



Tower Hamlets Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-24



Mayor and Councillor Begum Foreword

Violence against women and girls ('VAWG') is a key priority for this council and so we are pleased to present the Tower Hamlets Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. This strategy sets out our priorities for tackling all forms of gendered violence over the next five years, and sits alongside our ongoing commitment to this issue, articulated in our Violence Against Women and Girls Charter.

Tower Hamlets is a young, diverse borough, with almost half of our residents between the ages of 20 and 39 and we have the largest Bangladeshi population in the country. Although domestic abuse does not discriminate and reaches every corner of society, we recognise that younger women, women with disabilities and black, Asian and minority ethnic women face added barriers in accessing support.

This strategy is informed by both an understanding of the unique demographics of the Borough and through consultations with front-line staff and survivors, to whom we are greatly appreciative of for their contribution to this important piece of work.

This strategy builds on our existing commitments by setting three priority areas for action over the next five years, which cover support for victims, holding perpetrators accountable, engaging the community and challenging misogyny. These priorities are supported by a framework with measurable outcomes, which ensure that the council keeps on track in its commitments.

We know that gender inequality and negative attitudes towards women and girls are at the root of VAWG. We also know that the impacts of VAWG are far reaching and can be seen across a wide range of council services, including community safety, education, housing, employment and health. This is why this strategy takes a prevention focused, multi-agency approach and recognises that tackling VAWG is everyone's responsibility.

At a time where we are faced with significant reductions to funding, it is even more important that we work together as a community to tackle this vitally important social issue because everyone deserves to live free from violence and abuse.



John Biggs
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets



Councillor Asma Begum
Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for
Community Safety and Equalities

1. How England, London and Tower Hamlets prioritise tackling violence against women and girls



Increasingly over recent years, tackling violence against women in girls, in all its forms, has been recognised and prioritised

2. Scope of the strategy

How did you develop this strategy?

- Surveys and invitations to attend focus groups were sent to service user bodies within Tower Hamlets, for example the East London Mosque, Children's Centres, the Youth Council, Reset Recovery and the Migrant Project Network. 61 residents responded and their views have directly informed this strategy.
- 168 professionals representing diverse organisations including the Police, TOWER Pride, Health, Schools, the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations also gave their opinions, which have directly informed this strategy.
- Evidence, data and research at a national, regional and local level was analysed and used to inform this strategy.
- Domestic abuse has been addressed within this VAWG strategy to align with the Mayor of London and National VAWG strategies.

What were the main messages from residents, service users and professionals?

- Residents, service users and professionals all prioritised the need to challenge perpetrators and hold them to account. This priority is reflected in the strategy.
- Although awareness levels on where to go for help were good, the importance of awareness-raising campaigns and clear communication were highlighted. Interestingly, when asked which local groups have the strongest influence in raising awareness and challenging attitudes around VAWG, professionals believed that community members are most influential. In contrast, residents and service users think statutory agencies and other professionals have the most influence.
- Service users felt that more time for victims with knowledgeable staff who take a personalised approach would improve things. Professionals felt that more staff training would be helpful. Both highlighted the importance of considering language barriers in service provision, and both valued women-only spaces.

What about men and boys?

Any victim of violence and abuse deserves to access support and help. We will support anyone presenting regardless of gender or sexuality. However, this strategy reflects the reality that gender based violence is predominantly a pattern of behaviour perpetrated by men against women.

3. Why we need a strategy to tackle violence against women and girls

The highest concern raised via the Muslim Women's Helpline was domestic abuse. The second was mental health
(Muslim Women's Network 2017)

Two women are killed each week by a current or former partner in England and Wales
(ONS, 2016)

Women involved in on-street prostitution are 12 times more likely to be murdered than women not involved in prostitution
(Salfati, C. G. 2009)

64% of women have experienced sexual harassment in public, rising to 85% of women aged 18-24
(2016 YouGov survey)

47% of the cases requiring advice from the Forced Marriage Unit involved a child at risk of forced marriage
(Forced Marriage Unit, 2018)

21% of women aged 16-59 in England and Wales have been stalked by a partner or family member
(ONS, 2018)

An estimated 137,000 women and girls are affected by Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales
(Macfarlane, A. and Dorkenoo, E. (2015)

An estimated 20% of women and 4% of men have experienced some type of sexual assault since the age of 16
(Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2017)

Almost 1 in 4 human trafficking referrals involve sexual exploitation, of which 94% of victims are female
(National Crime Agency, 2018)

There were 145 referrals to the Crown Prosecution Service from the police for honour based violence related offences in 2017-2018
(CPS, 2018)

Domestic abuse accounts for a tenth of all crime reports to the Metropolitan Police
(Mayor of London VAWG Strategy, 2018)

Almost 560 children were trafficked for sexual exploitation last year
(National Crime Agency, 2018)

82% of students who were forced into a sexual act never reported it
(Brook, 2019)

In 2017 the Forced Marriage Unit provided advice and support to 1,196 possible forced marriage cases
(Forced Marriage Unit, 2018)

Dowry related abuse can include domestic abuse, sexual abuse, acid throwing, burning and other forms of violence

1 in 6 black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people have experienced domestic abuse in the past year
(Stonewell, 2018)

4. Who experiences abuse?

Anyone can be a victim of gender-based abuse. However, research indicates that:

- Younger people are more likely to be subject to abuse.¹
- Pregnant women or women separated from their partner are more likely to experience domestic abuse.²
- Women on a low income, with a pre-existing mental health issue or learning disability are at an increased risk of abuse.³
- Participation in prostitution significantly increases vulnerability.⁴
- Certain forms of abuse are more prevalent in particular communities – for example, girls in the UK whose families originate from a female genital mutilation practising community are at a greater risk of female genital mutilation happening to them.

5. Who are the perpetrators?

Men are most frequently reported as the offender for all strands of VAWG, other than female genital mutilation. Research carried out in 2016 at a London level indicates that perpetrators are more likely to be known to their victim.

- Perpetrators of domestic abuse are more likely to have a criminal conviction for other offences.⁵
- Evidence suggests that between 50-75% of rapists do so for the first time as teenagers.⁶
- Exposure to violence in childhood; presence of community norms that support domestic abuse against women; binge drinking; and harmful notions of masculinity and rigid gender roles appear consistently potent in their power to elevate risk of partner violence.⁷

¹ 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 p. 25

² Ibid

³ 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 p. 26

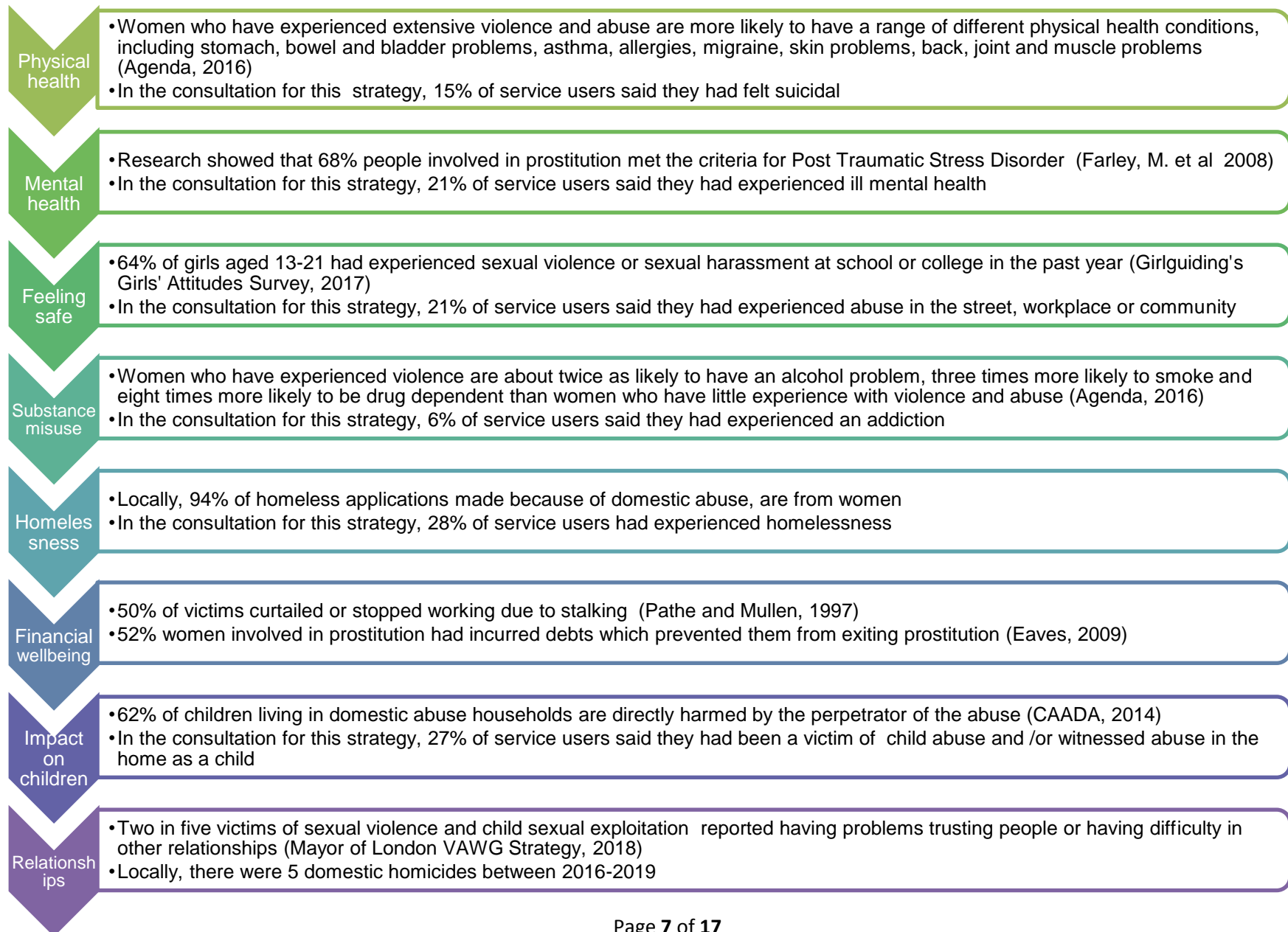
⁴ Ibid

⁵ 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 p. 30

⁶ Jewkes, Rachel. (2014) Summary of Evidence Review – State of the Field of Violence against Women and Girls, What Works to Prevent Violence. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337608/What-know-need-prevent-E.pdf

⁷ Jewkes, Rachel. (2014) Summary of Evidence Review – State of the Field of Violence against Women and Girls, What Works to Prevent Violence. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337608/What-know-need-prevent-E.pdf

6. The impact of violence against women and girls



7. Challenges

- **Misogyny and damaging social attitudes towards women and girls.** Gender inequality is understood to be an underlying factor in violence against women and girls. Community attitudes that tolerate violence against women and girls compound the shame experienced by victims, discourage them from seeking help and can give licence to perpetrators to continue their abuse. It can also contribute to services putting the onus on the victim to take action rather than the perpetrator to change their behaviour. Evidence suggests that negative gender attitudes are prevalent within society, with 39% of 16-21 year old girls believing that coercive and controlling behaviours in relationships have become normalised.⁸
- **People not getting the help they need.** Social and cultural norms which discourage victims from seeking help, a lack of understanding of where to go for help and a fear of repercussions are some of the significant and complex barriers that can prevent people from seeking help. These barriers can be exacerbated by language barriers, immigration status and other vulnerabilities.
- **Understanding the nature of the problem.** VAWG is a largely invisible crime and rates of abuse are believed to be significantly under reported by women and girls. It can also be difficult to obtain a true picture within the local context due to the use of different record keeping systems within agencies. Similarly, services not sharing information with each other can mean key information is missed and families are not supported according to all of their needs.
- **Multiple needs.** In the consultation for this strategy, service users stated that not knowing where to access support was the biggest barrier to reporting their experience of VAWG. Having multiple needs can heighten these barriers because victims have to visit several different services and re-tell their story to many different agencies.
- **Resources.** A number of public services are experiencing a restriction in resources in real terms. By introducing a rolling three year budget in 2017, we have been able to change the way services are delivered across the council. Since then, we have saved £38m from our budget. However ongoing government cuts and rising demand for our services mean in the coming three years we will have to save a further £44m.
- **Emerging trends.** The following trends present possible challenges to address violence against women and girls:
 - The role of technology: perpetrators are increasingly using technology to facilitate their abuse (e.g. accessing victims devices, online accounts and even their childrens toys and devices)⁹ and technology contributes to issues like the sexualisation of young girls, sexting, revenge porn and 'upskirting'.
 - The MeToo movement that started in 2017 has put a welcome focus on sexual harrassment and discrimination. This presents us with an opportunity to amplify the focus on tackling violence against women and girls. However, it is important that this public attention is maintained and VAWG is not treated as a passing trend. The MeToo movement may also lead to an increase in reporting of sexual harrassment and discrimination which could present as a challenge to service providers in dealing with any increase.

⁸ Refuge. (2017). *Define the Line Infographic*. Retrieved from <https://www.refuge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Define-the-Line-infographic.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/forms-of-violence-and-abuse/tech-abuse/>

8. The response so far in Tower Hamlets

Over the last three years, a far reaching programme of activity has been carried out to prevent and address violence against women and girls:

- **Awareness-raising** through training, outreach, communication and campaigns. Six campaigns were run across the borough, including 'Domestic Abuse, No Excuse' and 'Love Shouldn't Hurt' Campaign. 245 training and outreach sessions were attended by over 1200 professionals, and we have 84 Violence Against Women and Girls 'Champions'. The 'Ask for Angela' Campaign to tackle sexual abuse is now included within every licensing package.
- 34 **refuge spaces** are provided at any one time, including 19 spaces for those from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Our **Sanctuary Scheme** improved the security of a victim's home. 154 families were enabled to stay in their own home through this service. We estimate that this has reduced homelessness due to domestic abuse by 52%.
- A weekly domestic abuse '**One Stop Shop**' is run from an Idea Store in Whitechapel. We have also published a directory of support services to help people find out what support is out there and how to get it.
- We commission **Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs)**. This and our Violent Crime Service runs from a range of locations including the Royal London Hospital and GP surgeries. Over 2017-18, 841 victims of domestic abuse were supported by this service.
- Our **Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts** have seen an 11 per cent increase in conviction rates, and have a victim satisfaction rate of 90%.
- We fund a social worker who specialises in **female genital mutilation** cases. As a result, identification of FGM cases has increased by 88%.
- Our outreach service for women involved in **prostitution** supported at least 150 women.

- In October 2017, we introduced the **'Stop and Think'** programme as an education programme for people who were arrested for buying sex. There have been 46 men who have attended and only two repeat offenders post course attendance.
- **Courses to build resilience and empower women** – for example, providing courses on self-defence, vocational training, English for speakers of other languages classes and Sylheti speaking counselling sessions to support 185 women, with an estimated 30% of those engaged had no recourse to public funds.
- There has been a 3% reduction in **repeat victims** between 2016 and 2019 seen by our Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (a conference where there is considered to be a high risk to a person's safety related to domestic abuse).
- Within the Council, we have developed a **'Sexual Harassment Within The Workplace' and refreshed 'Domestic Abuse Guidance'**, which, as one of the largest employees within the borough, means that we are trying to lead by example.
- We have particularly tried to remove barriers for demographics who proportionately do not report domestic abuse, by promoting our work via **outreach and delivering training** to groups such as students, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual community, English for speakers of other language learners and victims of female genital mutilation.
- We have worked in partnership with **East London Mosque**, to deliver Friday sermons on domestic abuse. This can reach up to 7000 Muslims each Friday.
- The Single Women's Project offers 9 bed spaces for **single women with complex needs**, including one bed space for a woman with no recourse to public funds.
- The **VAWG Charter** was created and signed by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Tower Hamlets and reaffirms Tower Hamlets current and future commitment to tackling VAWG.

9. Our priorities for 2019-24

Support and Protection for Victims

What we want to achieve:

- 1) Victims know how to access specialist VAWG support
- 2) Victims of VAWG have safe temporary accommodation if they choose to leave their home
- 3) Further develop Tower Hamlets Council Housing response to victims of VAWG
- 4) Agencies are confident working with VAWG victims with multiple needs through a trauma-informed approach
- 5) VAWG victims are able to remain within their communities if it is safe to do so
- 6) VAWG victims utilising the Criminal Justice System have high satisfaction
- 7) Early identification of family needs around VAWG

How will we do this?

- 1) Maintain provision to support VAWG victims and review current delivery model
- 2) Maintain refuge and Sanctuary Scheme provision
- 3) Achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation
- 4) Implement a relationship based practice model and trauma informed social work practice to prevent and reduce harm
- 5) Support VAWG victims going through the Criminal Justice System
- 6) Improve risk assessment tool for children with adverse childhood experiences including those at risk of sexual exploitation
- 7) Enable front line staff to intervene, especially in relation to drug and alcohol use, mental health and VAWG

Bringing Perpetrators to Justice

What we want to achieve:

- 1) Perpetrators will be dealt with robustly through the Criminal Justice System
- 2) Perpetrators will not be 'hidden' within statutory processes
- 3) Lessons learned through Domestic Homicide Reviews, both locally and nationally
- 4) Victims experiences improve processes
- 5) Agencies are held to account for how they are disrupting perpetrators
- 6) Identify and target areas where child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and prostitution occur
- 7) Examine the relationship between extremist activity and perpetrators of VAWG

How will we do this?

- 1) Police and Specialist Domestic Abuse Court monitor their outcomes to maximise on bringing perpetrators to justice
- 2) Agencies will engage with or signpost VAWG perpetrators to encourage behaviour change
- 3) Disseminate learning from local and national Domestic Homicide Reviews
- 4) Act upon feedback received from victims
- 5) Monitor hotspots where child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and prostitution occur
- 6) Commission research to identify links between extremism and perpetrators of VAWG

Engage with Communities to Raise Awareness and Challenge Misogyny

What we want to achieve:

- 1) Agencies and residents challenge misogynistic attitudes and behaviours
- 2) A 'Think Family' approach to tackle VAWG
- 3) Schools know how to identify signs of VAWG
- 4) Young people have an awareness of VAWG
- 5) Increased community understanding and challenge of 'harmful practices'
- 6) Support parents and children to enable understanding about adverse childhood experiences and their impact on health and behaviour

How will we do this?

- 1) Lobby the Government to make misogyny a hate crime
- 2) Co-ordinate a bi-annual forum for VAWG Champions and agencies to learn about local and national VAWG provision
- 3) Utilise multi-agency forums to address the needs of the entire family
- 4) Publicise and develop anti-VAWG campaigns in accessible formats
- 5) Offer schools targeted support around VAWG
- 6) Promote key messages through faith groups
- 7) Deliver training and family reflective practice around adverse childhood experiences

10. How we will make this happen

The 2019-24 Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy will be delivered through an annual action plan, monitored quarterly by the Violence Against Women and Girls Steering Group.

11. Other strategies and plans that are linked to this

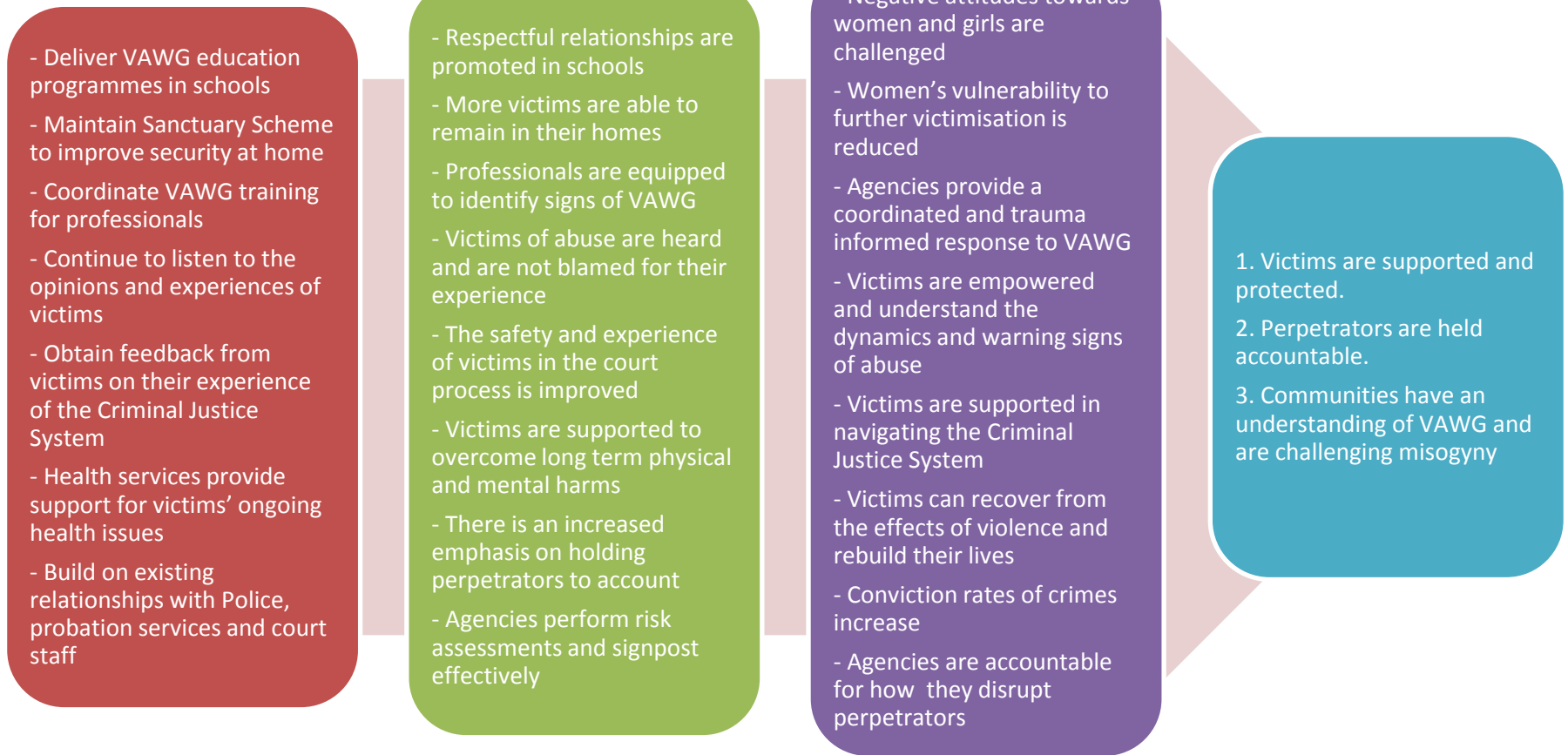
This Strategy has close ties to the following strategies and plans in Tower Hamlets:

- The Tower Hamlets Plan
- The Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan
- The Community Safety Partnership Plan
- The 2017-20 Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- The 2018-23 Homelessness Strategy
- The 2019-24 Children and Families Plan
- The Prevent Strategy
- Police and Crime Plan 2017-21
- Safeguarding Adults Board Strategy 2019-24

When putting this strategy into place, we will work with an awareness of these strategies. This is to make sure that resources are put to the best possible use and that there is no duplication of resource.

12. How We Are Going To Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls

This page summarises the action we will take over the next five years and the impact we want this to have in the short, medium and long term.



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