

# Update on draft VAWG Needs Assessment

1 December 2023

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# Request from Overview and Scrutiny



We request members of this group to:

- Provide advice about recommendations
- Provide feedback or questions for the draft VAWG needs assessment
- Agree the next steps for the draft needs assessment including sign off process (slide 9)



# This needs assessment is being developed to help inform future planning to prevent and address VAWG from 2024



- The information in the draft VAWG NA includes background context, recommended practices, population data and engagement findings
- The project has included two engagement components conducted in August-October 2023 – one with residents and one with professionals
- The project has helped identify both gaps in implementation as well as in information which could be addressed in the next VAWG strategy



# In Tower Hamlets, there are a range of risk factors for VAWG and for experiencing barriers to seeking support



- **Risk factors for experiencing VAWG**

- Financial insecurity: Low economic activity among female residents, high proportion of LSOAs among most deprived
- Housing issues: High costs, overcrowding, availability of suitable housing for different needs, homelessness
- Health and wellbeing: poor mental health, substance use

- **Increased likelihood of barriers to support**

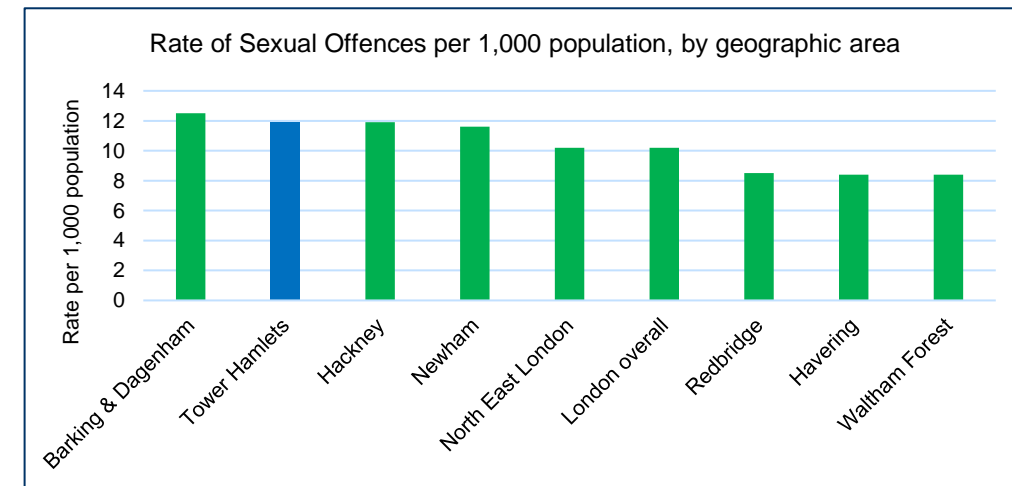
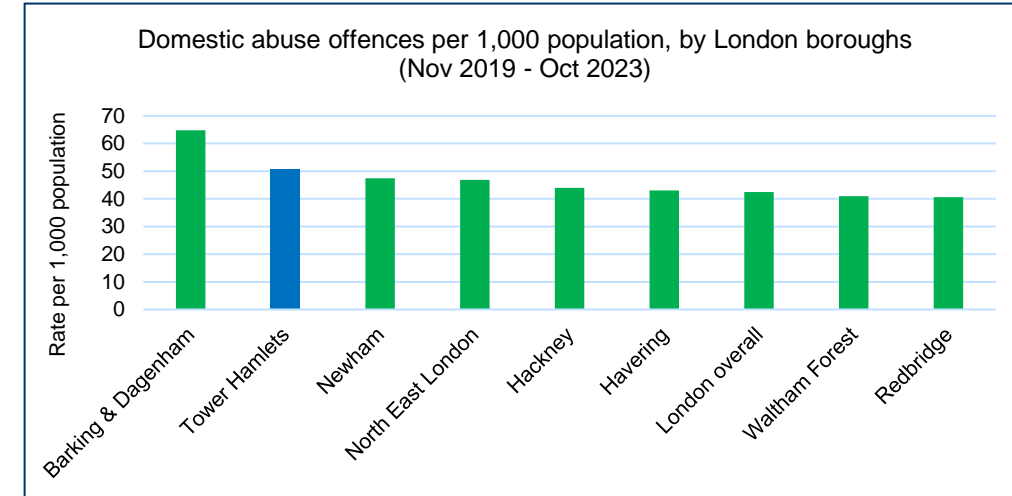
- Bangladeshi residents are the largest ethnic group followed by White British/Northern Irish; other ethnic groups make up about one-third of the resident population in the borough.
- Large proportion of Muslim residents (39%) followed by no religion (26%) and Christian (22%); also small populations of Hindu and Buddhist residents
- A significant number of households had no adults with English as their main language (15.7%)
- Disabled residents , including 1,600+ adults with learning disabilities
- About 7% of Tower Hamlets' adult population identifies as LGB+ and 1% have a gender identity different than that registered at birth



# Different forms of VAWG occur frequently in the borough, most often to women



- Higher rates of domestic abuse, stalking, and sexual violence in Tower Hamlets compared to London rates
- Suspects of domestic abuse offences:
  - Over three-quarters (77%) of suspects were male
  - The most common age range was 18-39 years old
  - More than two-thirds (70%) of known perpetrators are partners or ex-partners; others include brother, son, and other familial relationships in smaller quantities as well as acquaintances
- Patterns among victims of domestic abuse in Tower Hamlets:
  - About two-thirds of victims in Tower Hamlets were female
  - Over half of victims were between ages 18-39 years old although ~10% are over 50 years old
  - Gender differences in number of offences are greatest for victims between 18-40 years old; more similar among those under 18 and over 65
  - Nearly half of victims known to police were Asian ethnicities (48%); followed by White (31%), Black (9%), Mixed (3%), and Other (10%)
  - Same sex domestic abuse offences make up under 1% of all MPS cases in Tower Hamlets (25-46 offences each year).
  - 33 of the 108 homicides in Tower Hamlets since 2003 were considered domestic homicides, of which 24 were women.
- Sexual violence:
  - Sexual violence victims were most often female (84%) although males (16%) also experienced sexual violence.
  - Rates of being a victim of sexual violence are highest among younger adults (18-29 year olds) and people aged 17 and under
  - 5.6% of victims self-identified as having a disability – of these victims, the most frequently reported disabilities were mental health issues (57%) and learning difficulties (17%)
  - Where the victim and perpetrator relationship was recorded, the perpetrator was known to the victim in most cases (most frequently an acquaintance, ex-boyfriend or husband if the victim)



# Tower Hamlets has many good practices in place for preventing and addressing VAWG to build from



## Raising awareness and challenging misogyny

- 100s of training and outreach activities for professionals and residents about different VAWG topics including misogyny and allyship
- 220 VAWG Champions in community and across system
- Learning and development focused on adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed practice/care a priority in Tower Hamlets
- Extensive online VAWG service directory

## Supporting victims

- IDVA support has expanded, including specialist posts on housing, health and economic abuse - over 90% of victims report experiencing positive outcomes following IDVA support (confidence, safer, satisfaction)
- Tailored support and outreach available for meeting local marginalised population needs including Sister Circle, Haawa Project, Door of Hope
- 34 refuge spaces including
- Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation project in implementation phase
- Sexual violence services available from Royal London and East London Rape Crisis
- Specialist support for victims in maternity services and sexual health services
- Reviews of MARACs and DHRs completed to support learning

## Bringing perpetrators to justice

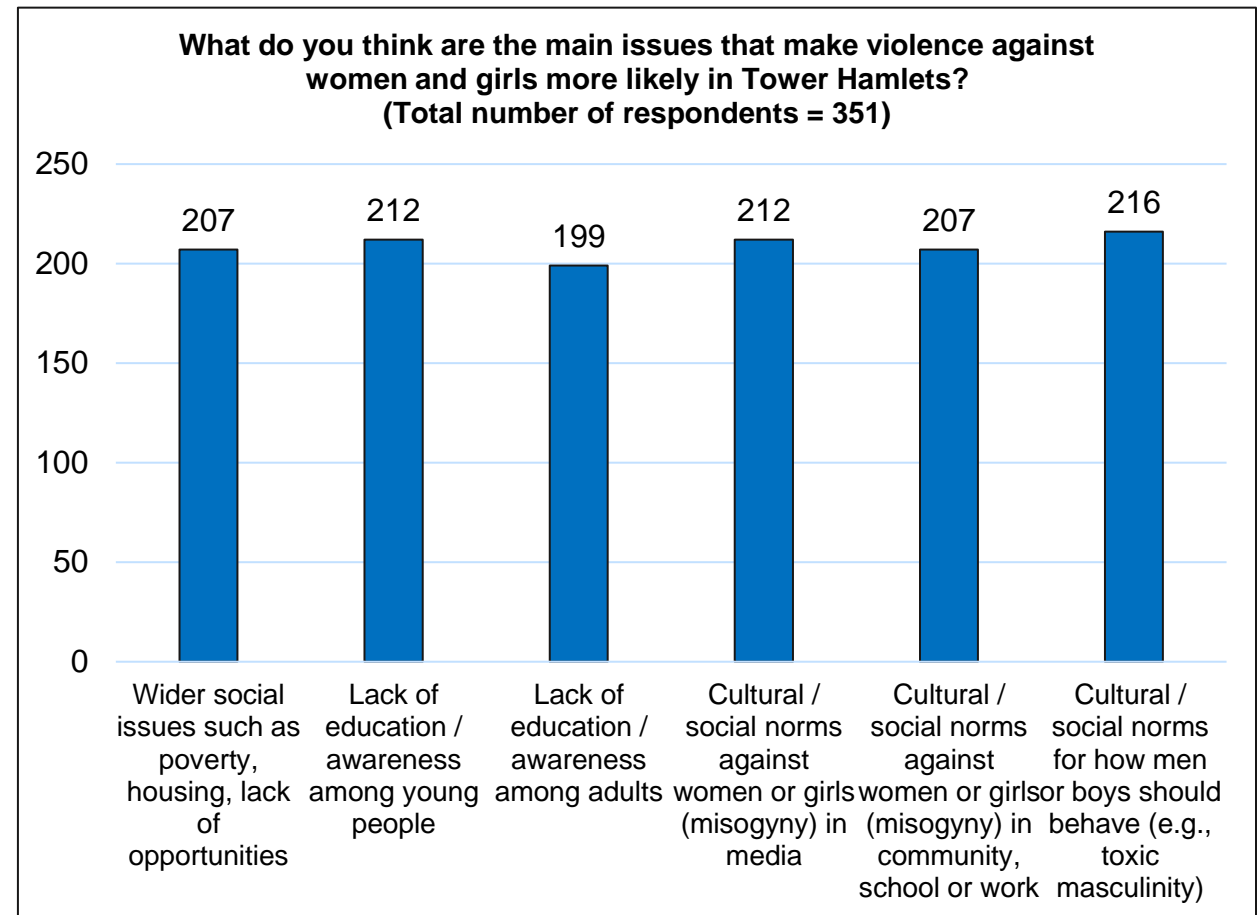
- Specialist Domestic Abuse Court previously delivering 65-72% conviction rates and 70%+ witness satisfaction rates
- Positive Change programme completed by over 33 perpetrators in 2022-23



# 350+ Residents and 120+ professionals have shared their views about VAWG-related issues in Tower Hamlets



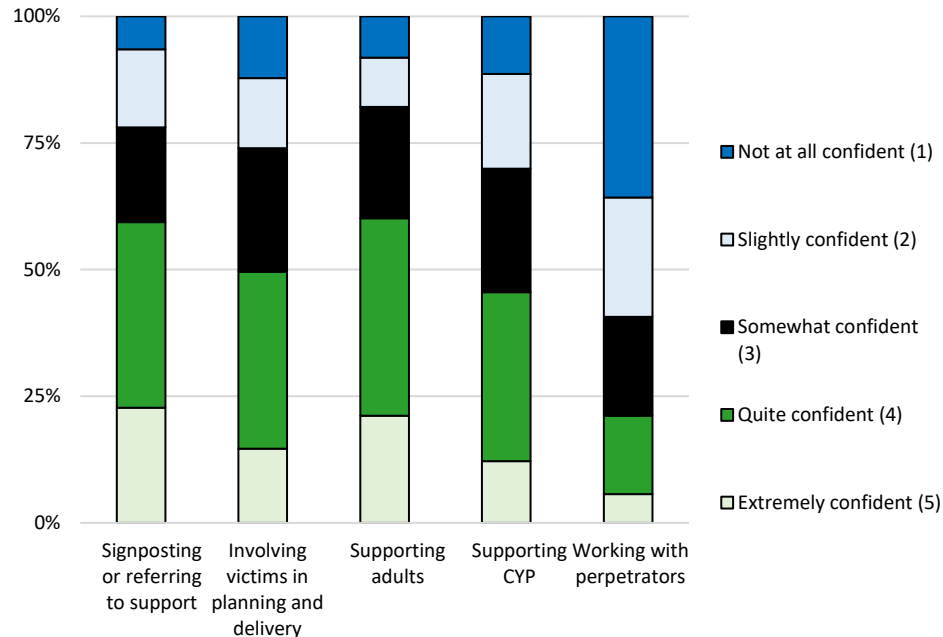
- Residents identified different wider factors that influence the likelihood of violence against women and girls in the borough (chart on right)
- The groups that residents said could have the greatest influence on changing attitudes were **men, faith groups/leaders, and schools**
- Professionals shared what they find most supportive of their work in preventing or responding to VAWG:
  - **Information, training and resources** about services to refer or signpost to (e.g. the online directory)
  - **Relational and trauma-informed approaches:** having time to build relationships and trust with residents; flexible approaches such as meeting in the community; listening without judgement; opportunities for social support groups and other ways to connect
  - **Agencies working together well:** clear referral pathways and information sharing protocols, support and advice from other professionals such as the VAWG team and IDVAs; having professionals in the right place such as Beyond the Streets; clinical leads supporting IDVAs through the IRIS project.



# Residents and professionals identified gaps to address in future VAWG planning



Levels of confidence with different aspects of VAWG delivery among professionals, by proportion of respondents



- Lack of awareness about VAWG issues as well as about services and support available and how to reach them
- Inequalities of access to support for different languages, abilities, digital skills and cultural needs.
- Need for greater focus on engagement with men and boys
- Lack of awareness among staff for how to work with perpetrators
- Need for improvement in conviction rates and consequences for 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
- Need for addressing housing and financial security including the lack of appropriate housing for different needs





# Residents provided their ideas for how Tower Hamlets could feel safer and prevent VAWG



| Increase awareness and change attitudes among community members   | Provide more and better support from services  | Enhance community safety  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How: visible ads, posters, leaflets through doors, street art, workshops, social media, speaking in cultural settings / places of worship, school curriculum, multiple languages</li> <li>• <b>Who:</b> men and boys, specific faith groups, health care professionals, schools, workplaces</li> <li>• <b>What:</b> What is abuse, that abuse is wrong and unacceptable, what the repercussions and consequences are, Misogyny/sexist attitudes in the community, Celebrate women role models and better role models for men, Services including direct telephone numbers, how to access local networks, women's empowerment and knowing rights</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helplines / emergency contact numbers and easier reporting</li> <li>• Community support groups and workshops</li> <li>• Counselling / therapy to deal with trauma and long-term effects on mental health</li> <li>• Safe, women's only support / places</li> <li>• Offer translation / interpretation</li> <li>• Legal aid for VAWG victims</li> <li>• Better knowledge in services about where to refer to</li> <li>• More warmth, support, confidentiality, quicker responses, easier and simpler access routes, anonymity</li> <li>• Services around the borough</li> <li>• Check-ins and long-term support</li> <li>• Shorter waiting lists</li> <li>• Responsiveness of services</li> <li>• More youth services</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase presence of law enforcement professionals in community (police, THEOs)</li> <li>• CCTV</li> <li>• Lighting and cleanliness</li> <li>• Increase trust in police</li> <li>• Safety on public transport</li> <li>• More action and involvement from members of the public</li> </ul>   |
| Address local housing and financial security  | Make institutional and system changes  | Improve the response to perpetrators  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring victims have safe places to stay or go in the middle of the night / short term</li> <li>• Suitable accommodation for different women's needs (e.g. mothers with children, people with complex needs)</li> <li>• Financial support for women fleeing abuse</li> <li>• More women working</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce misogyny and increase equality / social justice (reference to police culture and treatment of women)</li> <li>• Trauma-informed approaches embedded across services</li> <li>• Better complaint procedures and accountability</li> <li>• Believing people and taking people seriously</li> <li>• Quicker responses and timescales</li> <li>• Zero tolerance for VAWG</li> <li>• Reduce victim blaming and increase belief of victims</li> <li>• Increased funding to support programmes and enable changes to the system</li> <li>• Improve trust and confidence in police</li> <li>• Support equality and voices of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and LGBTQ+ groups</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase conviction rates</li> <li>• Increase confidence that arrests / prosecutions will happen</li> <li>• (Harsher) penalties</li> <li>• Take action to prevent future harm/perpetration</li> <li>• Report on numbers and convictions to the public</li> <li>• More support for perpetrators to address their behaviour and build healthier relationships</li> </ul> |



# Professionals also shared their views about what could help in preventing and responding to VAWG



| Increase awareness of VAWG and its impacts   | Improve community engagement  | Improve accessibility and inclusion  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where to get support</li> <li>• What is not acceptable behaviour</li> <li>• How to appropriately challenge</li> <li>• Low level issues to highlight pervasive nature, prevention</li> <li>• Forced marriage</li> <li>• LGBT+ specific awareness</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safer spaces to foster trust</li> <li>• Gender equality and rights with faith and community groups</li> <li>• Community champions</li> <li>• Have conversations with different generations</li> <li>• Speak to victims about their experience, especially those who decline support</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve language skills / ESOL</li> <li>• Provide support in different languages</li> <li>• Knowing how to challenge VAWG in different cultures</li> <li>• Islamic counselling</li> <li>• Training about how to support LGBT+ community</li> <li>• Improve support for people with high needs (substance use, MH, involvement in survival sex)</li> <li>• Improve support for people new to the UK</li> </ul> |
| Focus on men and boys  | Work with children and young people   | Offer women's spaces   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More male allies</li> <li>• Young boys and adolescents</li> <li>• Understand the awareness and interest among men in power, such as politicians</li> <li>• Engagement with men</li> <li>• Groups for men and women about relationships, conflict, equality</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy relationships, good communication and signs of coercive control</li> <li>• How to fact check things online related to VAWG</li> <li>• Having school/community-based family support workers</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women only provision and targeting women for engagement where they are underrepresented</li> <li>• Muslim women need single sex spaces</li> <li>• Female only coaches and instructors for sports or physical activity</li> </ul>  |
| Organisations and professionals  | Address housing and financial insecurity  | Resources  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More joined up working</li> <li>• Consistency in quality</li> <li>• Long-term and therapeutic support access</li> <li>• More female professionals (e.g. THEOs)</li> <li>• Better communication between professionals and services</li> <li>• Recruiting a MARAC Liaison Nurse</li> <li>• Reinstate SDAC with support from Councillors, CPS and judicial system</li> <li>• Adoption of trauma-informed care across the system</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the lack of affordable housing</li> <li>• Reduce the impact of increasing the cost of living on residents</li> <li>• Support for women with high needs such as those risk of homelessness</li> <li>• Better pathways needed as hostels/temporary accommodation offer considered inadequate for women and children</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding and ringfencing resources</li> <li>• Resourcing in context of increased costs</li> <li>• Increase availability to meet demand on both victim and perpetrator side</li> </ul>  |



# Next steps for this needs assessment include further review and application in strategy development



- 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. Planned amendments to be made based on current feedback include:
  - Additional sections to the document: Executive Summary, Key Findings, Recommendations
  - Additional information: children and adult safeguarding data; psychosexual support service use data; modern slavery data; prostitution exit service data; demographic differences in survey findings; digital/online abuse
- **Proposed approach for agreeing final document:** 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**. Final version to be circulated via email and published on the Council website after this date.
- Subsequently, HASC Strategy and Performance 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.

