

Cabinet 24 th April 2024	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Simon Baxter, Corporate Director - Communities	Classification: Unrestricted
Women's Safety – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendations and Action Plan	

Lead Member	Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury, Cabinet member for Safer Communities
Originating Officer(s)	Menara Ahmed/Simon Smith
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
Forward Plan Notice Published	Not Applicable
Exempt information	None
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	6. Empowering communities and fighting crime.

Executive Summary

1. This report sets out the Women's Safety Action Plan developed and implemented as a result of seven recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2023. These recommendations are set out in the body of this report.
2. The resultant action plan, and service comment and initial progress is attached at Appendix A. This is submitted for decision by the Mayor in Cabinet.
3. A further report will be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2024 to provide a progress update on delivery against those recommendations.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to

1. Approve the women's safety action plan at Appendix 1 to this report.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This paper submits the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the women's safety action plan for consideration and approval by Cabinet.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Take no action. This is not recommended as the recommendations set out recommendations and actions to improve women's safety in the borough.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The current 2019-24 Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy sets out the current priorities of the Council and partners on this issue. This Strategy is due to expire in March 24. Work is ongoing to develop an ambitious new Violence against Women and Girls strategy. The next stage in developing this work to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and improve feelings of safety in Tower Hamlets is to publish a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy by July 2024. Gender based violence is predominantly a pattern of behaviour perpetrated by men against women. One of the core aims of the work is to prevent VAWG, reduce gender inequality and discrimination and improve women's safety.
- 3.2 In February 2023 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed seven recommendations following two in depth scrutiny review sessions. These are as follows:

Recommendation 1

The council and its strategic partners to collaborate to improve the awareness of women of the programmes and help available directly that support women's safety on the streets.

Recommendation 2

The Council to review current funding arrangements and increase the capacity to support women's groups that offer domestic abuse services to the community.

Recommendation 3

The Council to ensure that if factors in improving self-defence access for women and girls when considering leisure, public health and physical wellbeing activities.

Recommendation 4

The Council's Children and Education Service to support increasing capacity at schools on raising awareness of domestic abuse and support available.

Recommendation 5

The Council and Residential Social Landlord (RSL) partners should actively strengthen their partnership workings to focus on tackling women safety issues on RSL estates.

Recommendation 6

The Police/THEOs to actively target and focus their recruitment and retention strategy to reflect recruiting representative women from the community in Tower Hamlets.

Recommendation 7

All Tower Hamlets Councillors (male and female) to support and champion women's safety issues through the established channels such as male allies' Programme, women safety focussed walkabouts and building this within the roles when engaging the public within the constituencies and member surgeries.

- 3.3 As a result of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendations made, a holistic action plan was developed incorporating views from a wide range of services, third sector partners and statutory partners such as the Police. The action plan is attached as an appendix to this report and provides detail of the initial progress against the recommendations.
- 3.4 This programme of work will be embedded into the VAWG Strategy 2024-2029 which is in development.
- 3.5 A significant number of actions have been completed prior to submission of this report.

1.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 1.1 Gender based violence is predominantly a pattern of behaviour perpetrated by men against women. Prevention of VAWG and improving women's safety is a key priority for the Mayor.
- 1.2 It is recognised that prevention over the long-term can only be achieved by tackling the misogynistic attitudes and behaviours that can lead to these

crimes. Consequently, a programme of training and awareness around VAWG (including digital abuse), healthy relationships, toxic masculinity and a Schools Pledge is available to Schools and Youth Services.

- 1.3 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee heard about the importance of “safe spaces” and that women feel significantly less safe after dark in Tower Hamlets compared to men. This appears to be part of a broader trend across the UK and internationally, whereby women tend to feel less safe in public spaces and fear crime more than men. As well as the significant impact on women’s health and wellbeing as a result of being a victim of crime, safety fears more broadly affect women’s behaviour and choices and restricts their freedom to be in public spaces.
- 1.4 Whilst this draft action plan has a focus on gender, it is important to note that this is not the only determining factor when it comes to feeling and being safe: Older and younger people also tend to report feeling less safe.
- 1.5 In recent local research women have described how they create routes that navigate around places where groups of men congregate and cat call, hot spots for drug dealing or where they have previously experienced threat. They also navigate around streets that feel unsafe due to limited sight lines, escape routes or poor lighting and that this ‘way’ of getting around is precautionary. All women, girls, and gender diverse people, feel or perceive safety or public space differently. However, most women agree (96% of Let’s Talk Survey respondents) that there must be a culture shift to improve attitudes towards women and girls.
- 1.6 Equally it is important to highlight the issue of intersectionality. Women of different ethnicities, women of different faiths, women of different sexual orientations, gender identities, age and disability will not all have the same experience of safety in public spaces.
- 1.7 The VAWG Needs Assessment 2024 found that faith leaders and men/boys have a key role to play in tackling misogyny. A programme of work is in place with Tower Hamlets Inter-faith Forum, Council of Mosques and Schools to support them with this. This includes a Male Allyship Programme, London Muslim Centre Ambassadors Project and Don’t Cross the Line Campaign.
- 1.8 The draft Action plan and recommendations from the Committee will have beneficial consequences for equalities, inclusion and diversity in the Borough.

2. BEST VALUE CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Women’s’ safety is a Mayoral priority and is set against the context of Tower Hamlets having some of the highest levels of VAWG offending including domestic homicides in London. Since 2011, there have been 14 Domestic Homicide Reviews commissioned totalling approximately £130,000. This does not include the wider cost implications to service providers such as Social Care, schools, criminal justice agencies and health providers involved in managing the support provided to victims. The estimated cost for a victim of

domestic abuse is £34,015¹ and £58,860² for a victim of rape. Furthermore, the human cost of the physical and emotional impact of abuse far outweighs any financial cost. Hence earlier intervention, prevention and safeguarding work is key to ensuring best value for money and a more invest to save approach has been adopted.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The Violence against Women & Girl's (VAWG) service has a net budget of £0.494m, comprising gross expenditure totalling £1.237m for staffing and the provision of funding to third party service providers, offset by income of £0.743m in the form of grants and recharges from internal service users.
- 6.2 This report provides an update of the Women's Safety Action Plan and its recommendations. The cost of developing the action plan has been contained within these existing budgets. However, the cost of implementing these recommendations require further financial review and may incur additional cost above budgeted levels. Any requests for additional financial resources will be subject of separate reports.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Women's Safety Action Plan 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.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Overview and Scrutiny Notes and presentations held in February 2023 on Women's Safety

¹ Home Office. 2019 'The economic and social costs of domestic abuse.'

² Ibid.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Draft Women’s Safety Action Plan

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

- None

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