

Report to: Social Inclusion and Community Safety Policy and Accountability Committee

Date: 22/11/2022

Subject: Violence Against Women and Girls

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Responsible Director: Matthew Hooper, Chief Officer Safer Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services

SUMMARY

This report provides PAC Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the council's approach to responding to and preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in H&F. In particular this report focuses on the support services provided to women and girls experiencing domestic abuse.

There are no decisions required from this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the committee to note and comment on the report and its contents.

Wards Affected: All

| Our Values | Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values |
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| Building shared prosperity | The council's VAWG strategy contributes to the council's commitment to end violence against women and girls and make H&F a safe borough for residents. Commissioned support service providers are asked to deliver social value (were required) and to confirm that the staff involved in delivering the services will not be subject to zero-hour contracts, and will have suitable employment terms and conditions, including the payment of the London Living Wage. |
| Creating a compassionate council | The council's VAWG strategy and commissioned support services support some of the most vulnerable residents in H&F and aim to improve the safety of residents affected by violence against women and girls (VAWG). |
| Doing things with residents, not to them | The council's VAWG strategy was co-produced with H&F victims/survivors, residents, third sector providers, community organisations and various council departments including public health, |

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| | housing and children's services. |
| Being ruthlessly financially efficient | When commissioning VAWG services, the council follows a competitive procurement process to ensure all contracts represent good value for money. |
| Taking pride in H&F | The council's VAWG strategy contributes to the council's commitment to end violence against women and girls and make H&F a safe borough for residents. |

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

1. **Background**
2. Stopping different forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was named as a key priority in the council's 2022 manifesto commitments, which stated "We will deliver our new, locally-focused strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls."
3. The council's new 2022-2027 [Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#) was published in March 2022. The strategy was developed and co-produced with H&F victims/survivors, residents, third sector providers, community organisations and various council departments including public health, housing and children's services.
4. The strategy has four main objectives:
 - a. VAWG is prevented
 - b. Survivors are supported
 - c. Abusers are held to account
 - d. Collaboration to create change
5. Accompanying the strategy is a 5-year action plan, reviewed annually, which details how we will be delivering against these objectives as a wider VAWG partnership. Included within this are the following commitments outlined in the manifesto:
 - a. Increasing the number of VAWG Law Enforcement Officer women's champions across the borough
 - b. Extending our work with residents, partners, the third sector and victims to provide a comprehensive programme of zero tolerance of VAWG: and
 - c. Ensuring that all perpetrators of VAWG are brought to justice in partnership with the police and key stakeholders.
6. In September 2021, the council increased its investment in VAWG funding, and recruited a dedicated Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Lead to oversee the delivery of the strategy and action plan and to further strengthen and enhance our response to VAWG.
7. Given the breadth of work being undertaken across the partnership to tackle the different forms of VAWG, this report will focus on the following key priority areas:
 1. Council funded domestic abuse refuge provision, provided by Refuge Charity
 2. Council funded domestic abuse support services, including Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates (IDVAs); Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs) and the Impact Project
 3. Council funded survivor consultation, being delivered by Women and Girls Network
 4. Activities to recognise 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in November-December 2022

8. Refuge provision

9. The new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on local authorities to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation, and to ensure that this support is tailored and meets the diverse needs of victim/survivors.
10. Hammersmith & Fulham have multiple refuge providers operating within the borough who receive funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities via the Greater London Authority.
11. One of these providers, Refuge Charity, is commissioned and part-funded via the council to deliver safe accommodation to single women and women with children affected by domestic abuse in H&F. As part of this contract Refuge also provide IDVAs, a children's worker, access to group work and counselling, and support to move on to independent living.
12. The service was recommissioned and awarded to Refuge Charity in July 2022 via a competitive procurement process and provides 14 spaces for single women and women with children affected by domestic abuse. The value of this contract to the council is £121,400.35 per annum and the contract was awarded for a minimum contract term of 3 years.
13. The service aims and objectives are:

Service Aims

- Provide high quality, safe accommodation for women, fleeing or at risk of domestic abuse and in immediate danger
- Deliver effective support interventions that enable survivors to exercise life choices that enable them to secure safe, settled accommodation.
- Deliver a service which reflects the needs of its residents including underrepresented groups
- Enable women and children affected by domestic violence to rebuild their lives and make the transition to a settled home and to training or employment.

Service Objectives

- Provide high quality, safe temporary accommodation for women and their children
- Assist women and their dependants to maintain personal safety and security
- Provide survivors with bespoke, specialist support based on an informed and ongoing assessment of need and risk
- Support women to access and maintain education, training or employment (where appropriate) and provide practical financial advice and support
- Support survivors to explore their accommodation options, such as management transfers and private sector housing options
- Support survivors and their children to move on into more suitable, sustainable settled accommodation
- Assist with a range of practical tasks associated with women fleeing their homes, belongings, jobs and support networks in an emergency
- Assist survivors to obtain specialist legal advice and seek remedies through the judicial system
- Enable children to identify and access the resources and services they need
- Promote a community support ethos within the refuge accommodation

14. Under the previous provider, in 2021-22, this service supported 42 women and 28 children.
15. The latest performance data for this service can be found in appendix 1.

Key challenges

16. The council and our service providers face two key challenges in delivering domestic abuse refuge accommodation in H&F - notably the security of funding and the availability of suitable accommodation/housing options.
17. With regard to the security of funding, the council currently has a core funding envelope of £121,400 per annum for domestic abuse refuge provision. This budget is secure and forms part of our confirmed annual budget. According to Women's Aid, 71.7% of refuge spaces are funded by local authorities nationally.
18. In H&F, local refuge providers also receive funding via the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Fund.
19. The council administers this DLUHC grant funding (which the council receives via the GLA) to various refuge service providers operating in H&F, including Refuge Charity.
20. However, this funding is only confirmed by DLUHC and the GLA on an annual basis, shortly in advance of the beginning of each financial year (in March). The council received confirmation that this funding would continue for Q1 of financial year 2022/23 on 30 March 2022. The funding for Q2-Q4 of 2022/23 was confirmed on 5 May 2022. We received the contract for signature on 13 September 2022. We have yet to receive the funding for this year 2022/23.
21. The uncertainty regarding whether this funding will continue year on year creates not only insecurity for our providers and their employees, but it also has the potential to have a negative impact on the quality of service provided and on our service users, who are amongst the most vulnerable in the borough.
22. Officers in community safety work closely with our refuge providers to communicate updates and manage risks associated with the precarity of this funding.
23. With regard to the second key challenge noted, it is recognised within the Ending VAWG Sector that best practice for domestic abuse refuge provision would involve secure, high quality, self-contained units within a space which also contains communal spaces which are purpose-built to improve wellbeing, support, and access to resources and skills (for example, rooms for counselling/group work/workshops, study spaces, play areas for children, space for socialising and building a sense of community). Ideally, these units and the buildings would also be accessible and able to meet the varied needs of victim/survivors and their children who are fleeing domestic abuse.
24. Given the challenges of the London housing market coupled with funding constraints, local authorities and charities across London (and also nationally) find it difficult to deliver refuge provision which fully aligns with the best practice framework.
25. We currently do not have any fully self-contained units in any refuge buildings in H&F, which can be particularly challenging for victim/survivors with children or those with disabilities who are required to share bathroom and shower facilities with a number of other residents. We also currently do not have any fully wheelchair accessible units.

26. The challenging housing market in London, which is particularly saturated in Hammersmith & Fulham, also makes it difficult to find suitable move-on accommodation for victim/survivors when they are ready to leave the refuge. We are seeing residents in the refuge staying for much longer periods of time than intended due to delays in finding somewhere to live. This results in new victim/survivors being unable to access the refuge because they remain at capacity whilst our providers struggle to find accommodation for victim/survivors to move on to.

27. Similarly, refuge charities often lease buildings from Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to provide this provision. Officers are also working collaboratively with colleagues in Economy to explore opportunities to renovate alternative H&F owned buildings for use as refuges which would improve and expand our refuge offer in H&F.

28. Commissioned domestic abuse support services

29. The council currently commissions a range of services for survivors of VAWG.

30. The council's main VAWG support service is provided by the [Angelou Service](#) and was recommissioned for a minimum of three years in September 2021.

31. The Angelou Service is delivered by a consortium of VAWG organisations including:

- Advance (lead partner)
- Al Hasaniya (specialists in BAME communities and harmful practices)
- Women and Girls Network (specialists in sexual violence)
- Solace (specialists in sexual violence)
- IKWRO Women's Rights Organisation (specialists in BAME communities harmful practices)
- Galop (LBT+ communities)

32. The Angelou Service supports women (including trans women and gender non-binary people):

- Experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence and assault.
- Experiencing stalking and harassment as part of domestic abuse.
- Who have been subjected to or at risk of harmful practices including female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage (FM), and honour-based violence (HBV).
- Experiencing multiple forms of VAWG.
- Young women and girls aged 13-21 who are experiencing or are at risk of a range of issues including domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, gang related abuse and harmful practices.

33. The women supported include those from Black or global majority communities, women with multiple disadvantages, women with no recourse to public funds, women with disabilities and LBT+ women. Angelou provide support to victims regardless of whether they remain in a violent relationship, are seeking to leave a violent relationship or have already left a violent relationship.

34. Support is available from 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday with extended provision from 8am to 9pm one day a week. Women referred to the service are contacted within 1 working day of the referral being received and an initial phone assessment is completed. All service users are offered an initial appointment within a maximum of five working days of the receipt of a referral.

35. The support provided includes:

- Advice around housing, rights and options
- Criminal and civil justice processes
- Safety planning
- Benefits and welfare
- Emotional support
- Physical and mental health
- Substance misuse
- Immigration

36. Working as part of a Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR) to tackling VAWG, the service aims to deliver the following key objectives:

- To improve safety of victim/survivors of VAWG and their children
- To provide access to specialist support for victim/survivors who are from Black and Global Majority groups or who identify as LBT+
- To address wider forms of VAWG
- To improve access for victim/survivors experiencing multiple and intersecting disadvantage
- To reduce repeat victimisation
- To improve long-term outcomes and wellbeing for victims and their families
- To support young people and children affected by abuse

37. Since the service was recommissioned in September 2021, 471 H&F residents have received support through the Angelou Service and 285 children were also indirectly supported by supporting their non abusive parent.

- 58% of service users are aged between 25 and 44.
- 79% identified as straight, 14% chose not to disclose their sexuality, with only a small percentage of service users openly identifying as gay or bi-sexual.
- 56% of the women supported identified as Black or from a Global majority background.
- 34% of service users identify as having mental health needs and 10% stated they had a physical disability.

38. Since September 2021, 81% of service users were referred because of domestic abuse (as opposed to other types of VAWG).

39. In the most recent quarter (July to September 2022):

- 21% of service users experienced online abuse
- 15% experienced physical abuse
- 10% experienced sexual violence
- 11% experienced harmful practices such as FGM and honour-based abuse
- 10% experienced coercive control
- 9% experienced financial abuse
- 9% experienced stalking and harassment

40. The latest performance data for this service can be found in appendix 2.

41. In addition to the support provided by the Angelou service, the council is currently inviting tenders to bring together three other existing contracts and commission an enhanced specialist co-located Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service to support women experiencing domestic abuse who are accessing

Homelessness services, Children's Social Care, and/or the Criminal Justice System in H&F from April 2023.

42. The specialist co-located IDVA service will seek to provide specialist on-site support to meet the varied needs of victim/survivors accessing these services (Housing, Children's Social Care, Criminal Justice) and to help break down the barriers victim/survivors often face when accessing statutory services. The service will include enhanced provision for those experiencing complex and multiple disadvantages, acknowledging that these victims/survivors find it disproportionately more difficult to engage with and receive support from statutory agencies. The service will also provide training and consultations to professionals working across the three co-location areas and multiple disadvantages to upskill them in working sensitively with victim/survivors of Domestic Abuse.

43. Survivor consultation

44. The council are currently working with Women and Girls Network (WGN) to undertake an extensive consultation exercise with survivors of VAWG in H&F. As part of this consultation exercise, WGN are exploring how to most effectively establish a H&F VAWG Survivor Forum.

45. When established, the VAWG Survivor Forum will act a resident advisory board made up of a diverse range of victim/survivors. As experts through lived experience, the Forum would help guide and influence the council and local partners' response to VAWG by reviewing our VAWG strategy and action plan, our policies and procedures and guiding our service redesign.

46. The Forum will seek to ensure that intersectionality, equity, diversity, and inclusion are considered and embedded throughout the consultation, strategy, and recommendations. A key focus of the consultation is therefore to identify how we can ensure that voices which are often missing, excluded, and marginalised within consultations are offered equal voice and participation within the Forum.

47. The survivor consultation launched in May 2022 and is due to be completed by February 2023. From the outset WGN have demonstrated their commitment to co-production working alongside their own Pan London Advisory board to develop all materials to be used for the consultation and members of the board will co-facilitate consultation spaces. WGN will provide various platform for survivors to engage and participate including online/ face to face- individual and group sessions. They will also consult with other representative stakeholders working with VAWG survivors. They will provide a range of opportunities to feed into the consultation e.g., online surveys and provide a thematic analysis of findings. Based on the findings they will compile a report outlining key recommendations along with an action plan. Determined by the report recommendations they will develop relevant resources including policies and procedures to safeguard the Advisory Groups recruitment and membership.

48. 16 Days Activism against Gender-Based Violence 2022

49. 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international event that starts on the 25 November (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and runs to the 10 December (International Human Rights Day). Each year a broad range of organisations, including the council, host events to raise awareness of VAWG for both professionals and residents.

50. During this year's 16 Days, the council will be delivering the following:

- A festive fundraiser in support of domestic abuse services across H&F
- Social media communications campaign to raise awareness our VAWG support services
- Dedicated engagement with businesses and night-time economy venues to promote the 'Ask for Angela' initiative and promote further training on the scheme
- Workshops, delivered in partnership with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, on allyship, demonstrating simple and safe ways the community can intervene to address street harassment. [Register here.](#)
- A webinar for professionals focusing on how different communities are impacted by and experience harmful practices including female genital mutilation (FBM), so-called 'honour' based violence (HBV), early and forced marriage and conversion therapy.
- An event hosted by the Council's Women's Network and Race Equality Networks to show solidarity with women in Iran and to discuss the human rights violations taking place. This is following Full Council agreeing a motion to condemn the Iranian regime and its treatment of women on 19 October 2022.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Refuge Service Performance Report

Appendix 2 - Angelou Service Performance Report

Appendix 3 - Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)

Appendix 4 - H&F Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2022 – 2027