

<b>Briefing title</b>	Update on draft Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment
<b>Prepared for</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date</b>	1 December 2023
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<b>Reference</b>	

### Focus of the briefing

This briefing is about a draft needs assessment on the topic of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Tower Hamlets, to be finalised by 18 December 2023.

### Key Points

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to provide feedback about recommendations or further amendments to the needs assessment, which will be revised up to 18 December 2023 and finalised by the VAWG Strategic Steering Group which includes membership from Community Safety; Strategy, Policy and Improvement (SPI); Public Health; Public Realm; and Cabinet Support Officers.

Below are high-level takeaways from the report:

- Different forms of VAWG, as well as risk factors for VAWG, are common in Tower Hamlets
- Tower Hamlets has been implementing many good practices for preventing and addressing VAWG
- Many residents experience barriers to support with VAWG including lack of awareness of VAWG and related services as well as lack of trust in systems
- Future efforts to address VAWG should focus on primary prevention; tailored community engagement; building and sustaining a capable system and workforce; inclusive, accessible and comprehensive support for victims; and a focus on holding perpetrators to account. There should also be a greater emphasis on data, evaluation and insight incorporated into future planning.

### Implications

The VAWG needs assessment will help inform future planning and commissioning to prevent and reduce the impact of VAWG in Tower Hamlet, including specific decisions on future resourcing including from the Public Health Grant. Furthermore, this needs assessment will help inform the development of the new Tower Hamlets VAWG Strategy throughout 2023-2024 and for delivery of the objectives under the Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

### Background

VAWG includes a range of crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls (although all genders can experience VAWG) – these include domestic abuse (including physical, emotional, psychological and coercive control), rape and other

sexual offences, stalking, harassment, 'honour'-based abuse (female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and 'honour' killings), digital abuse (e.g., 'revenge porn', 'upskirting'), among others. According to UN Women, VAWG is related to gender-based discrimination and social norms that accept violence. Considering the drivers of VAWG enables a broader understanding of the factors that intersect at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels to increase or decrease the likelihood of violence. This lens helps identify a broad set of opportunities to intervene and reduce VAWG.

To address VAWG locally, Tower Hamlets has been delivering the VAWG Strategy 2019-2024 and annual delivery plans with the following priorities: engage with communities to raise awareness and challenge misogyny; support and protect victims; and bring perpetrators to account.

### Information

The purpose of this Needs Assessment is to provide an overarching view of local need in relation to (VAWG) and provide recommendations for planning and commissioning of interventions to address violence against women and girls in Tower Hamlets. The document includes a summary of relevant policies and good practices, population data, current interventions in place, and local perspectives of professionals and residents on VAWG-related issues.

There are several laws relevant to VAWG (including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003) which provide definitions and clarity around the duties of local authorities and services. Additionally, there are multiple national strategies in England which local authorities like Tower Hamlets should adapt to local delivery to support victims and address perpetrators: the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Women's Health Strategy, and the Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Risk factors for VAWG are common in Tower Hamlets. These include financial insecurity, housing issues, poor health and disability, and a large a young adult population. Financial insecurity and housing issues are also prevalent. Additionally, residents shared that community and societal risk factors are also common, such as harmful social views about gender (e.g., misogyny, toxic masculinity); lack of awareness; and social issues like lack of opportunities. Alongside these factors, the diversity of Tower Hamlets' population is important to consider when designing interventions to prevent and respond to VAWG, including people with different language needs, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, abilities and digital skills.

Different types of VAWG occur frequently in Tower Hamlets; our borough has some of the highest rates of both domestic abuse and sexual violence offences compared to the rest of London. Rates of police-reported domestic abuse and sexual violence have been increasing over the past 10 years. Suspected perpetrators are most often young adult males while victims are most often young adult women, although both groups have diverse profiles. There is limited quantitative local data available about the negative impacts these issues have on victims, however, anecdotes and national evidence indicate there are consequences for mental and physical health as well as housing and financial security.

Tower Hamlets Council and partners have delivered important interventions to prevent and reduce VAWG between 2019-2023, including:

- Training and outreach to thousands of professionals and residents, including 220 VAWG Champions
- Provision of support to VAWG victims by Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, the Haawa project, Sister Circle, rape crisis services, and the Door of Hope project
- Housing provision including refuges, home security, hostels and making progress towards attaining the Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation
- Delivery of the Positive Change programme to hold perpetrators who are parents to account and provide opportunities for change.

Unfortunately, sanction detection rates are low (9% for domestic abuse and 10% for sexual violence). The Specialist Domestic Abuse Court is also not currently operating.

The Annual Residents Survey revealed several relevant gender differences among residents' experiences of the borough. Male residents were more likely than female residents to say they feel safe both during the day and after dark. Female residents more frequently reported concerns about paying utility bills and council tax while male residents more frequently reported concerns about the availability of employment.

More than 350 residents and 120 professionals have shared their views about important gaps to address in future planning to address VAWG in Tower Hamlets, including:

- Conviction rates and consequences for perpetrators
- Lack of awareness about VAWG issues as well as about services and support available and how to reach them
- Lack of awareness among staff for how to work with perpetrators
- Lack of trust in services and the criminal justice system
- Lack of spaces and environments that women feel safe in
- Accountability and accessibility of services and responses
- Lack of appropriate housing for different needs
- Inequalities of access for different languages, abilities, digital skills and cultural needs.

The next steps for this needs assessment project are to further revise the document with additional data and information and develop a set of recommendations based on the key findings. The draft needs assessment report will be reviewed by multiple groups and revisions will be incorporated before finalising the document with the VAWG needs assessment and strategy steering group on 18 December 2023. Subsequently, the HASC SPI team will use the information from the needs assessment to inform the development of the new VAWG strategy, which will replace the existing strategy document when it expires in April 2024.

<b>Points of engagement</b>	<b>Date</b>
HASC DLT	27 November 2023

Communities DLT	27 November 2023
Community Safety Partnership	5 December 2023
Overview & Scrutiny	11 December 2023
Agreement of final version by project steering group	18 December 2023

## Where to find more information

- [Tower Hamlets Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-2024](#)
- [Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan 2023-2026 \(Priority 6\)](#)
- [Tower Hamlets Violence Against Women and Girls Service Directory](#)
- [National Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021](#)
- [Women's Health Strategy for England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## Approvals

**All** briefings must be agreed by the relevant Director prior to circulation and logged by a member of the Executive Support Team.

Name.....

Signature...

Position...

Date.....