


Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
16 October 2024	
Report of: Simon Baxter - Corporate Director, Communities	Classification: [Unrestricted]
Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) and Women's Safety Strategy	

Lead Member	Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities
Originating Officer(s)	Adam Price, Strategy and Policy Lead
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
Forward Plan Notice Published	13/08/2024
Exempt information	N/A
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Priority 5: Investing in public services Priority 6: Empowering communities and fighting crime

Executive Summary

The Council's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-2024 expires this year, and a new strategy has been produced to set out our approach and priorities for 2024 to 2029. The Mayor in Cabinet is asked to approve the proposed strategy and consider how the council can deliver a truly holistic cross system response to support delivery of this important strategy across the whole organisation.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the council's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Women's Safety Strategy (Appendix 1).
2. Acknowledge that addressing and preventing violence against women and girls requires a whole system response and consider how members can support the delivery of this across the organisation, improving and strengthening system leadership of this cross cutting and critical agenda.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This strategy has been informed and is underpinned by the VAWG Needs Assessment (Appendix 3) carried out in 2023 and published in January 2024. This data led assessment sets out a strong evidence base of local need. It has also been informed by consultation with over 370 residents, experts by experience and 120 professionals via surveys, face to face engagement and dedicated focus groups. This important work was supported by the Mayor's Advisor for Women and Equalities and professionals across the Council.
- 1.2 The Strategy has been developed through workshops with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. Experts by experience have participated in the consultation and they have contributed in particular to the assessment of the equalities considerations and the Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) which supports this strategy. This work was delivered in collaboration with the Cornerstone Project.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Mayor could decline to approve the strategy and require substantial revision and changes to the structure before returning for approval on another occasion. However, this would result in further delays while the changes were made and have a significant impact on the development of other strategies in this area that are currently being scoped and taken forward.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Tower Hamlets is a young, diverse borough, with almost half of our residents between the ages of 20yrs and 39yrs. The Borough has largest Bangladeshi population in the country.
- 3.2 The needs assessment highlights that younger woman, women with disabilities and Black, Asian and minority ethnic women are more likely to experience gender-based violence and they face added barriers in accessing support.

- 3.3 This is also 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 and Crime 2023).
- 3.4 In 2023-24, the Police received 4519 domestic abuse reports from our residents. Tower Hamlets is one of the top five London boroughs for domestic abuse offences in terms of raw numbers. Nine domestic homicides have taken place between 2019 and 2024 with four of those occurring within the last 12 months.
- 3.5 A significant amount of work to tackle VAWG has been delivered under the previous partnership strategy between 2019-2024. This has included:
- Commissioning and providing specialist support for victims of VAWG. Tower Hamlets Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) The Service received 6382 referrals during this period, with a 96% satisfaction rate and 93% of victims feeling safer post support. This offer includes culturally appropriate services such as Somali specific casework and a dedicated Sylheti speaking IDVA
 - A new Family Nurse Partnership to improve identification and support to first time mothers experiencing intimate partner violence
 - Mainstreaming VAWG considerations in the Council's new licensing policy and making the nighttime economy safer. Dedicated work with the Licensing Service to deliver sexual harassment in the nighttime economy training for licensees alongside their WAVE programme
 - Tackling misogyny in the nighttime economy via the development of a groundbreaking anti-misogyny campaign with LB Hackney and City of London.
 - Development of a dedicated Economic Abuse Programme of work implemented in the borough including co-location of support for victims with Dept for Works & Pensions (DWP)
 - Protecting victims in their own homes. Accommodation support via the dedicated Sanctuary Scheme. This project provides free, tailored security for the homes. There are 333 installations and up to 60 victims of domestic abuse are supported per year so they can remain safely in the borough close to their support networks.
 - The Council continues to fund and invest in 34 refuge bed spaces, including culturally specific provision.
 - Development of a dedicated offer for women involved in prostitution and selling survival sex.
 - Commissioned a local research report into off street prostitution.
- 3.6 Additional detail on the achievements and challenges faced in this area are included under Appendix 5.
- 3.7 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 community safety

partnership and the Criminal Justice system. This strategy takes into consideration the recommendations from the recent groundbreaking Tower Hamlets gender-inclusive design report (Appendix 4), and the council's Equalities Action Plan. It is recognised that there is a need for it to be flexible to ensure it is fully aligned with new and developing initiatives such as the Tower Hamlets Women's Commission.

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

- The newly created Women's Commission will be undertaking work to increase our understanding of the lived experience of women across Tower Hamlets. We will take forward their recommendations for ensuring greater participation within the borough. 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 all 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 Violence Against Women and Girls, serious youth violence, contextual harm, and modern slavery and will provide a safe, consistent and supportive professional response.

3.9 The work within the strategy falls within three overarching priorities:

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

3.10 Within each of these priorities we have identified key areas of focus where we will build on the platform of the good work done under the former strategy. We seek to continuously 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.

3.11 The strategy is supported by a detailed action plan, (Appendix 6) which has been developed in collaboration with the multi-agency Violence Against Women and Girls Steering Group and the Council's VAWG service, the Mayor's Advisor for Women and Equalities, and other key stakeholders. The Action Plan will continue to develop and will be an iterative process. It will require whole system leadership to deliver it.

- 3.12 The Strategy itself does not have additional costs. The council and partner organisations will contribute through their own existing strategies, programmes of work and planning cycles.

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 a completed Equalities Impact Assessment is included 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 This report is seeking approval of a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) 2024-2029. The delivery of this strategy is supported by several funding streams in 2024/25. Consisting of MHCLG (£0.14m), Public Health grant (£0.48m), MOPAC (£0.09m) and contributions towards Sanctuary

Scheme from the HRA (£0.08m). The funding received is ring fenced for use on delivering these projects contained within this Strategy.

- 6.2 The Violence against Women & Girls service has a net budget of £0.48m in 2024/25, comprising of gross expenditure budget totalling £1.27m for staffing and the provision of funding to third party service providers, offset by income of £0.79m in the form of grants and recharges from internal service users.
- 6.3 Any resource requirements above budgeted levels will require additional funding to be sought or managed through in year cost reductions across wider Community Safety Service budgets. Grant awards from external bodies do not provide funding confirmations for the entire period of VAWG Strategy 2024-2029, uncertainties around future grant funding will be managed as part of annual 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 with respect to this report 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

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – VAWG and Women's Safety Strategy 2024-2029
- Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 3 – VAWG and Women's Safety Public Health Needs Assessment
- Appendix 4 – Tower Hamlets Gender Inclusive Design Report
- Appendix 5 – Delivery Achievements, Challenges & Reflections VAWG Strategy 2019-2024
- Appendix 6 – VAWG Delivery / Action Plan 2024 - 2029

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

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Equalities screening tool

<p>Is there a potential that the policy, proposal or activity covered by this form disproportionately adversely impacts (directly or indirectly) on any of the groups of people listed below?</p> <p>Please consider the impact on overall communities, residents, service users and council employees. If you have answered Yes to one or more of the groups of people listed above, a full Equality Impact Analysis is required.</p> <p>This should include people of different:</p>	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sex 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Race 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Religion or Philosophical belief 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sexual Orientation 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender re-assignment status 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People who have a Disability (physical, learning difficulties, mental health and medical conditions) 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marriage and Civil Partnerships status 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People who are Pregnant and on Maternity 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>You should also consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents and Carers ▪ Socio-economic status ▪ People with different Gender Identities e.g. Gender fluid, non-binary etc. ▪ Other 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>