

Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
4 October 2016	
Report of: Shazia Ghani, Safer Communities, Communities, Localities and Culture	Classification: Unrestricted
Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016	

Lead Member	Councillor Shiria Khatun, Cabinet Member for Community Safety
Originating Officer(s)	Shazia Ghani Head of Community Safety and Menara Ahmed DV and HC Manager
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Community Plan Theme	Safe and Cohesive Borough

Executive Summary

There is a requirement for each Community Safety Partnership (Safe & Cohesive CPDG in Tower Hamlets) to have a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. From a statutory perspective the responsibility to develop a VAWG Strategy lies with the Community Safety Partnership. This strategy comprises part of the Council's Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, which is a policy framework document which requires recommendation by Cabinet to full Council for approval.

Cabinet is required to agree and sign off the next three years VAWG Strategy (2016-2019) and the accompanying consultation report informing its development. Tower Hamlets has had a domestic violence team for over 15 years and a specific action plan for at least 10 years, aimed at tackling domestic violence against anyone who is experiencing abuse. In 2013, the borough launched an additional strategy, the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Plan aimed at addressing the disproportionate impact of gender based violence on female residents of the borough and linked to existing VAWG Strategies across London, nationally and internationally.

Abuse can take place regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, sexuality or age. Whilst we recognise that the issues addressed here have a disproportionate effect on women, we also recognise that boys and men are victims of violence too. As a Council and as a Community Safety Partnership and a Local Strategic Partnership, we remain committed to providing support for all victims of abuse and the intention of this plan is to strengthen our response to responding to abuse rather than distract from it. This draft strategy and supporting documentation is presented for securing final approval.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the content of the VAWG Strategy (appendix 1)
2. Agree that this report, the VAWG Strategy is recommended to Full Council for approval.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Full Council must adopt a VAWG Strategy in order to meet government requirements. The priorities and governance structure outlined in the CS Plan are based on the statutory strategic assessment exercise that was carried out by statutory partners to consider data priorities in the Borough. They have been agreed by the DV Forum and Community Safety Partnership in Tower Hamlets. The Cabinet is asked to consider the Strategy for recommendation to Full Council pursuant to the policy framework procedure.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 It is a statutory responsibility for Community Safety Partnerships to produce a VAWG Strategy as it forms part of the Community Safety Plan within the Council's Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy. There are therefore no alternative options to doing so.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- This is Tower Hamlets' second VAWG Plan. Tower Hamlets has had a Domestic Violence Team for over 15 years and a specific action plan for at least 10 years, aimed at tackling domestic violence against anyone who is experiencing abuse. In 2013, the borough launched an additional strategy, the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Plan, aimed at addressing the disproportionate impact of gender-based violence on female residents of the borough and linked to existing VAWG Strategies across London, nationally and internationally.
- 3.2 This draft strategy highlights the commitment of the Partnership to strengthen a coordinated multi-agency approach to tackling VAWG over the next three years and build upon the previous VAWG Plan. This is a partnership document, agreed through the VAWG sub group and CSP Board
 - 3.3 The aim of the VAWG Strategy is to support the work of the Domestic Violence and Hate Crime Team (DVHCT), within which the VAWG work sits, through the provision of a joined up and comprehensive approach to addressing all forms of gender-based violence. To that end the VAWG

Steering Group and Plan forms an additional CSP subgroup area linking in to the structures of the DVHCT and the work of the Domestic Violence Action Plan including the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Domestic Violence Forum (DVF) subgroup.

3.4 **METHOD**

In developing the VAWG Strategy we have used a consultative engagement approach with professionals, survivors of violence, local residents and young people to ensure that we include their views. We have also utilised a 'Stages of Change' methodology to enable a systematic review to inform our key performance indicators and outcomes.

3.5 **CONSULTATION**

Between October 2015 and February 2016, a comprehensive consultation process was undertaken across the Borough to support the development of the second Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Plan which will be published in 2016.

3.6 The violence against women and girls consultation involved:

- Consultation with professionals and partners through our local VAWG professional networks
- An on-line consultation
- Individual interviews with key stakeholders
- A series of focus groups held with local groups of survivors, women and young people
- Feedback has also been sought from DMT, CMT and MAB to influence and shape the final report and the inclusion of a number of appendices.

3.7 Key partners and stakeholders consulted included: VAWG Steering Group; Community Safety Partnership; Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Members; Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) and Practitioners' Forum members; Key contacts within Children's and Adults' Social Care; Safer Communities; Public Health; Barts Health; Mental Health Services; Domestic Violence Forum; Youth Council; Survivor Groups; Housing Options; Voluntary and Community Organisations and Local Residents.

3.8 A consultation report was prepared to inform the new three year VAWG plan. This report (attached) outlines the key learning from the consultation process and looks at the prevalence of various forms of violence against women and girls within the borough. It also examines the experience of female survivors of violence and provides an overview of what we currently know about local needs. It provides an overview of the national and regional context of work on addressing violence against women and girls and an assessment of our current approach in Tower Hamlets. It also highlights proposals made during the consultation by participants.

- 3.9 This action plan will be governed through the VAWG sub group reporting to the CSP Board. The VAWG action plan attached in the appendix was signed off by the VAWG steering group in April 2016 and CSP Board in July 2016,

GENERAL FINDINGS

- 4.1 The recommendations in the draft strategy are set out below in summary and the operational activity driven by these recommendations will be defined and further developed by the joint working arrangements already in place within the Partnership.

4.2 Survivor and Community Recommendations

- Prevention should be a key priority within the VAWG strategy
- A multi-agency approach to delivering services for survivors is the considered to be the best approach
- Multi-pronged but individualised approaches are needed to best support survivors
- Perpetrators should be given support to understand the consequences of their behaviour
- There is a need for a public awareness campaign to help women members in the community understand that experiencing abuse is not their fault
- Delivery of training to professionals on how to support survivors of VAWG promoting an empathetic approach
- Peer support methods, including group sessions, should be implemented
- Community champions-programmes should be expanded

4.2 Young people's Recommendations

- Focus on providing young people with information about all of the strands of VAWG and where they can get help and support
- Develop the work in schools to ensure that all young people are getting the right messages about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable
- Further develop youth programmes, recognising that young people will often disclose to other young people
- Work with parents so that they understand the issues that young people face and can support their children
- Work with young people so that they can recognise that pornography and the media send out the wrong messages to young people about what healthy relationships look like

4.3 Professionals' Recommendations

- Prevention should be a key priority in a climate of welfare reform and cuts. Continuation and expansion of work with young people, starting from reception is vital

- Links between competing priorities and VAWG should be made more explicitly – for example countries where FGM is emerging due to the increase in radicalisation and the increase in threat of extremism as a factor in child arrangement orders in the family courts
- Maintain the four objectives from the previous VAWG Plan but expand to highlight the need for better partnership working and participation by survivors
- Develop work across sectors, including having a renewed focus on women experiencing multiple disadvantage and work with older and disabled women
- Develop a survivors' forum which will be a peer support group for survivors of all forms of VAWG
- Commission services for young people experiencing VAWG as they can fall through gaps between children's and adult services
- Develop links with some of the large employers in the borough to highlight the impact of VAWG on their staff
- The key barriers to disclosure are faced by women experiencing multiple disadvantage and a fear of institutions. These need to be a key focus of the VAWG Strategy
- There is broad based support for the existing strands but there needs to be a focus on the internet as a facilitator of abuse

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 5.1 The report sets out the consideration of the VAWG three year draft strategy and highlights that up to £1m of funding was received over the previous three year strategy from external sources such as MOPAC, DfE, DCLG that supplemented the Policy and Victim budget of £571,000.
- 5.2 Given the financial constraints being faced by the Council and other partners, it is imperative that funding levels for the service are considered fully as part of the Council's Outcomes Based Budgeting approach for 2017 -2020. This will include the identification of complementary funding and consideration of the most effective way to respond to this area of work alongside the Council's wider priorities.
- 5.3 Consequently whilst there are no direct financial implications emanating from this report, the extent to which funding at the levels previously seen will continue to be available must be a consideration. There are a number of recommendations contained within the strategy that will need to be defined and further developed as they would seem to have the potential for significant financial implications which is not currently in place.
- 5.4 Any proposals that cannot be accommodated within the current budget provision will require financial approval as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) process before further commitments are made.

6. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 6.1 This report relates to the draft Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy for 2016-19. There is a statutory requirement for such a strategy as the Council is one of the responsible authorities for Tower Hamlets, within the meaning of section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 ('the 1998 Act'). Other responsible authorities for Tower Hamlets include: every provider of probation services in Tower Hamlets; the chief officer of police whose police area lies within Tower Hamlets; and the fire and rescue authority for Tower Hamlets. Together, the responsible authorities for Tower Hamlets are required to formulate and implement strategies for: the reduction of crime and disorder; combating the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances; and the reduction of reoffending pursuant to section 6 of the 1998 Act. When formulating and implementing these strategies, each authority is required to have regard to the police and crime objectives set out in the police and crime plan for Tower Hamlets.
- 6.2 Additionally, when considering this Strategy regard must be had to section 17 of 1998 Act and which places an obligation of the Council to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area
- 6.3 Development of 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 statutory guidance issued under the 2014 Act details the processes to follow during safeguarding investigations. This must be implemented together the Pan London Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures dated 03.12.2015.
- 6.4 The 2014 Act also sets out the council's duties to: - a) ensure the provision of preventative services, b) promote wellbeing when carrying out any of their care and support functions (this includes protection from abuse and neglect), c) cooperate with relevant partners and d) provide information about services available in the area that can prevent abuse and support.
- 6.5 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. Some of the council's responsibilities for the care and protection of children and young people are listed under, sections 17, 20, 31 and 47 of the 1989 Act.
- 6.6 Section 11 of 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. Section 10 of 2004 Act and Section 27 of the 1989 Act refers to the requirement for local authorities to cooperate with other agencies to promote the well-being of children.
- 6.7 With regard to consultation, regulations 12 to 14A of the Crime and Disorder (Formulation and Implementation of Strategy) Regulations 2007 provide for

Community Engagement. Further, in consulting, the Council must comply with the common law principles set out in *R v Brent London Borough Council, ex p Gunning*, (1985) and recently approved by the Supreme Court in *R(Mosely) v LB Haringey 2014*. Those are ‘*First, that consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage. Second, that the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response. Third that adequate time must be given for consideration and response. And finally, fourth, that the product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any statutory proposals.*’ There is no prescribed period for consultation, but principles of fairness apply such that there should be sufficient time for those being consulted to consider and respond to the matters arising, having regard to their complexity, impact etc. It is necessary to comply with the common law requirement to consider any feedback before making a decision.

- 6.8 Consultation has been carried out as referred to in paragraphs 3.4 through to 3.9 of the report. The responses have been incorporated into the Consultation Report in the Appendices and the consultation responses must be conscientiously taken into account before the final adoption of the Strategy.
- 6.9 The adopting of VAWG Strategy for 2016-19 is for Full Council. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended) provide that the making of a crime and disorder reduction strategy pursuant to sections 5 and 6 of the 1998 Act is a function that is required not to be the sole responsibility of the Council’s executive. In that regard, Part 2 Article 4 of the Council’s Constitution includes the crime and disorder reduction strategy sections 5 and 6 of the 1998 Act in the policy framework. The Substance Misuse Strategy forms a part of the Council’s crime and disorder reduction strategy and, on this basis, the final making of the strategy is for Full Council.
- 6.10 However, pursuant to the Council’s Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, the Mayor as the Executive has responsibility for preparing the draft plan or strategy for submission to the full Council. It will therefore be for the Mayor in Cabinet to recommend the draft strategy to Full Council.
- 6.11 In the exercise of its functions, the Council must comply with the public sector equality duty to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, namely the need to have regards to equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic, including ethnicity, gender, disability, and age and those who do not. We note that an EQIA has been completed for the VAWG Strategy and that all equality strands have been considered.

7. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The Community Safety Partnership (Safe and Cohesion Community Plan Delivery Group) aims through its plan, to make Tower Hamlets a more

cohesive place to live, work, study and visit. The work of the DV Forum, MARAC, No Place For Hate Forum; Community Cohesion, Contingency Planning Tension Monitoring Group and the Preventing Violent Extremism Programme Board, all subgroups of the CSP aim to carry-out this important part of work for the Partnership. Tackling gender based crime remain an important priority for the Partnership.

- 7.2 An EQIA has been completed for the VAWG Strategy and all equality strands have been considered. VAWG work aims to ensure One Tower Hamlets by aiming to eliminate gender based violence and discrimination.

8. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Whilst difficult to quantify there are potentially significant efficiency gains from working in partnership to reduce violence against women and girls in the borough. The Strategy which is a partnership document brings together key crime and disorder reduction agencies to ensure that we continue to work together as a partnership and share resources.

9. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 9.1 Approval and publication of the VAWG Strategy is expected to have a positive effect on the environment by helping to reduce violence against women and girls. This will then reduce the amount of serious and violent crime in the borough including domestic homicides, rape, sexual assault, prostitution, forced marriage, honour based violence, stalking, harassment, sexual exploitation and dowry related abuse as well as other environmental crimes in the borough.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There is risk that the name of the strategy is biased towards females, however, it is explicitly stated in the report that this is in line with national terminology from government, and that our strategy works across all protected characteristics. Majority of VAWG services support men and women.

11. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The decision to approve the VAWG Strategy will ensure we continue to work in partnership to tackle VAWG, ensure support for victims and ensure enforcement action against identified perpetrators. It will also support the Mayors priorities contributing to relevant 'safer' related community plan commitments.

12. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Community Safety Partnership includes amongst its members the independent chairs of the DV Forum, Safeguarding Adults and Safeguarding Children Boards. These boards are seen as 'linked boards' to the CSP and

have been included in the development process. There are no safeguarding risks identified in the report, only benefits for partner agencies across the CSP and both Safeguarding Boards by working together at strategic and operational levels in the borough, to ensure tackling VAWG in all its forms.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: VAWG Strategy & VAWG Consultation Report
- VAWG Consultation Report
- VAWG EIA Check List
- VAWG EIA
- VAWG Action Plan 2016-17
- DV Action Plan 2016 – 17
- NPFH Action Plan 2016-17

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

- NONE

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