlier intervention, prevention and safeguarding work is key to ensuring best value for money and a more invest to save approach has been adopted.
- 5.3. VAWG services play an important role in safeguarding residents in the borough and managing the risks faced from gender-based violence.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1. The delivery of the Strategy is supported by funding provided from MOPAC (£140k), Public Health grant (£476k) and a £70k recharge for the Sanctuary scheme from the HRA. This funding is ring fenced for use on delivering these projects contained within the Strategy.
- 6.2. The Violence against Women & Girl’s (VAWG) service has a net budget of £0.494m, comprising gross expenditure totalling £1.237m for staffing and the provision of funding to third party service providers, offset by income of £0.743m in the form of grants and recharges from internal service users.
- 6.3. Any spend requirements above these budgeted levels will require MTFS growth as part of the budget setting process.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1. Refreshing the VAWG strategy complies with a number of the Council’s key safeguarding duties. The Care Act 2014 sets out the council’s duties to safeguard adults who are experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect. The Act also sets out the council’s duties to ensure the provision of preventative services, promote wellbeing when carrying out any of their care and support functions (this includes protection from abuse and neglect), cooperate with relevant partners and provide information about services available in the area that can prevent abuse and support.

7.2. The Children Act 1989 provides the legislative framework relating to the council's duty to protect children from abuse and neglect and to promote the welfare of all children and young people in their area. The Children Act 2004 places duties on a council to ensure its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to cooperate with other agencies to promote the well-being of children.

7.3. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the authority, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the 2010 Act, to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, and to foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. The duty must be complied with at the time that the decision under consideration, but it is not a duty to achieve a particular result.

7.4. Section 17(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires an authority, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the likely effect of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent: crime and disorder; the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances; re-offending; serious violence. With respect to serious violence, s.17(1A) imposes a duty on the Council to do all it reasonably can to prevent people from becoming involved in serious violence and to reduce instances of serious violence. The duty applies with respect to the local authority's area.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices

- See accompanying documentation