

London Borough of
Tower Hamlets

**Violence against
Women and Girls
Strategy
2016-2019**

SUMMARY VERSION

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Introduction

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.

This current strategy outlines and 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.

Why have a VAWG Strategy?

Addressing violence against women and girls is already recognised as a priority area regionally, nationally and internationally. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1993. This was followed by a resolution of intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women in 2009. In 2010, the Mayor of London published 'The Way Forward'; a London-wide plan aimed to end all forms of violence against women in the capital and followed this with a refreshed strategy in 2013. In 2011, the Coalition Government published its 'Call to End Violence Against Women & Girls' which outlines the responsibility of Local Authorities to co-ordinate their response to VAWG issues. The Mayor of London's Policing and Crime Plan, launched in 2013 also has tackling VAWG as a key priority.¹ Tower Hamlets VAWG Plan takes a pro-active partnership approach to addressing this problem and makes a strong statement about the Council's commitment to safeguarding adults and children and pursuing gender equality.

Approximately 97% of all known victims of interpersonal violence in Tower Hamlets are female - a significant gender bias towards women. A Violence against Women and Girls approach sees the phenomenon of violence against women as both a cause and effect of fundamental inequalities between males and females. The Preamble to The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) states that *"violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men."*

It is important that Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is not seen as a series of incidents or assaults which are individual experiences. VAWG describes violent and oppressive patterns of behaviour and practises, which achieve power and control over women and girls. It impacts on the physical safety, health and emotional well-being of individuals and impacts on families, carers, children and the community as a whole. As Alison Saunders, Director of Public Prosecutions has recently highlighted, *until it is no longer the case that the vast majority of these crimes are committed by men using power, coercion and violence against women, amending the title of*

¹ The Policing and Crime Plan is currently in transition for 2016 and will be updated following consultation held by MOPAC in winter 2016. Our VAWG Strategy will be revised in light of any key changes.

*VAWG would put the victims of these crimes back into the dark, where they have been kept for far too long.*²

Abuse can take place, however, regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, sexuality or age. Whilst we recognise that the issues in the previous plan and this strategy have a disproportionate effect on women, we also recognise that boys and men are victims of violence too - 3% of all victims of interpersonal violence in Tower Hamlets. As a local area, 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 undermining this approach.

Evaluating our work on VAWG

Highlighting VAWG work to date

As outlined, we are developing our second VAWG Strategy. We are currently working on an evaluation report which will be published in autumn 2016. The evaluation report will look at the lessons learned in the previous three years and identify key successes and key challenges as well as looking forward to the future. However, in the interim, it is important to reflect upon the headline successes and challenges since 2013. Some of the key outcomes are outlined below:

- Almost £1,000,000 funding raised from external sources including MOPAC, DfE and DCLG
- Recruitment of over 150 VAWG Champions from organisations across the borough, ensuring that our champions represent the full diversity of communities in the borough.³
- Development of a multi-agency training programme and the Training and Awareness Officer post
- Development of a partnership approach to prostitution including a 'prostitution MARAC'
- Tower Hamlets is one of only 5 boroughs to participate in a MOPAC and DfE funded pilot to tackle 'harmful practices'
- VAWG network of over 500 participants
- Over 1800 young people have received lessons
- Nearly 2000 professionals have received training
- 'Whole School' approach to prevention developed and implemented in schools across the borough
- MARAC referrals for all strands of VAWG have increased, highlighting increased awareness by professionals
- Change in working practice around harmful practices where Tower Hamlets is now seen as a best practice borough across London
- Increase in men working to tackle VAWG – VAWG is not just seen as a 'women's issue' and men are championing the work around gender equality.
- Police reporting across all strands except dowry related abuse increase (dowry abuse is expected to have been subsumed within wider 'domestic abuse' flags).
- Development of a strong multi-agency partnership approach across all strands
- Increased awareness of VAWG across the wider community including recruitment of VAWG Community Champions

² Saunders, A. (2015) 'Some violence is targeted at women and girls – we can't ignore that', Alison Saunders, Director of Public Prosecutions in The Guardian Newspaper, 28.07.15

³ We have recruited champions from different communities across Tower Hamlets. Additionally, we have champions who represent LGBT residents and who represent disabled residents in the borough.

Areas for Development

Our consultation for the development of the current strategy⁴ has highlighted that there are areas that we are currently working on (including all of the above) that should be maintained and there are areas that we need to develop during the 2016-2019 period. The key areas for development included: innovation of services; increased multi-agency working to reduce resource costs and improve responses; renewed focus on No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), perpetrators and victims experiencing multiple disadvantage and prioritising prevention work with young people.

Key Challenges and how to mitigate them

What about men?

One of the key challenges in providing a VAWG approach is the belief that our work does not include men and boys. However, the aim behind providing a VAWG approach is the recognition that 97% of victims of interpersonal violence in Tower Hamlets are female. Any victim of violence and abuse deserves to access support and help: the Domestic Violence and Hate Crime Team (within which VAWG sits) will support anyone presenting regardless of gender or sexuality – we recognise that men also experience domestic violence and this is explicit in all the work of the team. However, the VAWG strategy reflects that gender based violence is predominately a pattern of behaviour perpetrated by men against women.

Welfare reform and austerity

Another key challenge to providing our work on VAWG is the difficulties that welfare reform coupled with austerity has on the survivors we work with and also the organisations providing specialist support services. Women are disproportionately affected by all of the reforms and victims of VAWG are further victimised through high levels of financial control. We have sought to mitigate some of the impacts through development of the partnerships, the champion programme as well as external funding meaning that our VAWG work can be developed without huge levels of additional resourcing.

Competing priorities

Given the difficulties of prioritising funding in a climate of cuts, VAWG has diminished in some areas as a priority focus. We have sought to mitigate this through close working with priority areas – for example we have developed workshops around the links between extremism and gender-based violence.

New Legislation

A new area which will provide a key challenge to our new Strategy is the introduction of coercive control legislation, which came into force in December 2015. This new criminal offence, with a renewed emphasis on protecting people from abuse, will provide a challenge to existing resources of police, the council and also our partners across the VAWG area.

⁴ Our consultation process ran from October 2015 - February 2016 to ensure that we consulted with as many people as possible. The consultation methodology was varied to allow for different stakeholders to contribute to our Strategy. A consultation questionnaire was launched in October and individual meetings and focus groups started in November 2015. (A paper version of the questionnaire was also available). A report to accompany the consultation is available with key recommendations that fed into the development of the strategy. An executive summary of the report is available in Appendix 3.

Sustainable Funding Streams

A key area of challenge for all of the work on VAWG is the sustainability of funding. A lot of the work around VAWG is funded externally, either through different departments within Tower Hamlets or by external funders. There is a risk that once the discrete projects (including FGM, Harmful Practices Pilot, Training and Awareness Officer Post and Youth Campaign) finish that there will not be funding to continue the VAWG Strategy work. There is also a risk to projects funded and delivered externally that are subject to the same pressures and cuts to local authority funding, including the IRIS domestic violence project that works in GP surgeries.

Outline of the VAWG Strategy

To address all of the forms of VAWG experienced by women in Tower Hamlets, our Strategy takes a multi-agency approach, recognising that no one agency can support all the victims of VAWG. As outlined above, in developing this strategic approach we worked with a range of organisations to hold stakeholder discussions with female victims of VAWG and women accommodated in refuge and other provision across the borough to ensure that our proposal is survivor led and that it also meets the needs of the diverse range of victims in our borough, including BME women, women with NRPF and women who experience multiple disadvantages.

What is Violence against Women and Girls?

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is both a form of discrimination and a violation of human rights. As outlined above, locally we have adopted the United Nations Declaration on Elimination of all forms of violence towards women, which defines violence against women as:

‘Any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women [or girls], including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty’

United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence towards Women (1993, Article 1)

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 the types of violence included are⁵:

- **Sexual Violence**
- **Domestic Violence**
- **Trafficking**
- **Prostitution**
- **Child Sexual Exploitation including in a gang context**

⁵ See Appendix 1 for definitions of the VAWG strands

- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**
- **Forced Marriage**
- **So-called 'Honour' Based Violence**
- **Dowry Related Abuse**
- **Stalking and Harassment**

We propose to maintain all ten strands but to also explicitly recognise that the internet and social media have facilitated a huge range of online and offline abuses and that this has escalated rapidly over the past three years since we published our first VAWG Plan.

Consultation

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

This report 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
- Looks at the experience of female survivors of violence and provides an overview of what we currently know about local needs
- Provides an overview of the national and regional context of work on addressing violence against women and girls
- Provides an assessment of our current approach to tackling violence against women and girls in Tower Hamlets
- Highlights proposals made during the consultation on the way forward for tackling VAWG in Tower Hamlets

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

Highlights from the consultation process

Awareness

Our consultation has shown that the vast majority of people consulted are aware of VAWG services in the borough. Almost 80% of respondents across all of the groups consulted have some awareness of the work and all of the individuals interviewed know about the work. This represents a large increase from the consultation held in 2013 for the first VAWG Plan.

Strands

All respondents believe that we should continue to prioritise the existing VAWG strands and are in agreement that there needs to be more work focussing on online methods used to abuse victims. The internet has increased as a facilitator of abuse since our first VAWG Plan and there is a need to recognise this.

Barriers

Barriers to disclosure differed depending on the consultation group but there was a cross-cutting barrier around people not disclosing as they did not understand what constituted abuse meaning that there is greater need to provide training and awareness to all residents and professionals in Tower Hamlets. For professionals the greatest barrier to disclosure for victims of VAWG was the increased complexity that women experiencing multiple disadvantage (mental health, complex needs, drugs and alcohol, homelessness and No Resource to Public Funds) as well as a marked fear of institution identified. For young people, the greatest barrier was a feeling of shame or embarrassment on disclosure of abuse and the feeling that professionals do not fully understand their experiences of VAWG.

Challenges

The two areas that respondents feel would have the biggest impact in the current economic climate are: prioritising prevention work and strengthening multi-agency links across all services in the borough. One of the comments includes: *The key for me is multi-agency working and skilling up all professionals to address VAWG. I feel like there could also be work done on spaces where people are likely to disclose - friends and family, medical context. While the focus on police and reporting is important this does not reflect how survivors access help.*

Current gaps in services

The main gap that has been identified is the lack of multi-agency working of some statutory and voluntary organisations in the borough. The other key areas that respondents feel is currently missing is support for women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) (especially single women) and also women with multiple disadvantage. These are two new priority areas for development of our new strategy. For survivors it was a need to have survivor led spaces combined with a two pronged approach of crisis-support and ongoing emotional and practical support as risks reduced.

Recommendations

The recommendations across the 3 groups – survivor and community consultation, young people and professionals had cross-cutting similarities but also nuanced difference pertaining to the individual group. There was consensus to build upon the work of the previous VAWG Plan but to expand in some areas, particularly prevention and community engagement and to develop other areas, especially around NRPF and complex needs.

Although the evaluation of the first VAWG Plan is not due until autumn 2016, it is obvious that there has been a change in Tower Hamlets in terms of identifying, recording and supporting victims of VAWG. Recording has increased across the majority of strands (it is thought that dowry-related abuse continues to be subsumed under domestic abuse figures) and responses by professionals have improved although there is still a staggering need for more training to all professionals.

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 best approach
- Multi-pronged, individual approach is needed to best support survivors

- Perpetrators should be given support to understand the consequences of their behaviour
- Hold 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 with an empathetic approach
- Peer support methods, including group sessions, should be implemented
- The community champions programme should be expanded

Young people's Recommendations

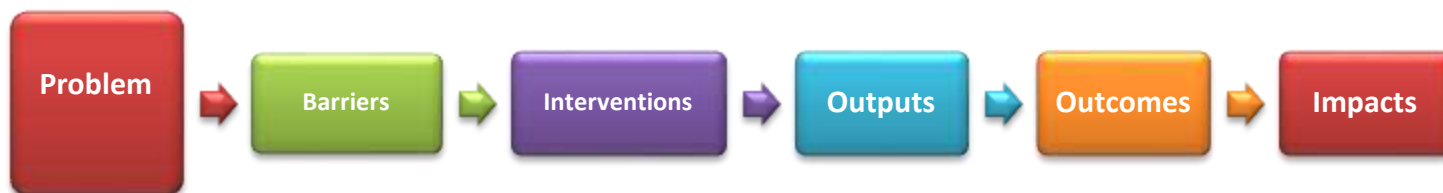
- Focus on providing young people with information about all of the strands of VAWG and where they can get help and support
- Develop the work in schools to ensure that all young people are getting the right messages about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable
- Development the youth champions programme, 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.

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 often fall through gaps between children's and adult services and existing services are predominantly funded externally
- 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

Theory of Change

In developing our updated VAWG Strategy, we have applied a theory of change model to our current work on VAWG.⁶ The model, which has been used since the late 1980s, is ‘a systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes and contexts of the initiative’⁷. The model has been used extensively in recent years by Department for International Development (DFID) to evaluate work in developing countries on VAWG⁸ and the systematic review highlights both the successful outcomes of our existing VAWG work but also shows where there needs to be additional focus for our strategic approach moving forwards.



A Theory of Change (TOC) model is depicted as a linear model to be read from the bottom up (See below) but should not be interpreted as such given the complexity of VAWG. Using a linear outline enables the key milestones and concepts to be outlined which, when combined with a coordinated community response model highlights the need for better multi-agency, multi-sector working to tackle VAWG.

Stage 1: Problem

The base of the TOC model is the problem which is the overarching issue to be overcome in order to work towards a borough that is free from VAWG. In the case of Tower Hamlets, the problem is that gender-based violence violates the rights of women and girls in the borough and both constrains their choices and affects their ability to participate as equal actors in society.

Stage 2: Barriers

The next level in a TOC model is identification of key barriers. In Tower Hamlets, the key barriers to prevention, provision and protection are:

- Attitudes of members of the community that condone violence
- Need for continued and committed political will at a senior level to tackle VAWG
- Inadequate or inappropriate support for victims of VAWG
- Lack of awareness of VAWG amongst professionals that impacts on responses to victims
- Absence of prevention with younger people leads to concerning attitudes and impacts on future support needs of young women

⁶ For information on using a theory of change for work on VAWG, please see: Fancy, K. and McAslan Fraser, E. (2014) *DFID Guidance Note on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Education Programmes – Part A*, London: VAWG Helpdesk; Lindley, H. (2014) ‘Reflections on Womankind Worldwide’s experiences of tackling common challenges in monitoring and evaluating women’s rights programming’, *Gender and Development*, 22(2), pp. 271-289; Gains, F. and Lowndes, V. (2014) ‘How is Institutional Formation Gendered, and Does it Make a Difference? A New Conceptual Framework and a Case Study of Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales’, *Politics and Gender*, 10(4), pp.524-548

⁷ Connell, J.P. and Kubisch, A. C. (1998) ‘Applying a Theory of Change Approach to the Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Progress, Prospects, and Problems’ in Fulbright- Anderson K, Kubisch A.C. and Connell J.P., (eds). *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives: theory, measurement, and analysis*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute

⁸ Our Theory of Change model is based on Lockett, K. and Bishop, K. (2012) *A Theory of Change for Tackling Violence against Women and Girls*, Violence Against Women and Girls: CHASE Guidance Note Series: Guidance Note 1, London: DFID

Stage 3: Interventions

Appropriate interventions address the key barriers and support the creation of an environment that facilitates work on VAWG and work with the whole community to tackle VAWG. The key interventions are outlined in the Coordinated Community Response which highlights our 6 strategic objectives designed to provide a long term solution to gender-based violence.

Stage 4: Outputs

Each intervention leads to a range outputs and each area is cross-cutting – for example, good quality prevention work can lead to better perpetrator accountability. Outputs are in essence the extremely short term outcomes of the interventions but which contribute towards an overall systems change. Examples of this include: Training 100 VAWG Champions who then deliver messages to 15 staff members each at a team meeting extending the reach to 1500 professionals in the borough.

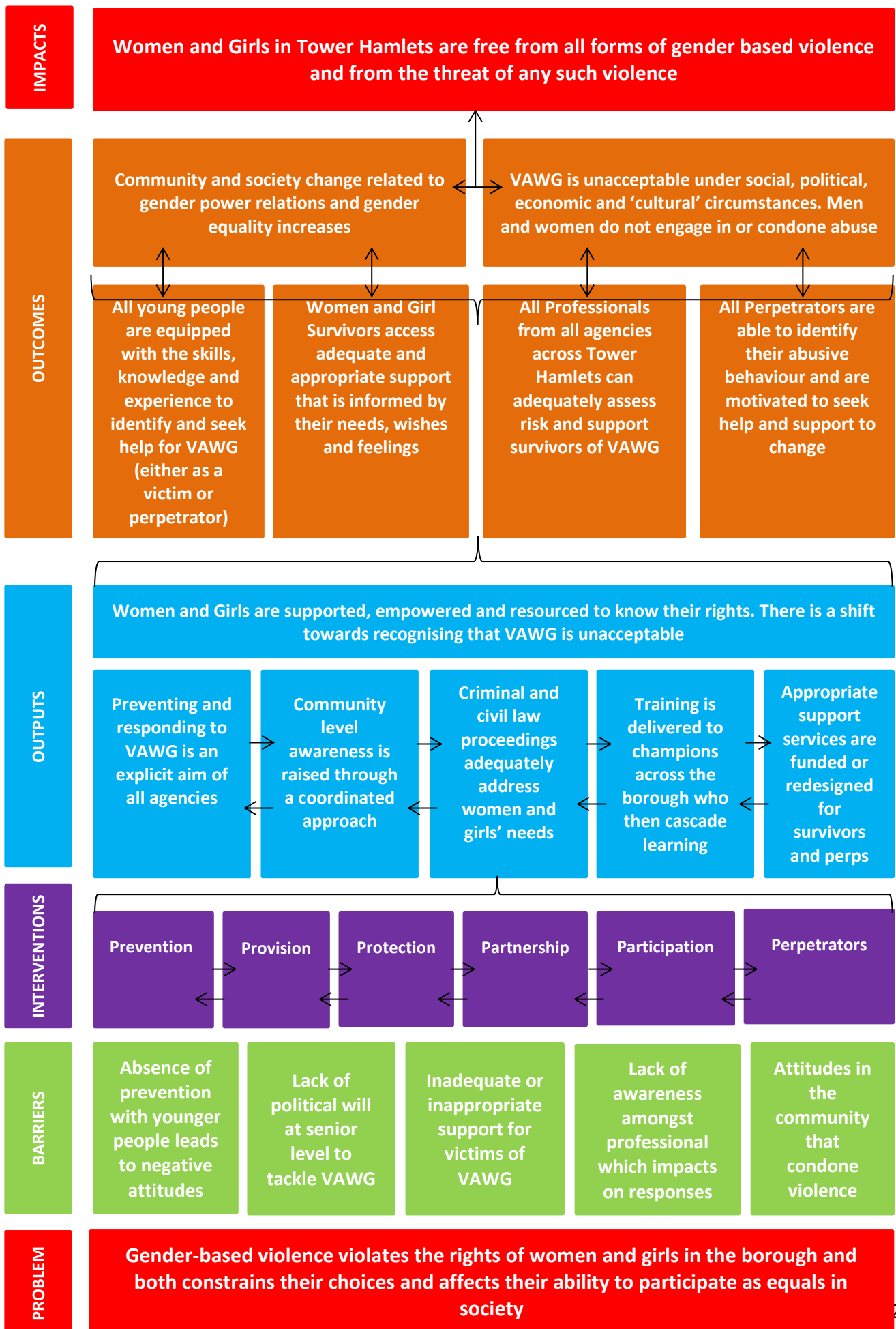
Stage 5: Outcomes

Given the linear depiction of the model – the outputs should lead to fulfilment of outcomes in a successful VAWG programme. Outcomes can be seen as the medium term successes the programme – a highlight of the areas that are recorded and monitored within our action plans and performance matrix

Stage 6: Impacts

The key impact, the top of the TOC model or the area of change essentially tries to ensure that the problem established in Stage 1 has been addressed and eradicated. For a Tower Hamlets model that would be the achievement of our strategic vision for the borough where all women and girls are free from all forms of gender-based violence and from any threat of such violence.

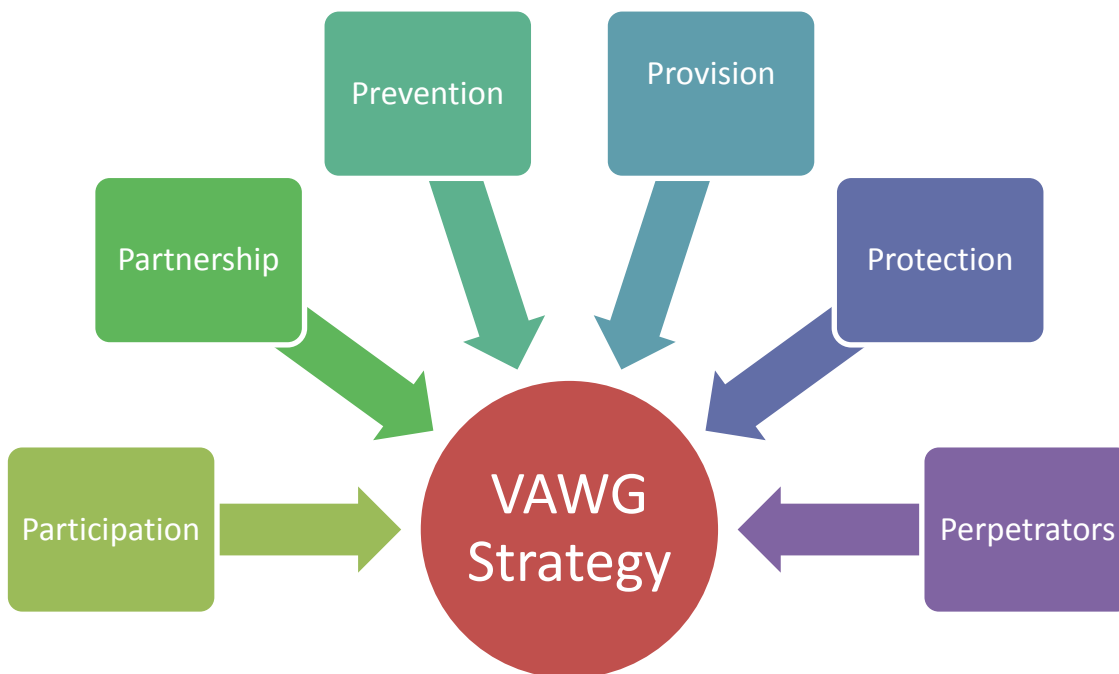
Figure 1: VAWG Theory of Change Model



Strategic Approach

We propose to use a 6P approach to develop the strategic priorities, ensuring that the learning from our work to date, as well as the theory of change model and CCR, are incorporated:

- **Strategic Priority 1: Prevention and Early Intervention**
- **Strategic Priority 2: Provision of Appropriate Support to Survivors**
- **Strategic Priority 3: Protection from Abuse**
- **Strategic Priority 4: Partnership working across Statutory and Voluntary Agencies**
- **Strategic Priority 5: Participation of victim/survivors to inform services**
- **Strategic Priority 6: Perpetrator Accountability**



Further information and Action Plans

For any further information on our strategic approach; the operational elements (including Action Plans) or the consultation report, please contact:

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