



Developing a Local Violence Against Women and Girls Commissioning Strategy

Before embarking on a process to commission specific services for survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG), commissioners will be involved in a consultation process to develop a local strategy that will identify local need and provide the framework for a strong, resilient and sustainable response to violence against women and girls.

The strategy will incorporate the aims of the Home Office national strategy, 'End Violence Against Women and Girls' to:

- ▶ prevent violence against women and girls from happening in the first place, by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early to prevent it;
- ▶ provide adequate levels of support where violence occurs;
- ▶ work in partnership to obtain the best outcomes for victims and their families;
- ▶ take action to reduce the risk to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice¹.

The local strategy will articulate the common needs and issues experienced by all survivors of VAWG, and the integration of the local strategy into the national network of provision that ensures women and children can find safety away from perpetrators in any part of the country necessary to preserve life and prevent harm².

Contents of the strategy³

The strategy is likely to include:

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4. Local need, identified through consultation
5. Priorities
6. Delivering the strategy
7. Relationships with voluntary and community organisations
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1 Home Office (2014) *A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan 2014*.

2 Bowstead J. (2013) *The extent and implications of women's forced migration journeys to escape domestic violence*. London: Metropolitan University.

3 Based on the Essex Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Strategy 2013-16.



Purpose

A strategy is needed:

- ▶ to establish a consistent, multi-agency approach to commissioning services for women and girls escaping violence and the provision of support to survivors;
- ▶ to clarify how the future commissioning landscape will operate with co-ordination between commissioners;
- ▶ to devolve control and power to survivors so they can make use of all public assets to make the journey from coping with violence to recovery from abuse;
- ▶ to support innovation and meaningful survivor involvement within service provision;
- ▶ to support the development of community capacity, whilst recognising the need for continued support for evidenced core VAWG services;
- ▶ to ensure that commissioning of VAWG organisations is transparent, fair and Compact compliant;
- ▶ to ensure alignment between external finance levered-in by the women's sector and the desired outcomes of public sector funding of voluntary and community organisations - very often the biggest funders for certain issues of violence against women and girls are the women's sector providers themselves, developing pioneering work on child sexual exploitation, trafficking, support for women involved in prostitution and work with survivors of VAWG who are dependent on substances;
- ▶ to influence organisational strategies and action plans that impact on procurement, commissioning and engagement between the sectors;
- ▶ to achieve strategic relationships rather than outline an operational plan for local implementation.

Audience

The strategy is intended for use by the public sector and voluntary and community sector, including:

- ▶ commissioners and funders of public sector services;
- ▶ voluntary and community sector organisations working to prevent, address, and support survivors of, violence against women and girls;
- ▶ organisations providing capacity building, development and support to the voluntary and community sector;
- ▶ local business organisations and groups;
- ▶ elected councillors and politicians.



Approach and context

Commissioning can be understood as an on-going process divided into four broad activities:

1. Identify and quantify service user needs for the general population in an area.
2. Align and plan resources to meet needs.
3. Secure an appropriate solution.
4. Evaluate the impact and lessons from the process.

The commissioning strategy will be informed by a number of key developments, including local Compacts, Domestic Homicide Reviews, public health strategies, and national violence against women and girls and victims' services strategies and will be informed by local and national research on:

- ▶ the number of women and girls likely to be experiencing abuse in the area⁴;
- ▶ demographics of the population and thus the estimated demographic of need;
- ▶ patterns in reported police figures;
- ▶ research into the impact on outcomes of support from services led by and for women⁵ including women with protected characteristic such as black and minority ethnic (BME) women⁶.

Local need

Commissioning is outcome focused, with the needs of service users and their families at its core and not the needs of service providers. It sets out a framework for deciding how best to deploy resources strategically in order to achieve objectives, making best use of the strengths of the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. However commissioners recognise that service providers have a full part to play in developing innovation and co-commissioning, particularly where they are close to the end user, are survivor-led and have a dual role in advocacy and service provision. In developing the strategy the public sector engages the local VAWG sector in the commissioning process by:

- a) carrying out consultation events to identify emerging needs with:
 - ▶ existing service user forums, including specific groups of BME women and girls;
 - ▶ dedicated specialist providers of violence against women and girls services;
 - ▶ other local women and children's specialist health, advice and community organisations;
 - ▶ other local voluntary and statutory partners such as children's services, health services and specialist police units.

4 This figure can be arrived at using the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls Ready Reckoner.

5 Nicholles N. and Whitehead S. (2012) *Women's Community Services: A Wise Commission* London: Nef.

6 Women's National Commission (2009) *Still we rise: Report from WNC Focus Groups to inform the Cross-Government Consultation, "Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls"* WNC.



b) identifying the contribution commissioned service providers will make to the wider environment, including contributions to:

- ▶ multi agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs);
- ▶ multi agency adult and child safeguarding;
- ▶ wider community safety strategies/action plans;
- ▶ multi agency safeguarding hubs;
- ▶ public health strategies;
- ▶ education strategies;
- ▶ environmental policy.

By harnessing survivor-led, customer-focused services in developing the strategy, commissioners will achieve wider social and economic objectives such as higher levels of volunteering, increasing local skills bases, and promoting a greater sense of community ownership of local issues.

In order to remove barriers to engagement in the process experienced by smaller VAWG organisations, especially those led by and those that support marginalised women, such as BME and disabled women, the public sector has a responsibility to support capacity building within the VAWG sector, as it does with the wider voluntary sector, and ensure the infrastructure that supports small organisations is fit for purpose.

Priorities

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- a) ensure the needs of women and girls who are at risk of, have experienced, or are experiencing violence are met in a way that encourages them to seek help, and meets their needs;
- b) bring coherence and clarity to the commissioning of organisations supporting survivors of VAWG;
- c) ensure organisations supporting survivors of VAWG, as part of the local voluntary sector, are able to comment on and influence public sector strategies, in order to develop reliable and robust strategies that reflect community needs;
- d) manage and use resources to achieve the delivery of strong, sustainable public services across the area;
- e) create mechanisms to build capacity in the sector creating a sustainable and diverse women's voluntary and community sector that is equipped to meet future challenges;
- f) ensure a fair and equitable commissioning framework that reflects competing priorities;
- g) ensure transparency and accessibility of data covering information about relationships with violence against women and girls organisations.



Delivering the strategy

The public sector will enable the objectives of the strategy to be met by:

- ▶ communicating and committing to deliver its strategic intent;
- ▶ complying with local Compact arrangements and valuing the role of infrastructure organisations;
- ▶ being honest and open about the challenges that lie ahead and finding solutions collaboratively with women's voluntary sector organisations;
- ▶ valuing and respecting the women's voluntary sector, including smaller providers, for what it has to offer;
- ▶ improving communication between sectors;
- ▶ ensuring the length and size of contracts preserves specialism and track record within the sector and local connections with more marginalised groups;
- ▶ encouraging women's voluntary sector organisations to work together where it would be beneficial to do so;
- ▶ weighting for consortia or "supply chains" that sustain specialisms through collaboration and sub-contracting between VAWG providers;
- ▶ being open and transparent with information and proactively sharing where possible, such as upcoming procurement and funding opportunities.

Relationships with voluntary and community organisations

The strategy seeks to provide a framework for the future relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector providing services addressing violence against women and girls.

Specialist VAWG organisations tend to be small, community-based, service user led organisations, often with little capacity outside frontline service delivery. The strategy will address this through capacity building and infrastructure priorities.



Legal duties

In recent years, government emphasis on social enterprises has placed the concept of social value at the heart of strategies for meeting communities' needs. New regulations and guidance such as the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in the Equality Act 2010, and Best Value Statutory Guidance set the legal framework to achieve this change. The Equality Act 2010 is particularly significant as it identifies the need to “advance equality of opportunity” by taking steps to meet the needs of groups with protected characteristics⁷. Women are identified as a group experiencing discrimination and the act supports the role of women-only services in reducing the discrimination inherent in all forms of violence against women and girls.

Evaluating the strategy / measures of success

Success should be measured against individual action plans but some generic success measures may include:

- ▶ reference to and use of national outcomes data collection and quality standards generated by the VAWG sector;
- ▶ an increase in involvement and engagement of the VAWG sector in public sector commissioning;
- ▶ capacity building within the VAWG sector; increasing the sustainability of the sector;
- ▶ the voluntary and community sector feel more included in the commissioning process and able to be involved on an equal footing.

Case Study

Birmingham City Council Public Health Department was tasked with commissioning Sexual Health Services for the city of Birmingham. The specifications for the new £25 million contract were consulted on with specialist providers in secondary care, primary care and the third sector. Birmingham Public Health opened a dialogue with the violence against women and girls groups in the city working in the sexual violence field and the specifications arising from this dialogue included, for the first time, specialist services and pathways for those presenting with experiences of sexual violence, coercion, domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Providers were brought together for the first time to develop new collaborations and engage with a funder that historically in this locality had had no interest or involvement in commissioning VAWG services. This has been a good example of a competitive process managed in consultation with, and influenced by, the specialist VAWG sector.

⁷ Equality Act 2010