

**Report for:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 20 June 2022

**Title:** Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) Scrutiny Review

**Report authorised by:** Ayshe Simsek, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

## 1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 A Scrutiny Review on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was started by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 2021/22. However, the Review was not completed due to resource limitations both within the Scrutiny team and the Public Health team.
- 1.2 The Committee is asked to consider the extent of the evidence gathered through the Review so far and to determine the most appropriate route to complete (or discontinue) the Review in 2022/23.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 For the Committee to determine next steps for the VAWG Scrutiny Review. Possible options include:
  - a) to complete the Review through the Overview & Scrutiny Committee either with the existing terms of reference or with a revised terms of reference;
  - b) to complete the Review through the Adults & Health Scrutiny Panel (which has a remit including VAWG and public health) either with the existing terms of reference or with a revised terms of reference;
  - c) to complete the Review through the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Review (which has a remit including schools and education) with a narrowed terms of reference to focus on how the Council can work with schools to support the prevention of VAWG;
  - d) to complete the Review through the Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel (which has a remit including strategic transport, parks/green spaces and liveable neighbourhoods) with a narrowed terms of reference to focus on how the Council can work with partners to ensure that women and girls feel safer during the day and night in public spaces in Haringey.
  - e) to remove the VAWG Scrutiny Review from the 2022/23 work programme.

### **3. Background to the VAWG Scrutiny Review**

- 3.1 A key outcome of the Council's Borough Plan is that levels of violence against women and girls will be significantly reduced. The Council's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy for 2016-2026 sets out the Council's vision to make Haringey one of the safest boroughs in London for women and girls in which no form of abuse is tolerated.
- 3.2 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Adults & Health Scrutiny Panel have monitored this issue in recent years. In June 2020, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was informed that reports of domestic abuse had increased by 30-35% following the lockdown measures imposed by the Government in March 2020. In November 2020, the Adults & Health Scrutiny Panel received an overview from the VAWG team of the changes made to the delivery of VAWG services since the implementation of lockdown measures. The Panel heard about the work that the Council had carried out with partners and service providers to identify and support residents who needed help but was concerned to hear about delays to court proceedings and shortage of refuge spaces. Recent high-profile incidents of violence against women and girls have further highlighted the importance of this issue.
- 3.3 The Government's national strategy states that the term 'violence against women and girls' refers to "acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls" and that this includes rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, 'honour-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and 'honour' killings) and offences committed online.
- 3.4 Haringey Council's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy for 2016-2026 sets out four key priorities:
- Developing a Coordinated Community Response
  - Prevention
  - Support for victims/survivors
  - Holding perpetrators accountable
- 3.5 The Council's VAWG Strategy states that violence against women and girls includes violence that is targeted at women or girls because of their gender or affects women and girls disproportionately. Examples of VAWG given include:
- Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation
  - Sexual harassment and bullying
  - Stalking
  - Trafficking
  - Domestic violence and abuse

- Coercive and controlling behaviour
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced marriage
- Crimes committed in the name of 'honour' (so-called 'honour' based violence)

#### 4. Terms of Reference

4.1 On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021, the Committee agreed terms of reference for a Scrutiny Review on Gun and Knife Crime with a focus on three distinct areas:

- Knife crime;
- Gun crime; and
- Violence against women and girls

4.2 On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021 the Committee determined to amend the terms of reference to limit the Review to violence against women and girls but with a wide-ranging scope within that area as follows:

- The Council's 10-year VAWG strategy, the resources available to support it and the involvement of partner organisations, including those in the voluntary and community sector.
- The scale of VAWG in the borough, and the level of confidence of women and girls have in reporting incidents of VAWG to the authorities.
- The Council's approach to communicating information about available services to women and girls who have experienced or are at risk of violence/abuse.
- How the Council is housing those who have been subjected to domestic abuse.
- How the Council is making physical spaces in the borough, such as parks, streets and housing estates, safer for women and girls.

4.3 The Public Health team expressed the view that the scope of the proposed Review was too wide and that it would take a long period of time to give full consideration to all aspects of VAWG.

4.4 As an alternative way forward, the Public Health team proposed that the scope of the Review be narrowed and suggested that a key theme could be how the Council can work with partners to ensure that women and girls feel safer in public spaces in Haringey. A survey of 1,700 women in the Borough had been carried out in August 2021 on issues relating to women's safety. This had highlighted a number of specific localities within the borough where women reported feeling unsafe. The survey findings included:

- Outdoor spaces were, by far, considered the most unsafe areas for women at night. Women also highlighted serious concerns around walking on the high street or along roads on their route home.
- Public transport: Women identified safety concerns in travelling on the bus and tube as well as at stops or stations when waiting for them.

- Areas which are: poorly lit or have poor surveillance; quiet with low footfall or traffic; poorly designed or maintained; poorly policed or monitored by transport staff; and frequented by men who might behave inappropriately or criminally, including those with mental health or addiction problems.
- Safety black spots such as spaces in the Wood Green, Tottenham, Seven Sisters, Harringay and Highgate wards were highlighted as feeling particularly dangerous.
- The survey highlighted the particular vulnerability of women from disabled or older age groups, as well as mothers, feel when out alone, in the daytime as well as at night.

4.5 As part of a discussion between Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, an alternative suggestion emerged that the terms of reference could be narrowed to focus on how the Council could work with schools to support the prevention of VAWG. The Committee had been informed at an evidence session with the VAWG team leader that more disclosures had been taking place in schools since the Sarah Everard case and that, as part of the VAWG team's Coordinated Community Response (CCR) and Prevention work, a small project had been commissioned which involved a worker going into schools to talk about healthy relationships.

4.6 The Committee was also made aware that there was a community engagement project with young people involving the development of videos and peer on peer support. While this was only a small project at present, the aim was to further support schools through an expanded offer and the development of a public health approach. Tackling attitudes and behaviour in men and boys as part of the solution also needed to start at an earlier age in primary schools, rather than just through PSHE in secondary schools.

## **5. Evidence sessions 2021/22**

5.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee began the process of collecting evidence for the VAWG Review but it quickly became clear that it would not be possible to complete the Review before the pre-election period began in March 2022, due to the wide-ranging nature of the Review and the existing workload of the Committee including the transfer of the High Road West Scrutiny Review from the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel. The Public Health team also made clear that the VAWG team was short-staffed at the time when evidence sessions were due to be carried out (Nov 2021 to Mar 2022) and that they would be in a better position to engage with a Scrutiny Review on VAWG later in 2022.

5.2 Evidence collected on VAWG during 2021/22 included:

- Oral evidence from Sandeep Broca, Intelligence Analyst in the Community Safety and Enforcement Team who provided the Committee with key trends and statistics on domestic abuse in Haringey.
- Oral evidence from Detective Inspector Paul Ridley from the Metropolitan Police who provided details of the Police approach to VAWG including their partnership working, statistical analysis, offender management plans for identified individuals who targeted women and additional patrols at peak times in identified hotspot areas.
- Oral evidence from Will Maimaris, Director for Public Health, and Manju Likhman, VAWG Strategic Lead, who provided a detailed overview of the Council's VAWG Strategy for 2016-2026 and responded to a range of questions from the Committee.
- Assembly of written evidence including:
  - the Council's VAWG Strategy;
  - the Council's VAWG Guidance for Professionals;
  - the Council's VAWG Annual Review for 2020/21;
  - the Government's Tackling VAWG Strategy (2021);
  - minutes from meetings of the Adults & Health Scrutiny Panel which had previously received reports on VAWG in Haringey;
  - previous Scrutiny Reviews on VAWG from other local authorities; and
  - information about voluntary and community organisations operating in the VAWG sector in Haringey.

## **6. Use of Appendices**

6.1 N/A