

Committee/Meeting: Cabinet	Date: 9 January 2013	Classification: Unrestricted	Report No: CAB 64/123
Report of: Corporate Director: Stephen Halsey		Title: The Violence Against Women and Girls Plan	
Originating officers: Emily Fieran- Reed, Head of Community Safety and Sharmeen Narayan, Domestic Violence & Hate Crime Manager		Wards Affected: All wards	

Lead Member	Councillor Ohid Ahmed
Community Plan Theme	Safe and Cohesive
Strategic Priority	Violence against Women and Girls

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This is Tower Hamlets first 'Violence against Women & Girls' Plan which is a development of the Domestic Violence Action Plan. The VAWG Plan consolidates the activities undertaken by the Council and its key partners in addressing violence against women and girls by promoting joint planning and implementation, raising awareness of the issues, promoting safeguarding processes and delivering support.
- 1.2 The VAWG Plan reflects the Council's continued commitment to identifying and challenging gender specific violence and providing effective support and advocacy for survivors and their families. The Plan, which reflects the fact that 97% of all reported gender specific violence in the Borough is against females, highlights the following types of violence that the borough is committed to addressing:

Rape and sexual violence
Domestic Violence
Human Trafficking
Prostitution and Sex working
Sexual Exploitation
Gang related (criminal) initiation practises for women and girls
Female Genital Mutilation
Forced Marriage
Honour based violence
Dowry related abuse
Harassment
Stalking

- 1.3 A newly appointed VAWG Plan Manager will be responsible for leading the Plan and supporting organisations to fulfil their responsibilities set out in the VAWG Action Grid.
- 1.4 This is a partnership document and the VAWG Plan reflects the Partnerships commitment to addressing all gender specific violence & abuse against women.
- 1.5 We have consulted extensively with statutory and voluntary services, community organisations, schools and faith groups to promote the purpose of the Plan and encourage organisational and service user feedback in response to it.

2. **DECISIONS REQUIRED**

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to –

- 2.1 Agree the Violence Against Women and Girls Plan as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Consider the equality analysis in Appendix 2.
- 2.3 Note that the Violence Against Women and Girls Plan has been prepared with the Council's major partners to be the appropriate detailed service and partnership framework for addressing all forms of violence against women and girls within the Borough.

3. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 3.1 Addressing violence against women & girls is already recognised as a priority area regionally, nationally & internationally. The UN declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1993. This was followed by a resolution of intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women in 2009.
- 3.2 In 2010, the Mayor of London published 'The Way Forward', a London-wide plan aimed to end all forms of violence against women in the capital. In 2011 the coalition government published its 'Call to end violence against women & girls' which outlines the responsibility of local authorities to co-ordinate their response to VAWG issues.
- 3.3 The Mayor of Tower Hamlets has been proactive in supporting work in this area and it forms part of the Mayors priority to drive down violent crime in the Borough. Tower Hamlets VAWG Plan takes a pro-active partnership approach to addressing this problem and makes a strong statement about the Council's commitment to safeguarding adults & children & pursuing gender equality.

4. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- *Do not have a VAWG Plan.* This would result in fragmented service planning between partners, duplication, lack of focus and inefficient use of

scarce resources by all of the key partners engaged in reducing violence against women and girls.

- *Do not agree this plan but ask for a different plan with different priorities.* This plan has been prepared in close consultation with all of the Council's major partners engaged in reducing violence against women and girls. As such it represents a shared platform of joint priorities that best reflect the way to maximise cross sector and organisation impact. The Plan has been based on established Council priorities to date and such a decision would cause significant delay to the process of joint planning and the achievement of more effective outputs for the Women and Girls at risk in the Borough.

5. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Violence Against Women and Girls Plan is a development of the existing Domestic Violence Action Plan and builds upon the recognition between partner organisations that success in combating this problem requires agencies to work more effectively together. The need for a plan that achieves this is especially significant in the current economic climate where there have been substantial cuts in funding to relevant support services across the Public Sector including Women's refuges and Legal Aid. The forthcoming welfare benefit reforms which are due to commence on 1st April 2013 will also increase the challenges faced by survivors of violence in securing access to safe accommodation at an affordable rent close to their jobs, social or family support networks or their children's schools.
- 5.2 Faced with increasingly difficult choices resulting from the above reforms there is a clear risk that higher numbers of Women may choose to remain living in situations where they and their children continue to be at further risk of violence.
- 5.3 The VAWG Plan brings key local partners together to minimise the adverse impact of the economic environment and welfare reforms on critical support areas for women and girls at risk whilst increasing efficiency and promoting more effective joint planning and delivery. The last 12 months have seen the setting up of the boroughs Domestic Violence One Stop Shop, The HPU Domestic Violence Service and a Domestic Violence Service at the Barkentine Medical Centre. These services have been developed to include support and advice addressing all VAWG related issues

6. BODY OF REPORT

- 6.1 The Plan takes forward a dialogue with Community Groups and Service users that started with a comprehensive consultation exercise in 2010/11 and continued until September 2012.
- 6.2 Formal consultation has taken place with the Safeguarding Boards and the Domestic Violence Forum and informal consultation has taken place with key partner individuals. It has been approved by the Safeguarding Adults Board,

Children's and Domestic Violence Safeguarding Board, the Domestic Violence Forum, No place for Hate Forum and endorsed by the Community Safety Partnership. All agencies have demonstrated a commitment to further developing and implementing the actions set out within it.

6.3 Consultation has also been completed with Public Health, The Children's Partnership Board, Supporting People and The Homeless and Hostel Boards.

6.4 A VAWG service user involvement initiative is also under development to further ensure that service user experiences and opinions form part of an on going feedback processes with wider feedback reviewed on a quarterly basis.

6.5 The Plan has 4 core objectives:

- Developing further understanding of the VAWG plan & its impact
- Prevention of VAWG
- Identifying appropriate support & protection for women & children
- Holding perpetrators accountable for their actions

6.6 Contained within the Plan is an action grid setting out how the Council and key partner agencies and organisations will work together to better address VAWG issues. It includes future work plans and outcomes for the next 12 months. The content has been agreed by the Partnership agencies that have engaged in the development of the Plan and reflects the breadth of interventions necessary to address the complex range of issues that VAWG presents.

7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

7.1 Council agreed at its meeting on 22nd February 2012 to allocate £50,000 to fund the VAWG Plan manager post. Resources have been identified to fund the post for three years and have been included within Communities, Localities and Culture base budget. The Plan manager post will not start till midway through the current financial year and therefore will run past the 31st March 2015 the budget will need to be amended to reflect this.

8. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)

8.1 The Violence Against Women and Girls Plan sets out how the Council proposes to deliver on a key element of its crime and disorder reduction strategy, adopted pursuant to section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Council's strategy for preventing violence against women and girls is aligned with its commitment in the Tower Hamlets Community Plan to achieving One Tower Hamlets.

8.2 The actions set out in the draft plan appear capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. Officers will need to ensure this is the case as final actions are planned and implemented.

- 8.3 Before adopting the plan, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. Section 9 of the report and the equality analysis in Appendix 2 provide information relevant to these considerations.
- 8.4 Some of the actions proposed as part of the Violence Against Women and Girls Plan are specifically targeted at women and girls. This is reflective of the evidence available to the Council, which is reported in the equality analysis, that 97% of victims in Tower Hamlets are female. Section 158 of the Equality Act 2010 permits a limited range of positive action. The section applies where –
- persons who share a protected characteristic (such as gender) suffer a disadvantage connected to the characteristic,
 - persons who share a protected characteristic have needs that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it, or
 - participation in an activity by persons who share a protected characteristic is disproportionately low.
- 8.5 In those circumstances, action may be permitted which is a proportionate means of –
- enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to overcome or minimise that disadvantage,
 - meeting those needs, or
 - enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to participate in that activity.
- 8.6 Some of the actions proposed as part of the Violence Against Women and Girls Plan may not be specifically targeted at persons who share a protected characteristic (such as gender), but may in fact result in services being delivered in a way that benefits such people (e.g. women and girls). Such indirect discrimination would not be unlawful if it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. There is a good argument that: (a) combating violence against women and girls is a legitimate aim for reasons set out in the report; and (b) that the actions proposed in the action plan are proportionate means of achieving that aim.

9. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The Violence Against Women and Girls Plan seeks to address significant levels of gender specific violence which are currently a significant contributor

to the overall levels of Violent crime in the Borough. It is important to note that The Domestic Violence Team provide advice, support and services to all survivors of domestic and gender specific violence including men. The VAWG Plan seeks to address the substantial imbalance in the pattern of gender specific violence which is significantly towards women and girls by reducing the incidents and supporting the survivors of it.

- 9.2 The equality analysis in Appendix 2 sets out how the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010 have been taken into account in formulating the Violence Against Women and Girls Plan. This has led to some action being targeted in ways which may affect persons who share specified protected characteristics. In each instance the proposed measures are considered to be proportionate means of combating violence against women and girls. Overall the equality analysis concludes that the impacts of the plan by reference to the protected characteristics will be positive.

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1 There are no relevant implications for the above.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no relevant implications for the above.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

The VAWG plan seeks to proactively address issues related to crime and disorder in the following ways:

- Increase safety planning to survivors of violence, thereby minimising future risk
- Identifying appropriate protective measures for women and children through service provision and strong safeguarding practises
- Increased advocacy for survivors of abuse within the criminal justice system
- Hold perpetrators of violence accountable for their actions (For example, by promoting increased reporting of incidents/crime, encouraging agencies to take proactive measures against perpetrators of abuse and providing increased support for perpetrators to address their offending behaviour)

13. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

The Council has provided additional funding for a 3 year VAWG manager post. All relevant council services will be utilising existing budgets to deliver the relevant actions outlined in the plan. The Plan maximises joint planning and delivery with partners in this policy area and as such supports efficient use of resources.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Violence Against Women and Girls Plan
Appendix 2 - Equality Analysis

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

Brief description of “background papers” Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection.

None

N/A