


<b>Cabinet</b>  27 March 2019	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Denise Radley – Corporate Director Health, Adults and Community	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-24</b>	

<b>Lead Member</b>	<b>Cllr Asma Begum, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Equalities</b>
<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Stacey Bradburne Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Co-ordinator
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Forward Plan Notice Published</b>	n/a
<b>Reason for Key Decision</b>	n/a
<b>Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome</b>	<b>Priority 2: A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in / Outcome 7: People feel safer in their neighbourhoods and anti-social behaviour is tackled</b>

### Executive Summary

The Mayor's manifesto for the May 2018 local elections set out a commitment to make Tower Hamlets safer for women and girls, and pledged to build on the successful work previously undertaken as part of the Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) Strategy that was published in 2016.

To deliver this, the Council's Strategic Plan 2018/19 committed to the outcome of making 'people feel safer in their neighbourhoods and anti-social behaviour is tackled'. A key action was to publish a VAWG Charter, which was launched in November 2018 and set out the response that the victims of gender based violence in the borough could expect from the local authority and its partners.

The next stage in developing the work to protect women and girls from violence and oppression in Tower Hamlets is to refresh the VAWG Strategy, which is due to expire in March 2019. This paper sets out the refreshed strategy, reflecting on the achievements from the 2016-19 document and detailing a new set of priorities that will shape the Council's approach to VAWG over the next 5 years based on:

- 1) Support and Protection for Victims
- 2) Bringing Perpetrators to Justice
- 3) Engage with Communities to Raise Awareness and Challenge Misogyny

The refreshed strategy outlines the changing legislative and policy landscape around VAWG, and explains the rationale for having a separate VAWG strategy based on national statistics around the different VAWG strands.

The demographic of victims and perpetrators is outlined, based on national research. Statistics from our service user VAWG strategy consultation are included to highlight the impact of VAWG on our residents. Challenges in tackling VAWG such as resources, understanding the problem and misogynistic attitudes are highlighted. The Strategy explicitly mentions the financial pressures on the Council and offers reassurance that it will maintain a high standard of delivery for VAWG victims.

The Strategy also commits to a review of our current service model for victims of VAWG to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) explain how we have used service users and professionals' consultations to directly inform the strategy. We emphasise that men and boys are recognised as victims within this strategy.

The VAWG Strategy Steering Group will monitor the Action Plan which will drive delivery of the strategy to ensure outcomes are met. There is acknowledgement of other Tower Hamlets plans that have been considered when writing this strategy and a Logic Model outlines the interventions and desired short, medium and long term outcomes, which relate directly to the three priorities. A bibliography is included for the statistics referenced throughout the strategy.

### **Recommendations:**

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-24
2. Publish the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-24

### **1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

1.1 The Mayor's manifesto stated that tackling violence against women and girls would continue to be a high-priority for the Council. The current VAWG Strategy is due to expire in March 2019 and a refresh is required to ensure that the Council's approach is relevant to the current policy landscape and responsive to the high level of need in the borough.

1.2 The Strategy is intended to be an outcomes-focused, resident-facing summary of our priorities for tackling violence against women and girls over the next five years. This will include a review and revision of the current VAWG service delivery model. Details of the agreed actions to be taken will be included in an annual delivery plan, allowing for clear accountability in the performance, pace and delivery of the activities.

- 1.3 This strategy refresh is informed by recent research, wide local consultation, recognition of good practice from the previous strategy and the current financial climate.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Different priorities could be chosen.
- 2.2 Not having a public-facing strategy, but instead having the Charter to set out our overall approach and have an annual delivery plan.

## **3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 The 2019-24 Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy sets out the priorities of the Council and our partners on this issue, which have been informed by a series of service user and professional consultations. 'Supporting and Protecting Victims' aims to improve resident knowledge of where they can access VAWG support. This involves evaluating and adapting our current VAWG delivery model to reflect the needs of our residents. We aim to improve responses from professionals so that victims receive an appropriate response the first time they disclose and professionals feel confident in addressing victim needs.
- 3.2 'Engage with Communities to Raise Awareness and Challenge Misogyny' aims to inform the community and change misogynistic beliefs to ensure that women and girls feel safe within Tower Hamlets. Professionals will 'Think Family' and share information to ensure good partnership working improves safety for the whole family. Schools will be targeted in an attempt to start education on VAWG and challenge misogynistic attitudes from school age.
- 3.3 'Bringing Perpetrators to Justice' aims to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable by the criminal justice system and other agencies working with them. Perpetrators are able to 'hide' from changing their behaviour by failing to attend meetings or not engaging fully with agencies, leaving the burden of responsibility with the victim. We want to change this culture by holding agencies to account on what they are doing to disrupt perpetrator behaviour. The detail on how we will try to do this, who is accountable and which budget this will come from will be monitored through a Delivery Plan which is governed by the VAWG Steering Group with overall oversight provided by the statutory Community safety Partnership.
- 3.2 The Strategy will be supplemented by the new Violence against Women and Girls Charter.. All future VAWG commissioning intentions will be directly informed by the VAWG strategy and consultation process. The current VAWG delivery model will be reviewed and adapted based on consultation responses and relevant research.

## **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Strategy sets out a number of equalities issues and how these will be addressed. These can be summarised as follows:
- 4.2 This strategy reflects the reality that gender based violence is predominantly a pattern of behaviour perpetrated by men against women. One of the core aims of the strategy is to reduce gender inequality and discrimination. The strategy also recognises that any victim of violence and abuse deserves to access support and help: Whilst the focus of the strategy is women and girls, men and boys will also benefit, and we will support anyone presenting regardless of gender or sexuality.
- 4.3 Younger people are more likely to be subject to abuse. Pregnant women or women separated from their partner are more likely to experience domestic violence. Women on a low income, with a pre-existing mental health issue or younger women are at an increased risk of abuse<sup>1</sup>. The strategy includes actions to target these groups, for example, through targeted awareness-raising and training.
- 4.4 Certain forms of violence are more prevalent in particular communities – for example, girls in the UK whose families originate from an FGM practising community (in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia) are at a greater risk of FGM happening to them. The strategy includes actions to target these groups (for example, through targeted awareness-raising and training).

## **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
- 5.2 The VAWG strategy will contribute to the wider statutory responsibility to reduce crime and disorder. Tackling all forms of gender based violence will help to reduce the significantly high levels of crime affecting the borough. There are significant safeguarding risks and associated hidden harms for young people, vulnerable adults and within families. The VAWG strategy will support victims and aim to protect and safeguard them from further harm, and address the criminal behaviour of offenders.

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<sup>1</sup> Mayor of London, (2018) *The London Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*. Retrieved from [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/vawg\\_strategy\\_2018-21.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/vawg_strategy_2018-21.pdf) p. 26

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 In 2018/19 the gross expenditure budget for activities directly attributable to supporting the delivery of the VAWG strategy is £1.2m.
- 6.2 There are no immediate direct financial implications from the refreshed strategy. Consideration of the financial impact of the annual delivery plan will need to be programmed and factored in to the annual MTFS refresh

## **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 In the exercise of its functions, the Council must comply with the public sector equality duty to eliminate unlawful conduct such as discrimination, harassment and victimisation under the Equality Act 2010. The VAWG strategy is intended to address inequality in respect of persons on the grounds of their gender. Therefore, refresh of the strategy complies with these legal duties.

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### **Appendices**

Appendix I: Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-24

Appendix II: Service user and professionals consultations

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

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