



Consultation response

'Transforming Places; Changing Lives'

Submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government

31 October 2008

Understanding and supporting
women and their organisations

This document is available in other formats. Contact the Women's Resource Centre on 020 7324 3030 or info@wrc.org.uk

The Women's Resource Centre is supported by



About the Women's Resource Centre

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

For more information about this response or the WRC, contact:

Kara Beavis
Policy Officer
Email: kara@wrc.org.uk
Tel: 020 7324 3030

Women's Resource Centre
Ground Floor East, 33-41 Dallington Street
London EC1V 0BB
www.wrc.org.uk

Introduction

Women's Resource Centre (WRC) welcomes the Communities and Local Government's *Transforming places; changing lives: A framework for regeneration*, especially as it aims to

1. Tackle some of the worst inequality and deprivation in the country,
2. Meaningfully involve equality groups from the beginning of the change process,
3. Encourage long-term and active commitment by all actors, especially local and central governments.

In this consultation response, given this focus, WRC have set out key areas for consideration and further investigation:

1. Violence against women
2. The funding crisis facing the women's sector
3. Women's representation on key decision-making bodies, e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships.

WRC is pleased that Communities and Local Government (CLG) will "encourage regenerators to address sex and gender inequality where these exist and are amenable to regeneration" (page 139). However, given that the Gender Equality Duty is statutory law, we do not think this goes far enough.

WRC reminds CLG that they have a legal obligation to undertake a thorough gender equality impact assessment on the *Transforming places; changing lives framework* as women will be disproportionately affected by many of the changes proposed.

We would strongly urge CLG to actively engage with the women's sector in the further development and implementation of this framework.

Women's inequality and Violence Against Women (VAW)

In order for Communities and Local Government to genuinely address key issues on the regeneration agenda (i.e. local engagement, self-determination, empowerment, economic prosperity, social enterprise, getting people into work), ***VAW must be a national priority and treated with urgency.***

Women's inequality is still deeply entrenched in the UK, and many women continue to face significant violence and discrimination that inhibits their capacity to exercise their human rights to justice, equality, safety and freedom.

WRC recognises that there are systemic and historic reasons why women experience discrimination and inequality. ***Violence against women (VAW) is a cause and consequence of women's inequality, and one of the biggest barriers to achieving gender equality.*** VAW affects women's self-determination, their ability to enter the workforce, economic prosperity and local engagement.

On 24th March 2008, Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), said:

"There is an undeclared war on women in this country... that is undermining real progress towards gender equality. Our world may have changed beyond recognition but there are still many important battles to be fought."

In the same speech, Phillips described violence against women in the UK as the "darker side to this debate".

Violence against women includes rape, sexual violence, trafficking, domestic violence, prostitution, stalking, forced marriage, crimes in the name of honour, female genital mutilation.

Almost one in two women in the UK will experience sexual or another form of violence against women each year.

Violence against women costs society £40 billion each year¹.

At the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the UN Headquarters in February this year, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon launched an international campaign to end VAW:

"Violence against women is an issue that cannot wait. A brief look at the statistics makes it clear. At least one out of every three women is likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime... No country, no culture, no woman young or old is immune to this scourge. Violence against women is always a violation of human rights; it is always a crime; and it is always unacceptable. Let us take this issue with the deadly seriousness that it deserves."²

¹ Violence Against Women: Hard Knock Life, New Philanthropy Capital, April 2008

² <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sgsm11437.doc.htm>

In April 2008, the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) announced that the UK Government had scored just 2 out of 10 according to its annual assessment of government action to tackle violence against women. The Northern Ireland Government scored 1 out of 10.³

Following that, EVAW launched a YouGov poll in July 2008, which resulted in more than eight in ten members of the general public (84%) agreeing that there should be a cross-government strategy to end violence against women.

Currently there are separate policies and action plans on specific forms of violence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – without an overall, cohesive strategy to drive and integrate the various initiatives.

Dr Liz Kelly, Chair of the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) says the current approach is “fractured” and “simply too costly, both for victims and for society. There is now a deafening chorus of voices calling for a national strategy to end violence against women and we are setting out what government at all levels should be doing.”

The UK government is required by domestic and international law to address violence against women under the Gender Equality Duty, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Beijing Platform for Action, United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In July 2008, the UK government was examined by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women at the UN Headquarters in New York. Following the analysis of the UK government’s performance on gender equality, the Committee specifically recommended that the UK government:

- Enhance cooperation with and support for NGOs working on forced marriage
- Provide increased and sustained funding to NGOs involved in women’s rights
- Enhance cooperation with and support (in particular adequate and sustained funding) for NGOs working the area of violence against women
- Establish additional counselling and other support services for victims of violence, including shelters.⁴

The Gender Equality Duty places a legal obligation on public authorities (including Communities and Local Government and all local authorities) to have ‘due regard’ to the need to promote equality of opportunity between women and men and to eliminate unlawful harassment and discrimination. ‘Due regard’ requires public bodies to take action on the most important gender equality issues. VAW prevention, education, training, and service provision should be addressed in every Local Authority’s Gender Equality Scheme.

³ Making the Grade, End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2008

⁴ Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 18 July 2008

Despite the prevalence of VAW and the UK government's legal obligations, there is still no firm commitment by local or central government to seriously address violence against women.

WRC recommends that Communities and Local Government:

- Endorse EAW's *Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations* strategy
- Adhere to the CEDAW recommendations, especially as they pertain to violence against women
- Ensure all local authorities have a Gender Equality Scheme in place that sets out how they are addressing violence against women
- Ensure Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) select and report on NIs that address sexual (and all forms of) violence against women, especially in local areas where VAW is prevalent
- Improve the capacity of staff from local authorities to respond to and understand local VAW issues and services, and utilise local women's sector expertise to deliver this training
- Ensure Local Strategic Partnerships have a dedicated women's sector position.

The role of the Women's Sector within the Regeneration agenda and the Impact of Commissioning

Addressing long term unemployment and promoting enterprise must include an explicit focus on social regeneration. Critically, gender equality must be integral. Community empowerment cannot be achieved without first acknowledging, and then acting to address, discrimination against women.

Women still face some of the most significant barriers to enjoying full economic prosperity, either because they work part-time, or because they are over-represented in low-paid professions, or because they are living with controlling partners who limit their activities.

One of the best ways for the government to regenerate communities is to sustainably fund women's organisations. Women's organisations address social exclusion and community cohesion by supporting women who are on the margins of communities, enabling them to access opportunities such as developing new skills or building their confidence – essential stepping stones to entering or re-entering the job market or training.

Regeneration needs to be viewed through a gender lens to ensure that the different needs of women and men are taken into account. For example, women are more likely to have caring responsibilities or be single parents and consequently may require a different approach from men e.g. flexible training courses. Support to help women develop business skills is also needed, particularly for women from black and minority ethnic communities. A study in Belfast into the social and economic impact of women's centres found those providing sexual and domestic violence services to some of the most vulnerable women in the community often also play an essential role in re-engaging women into work. One centre provides childcare and other support so that women can take up training and employment opportunities, and acts as a gateway to employment. 40% of their own employees have previously been volunteers or users at the centre.⁵

Women's Resource Centre's (WRC) members work with some of the most vulnerable and socially-excluded women in society and – in spite of chronic underinvestment by central and local governments – still manage to achieve financial and social benefits that far exceed their income.

WRC strongly agrees that "sometimes mainstream services alone are insufficient to make transformational change", and that "where there are particular place-based barriers to change, targeted investment can help to tackle multiple disadvantage".⁶

Women who access services provided by women's organisations benefit from the holistic support that they provide. Women's organisations that are managed by and for specific communities of women (eg Black and Minority Ethnic, lesbian,

⁵ Taillon, R., The Social and Economic Impact of Women's Centres in Greater Belfast: Summary Report, Women's Support Network: Belfast, 2000

⁶ Transforming places; changing lives: A framework for regeneration

bisexual, older and younger women, single mothers, mental health sufferers, women who have been through the criminal justice system, etc) are vital as they enable women to develop a sense of independence and self determination in appropriate ways.

For example, Southall Black Sisters (SBS) is a resource centre in West London that provides services (advice, information, casework, advocacy, counselling, self-help programmes, and translation) to women experiencing violence and abuse. It is managed by professional women from UK's BME communities who understand the unique needs of service users who come from BME communities. This makes a difference for service users – research indicates that a woman from a BME background would be highly unlikely to report a rape to a mainstream organisation, to a doctor or the police.

In April 2008, Ealing Council announced its decision to withdraw funding to Southall Black Sisters (SBS), on the grounds that a generic domestic violence service would be better placed to meet the requirements of the Community Cohesion agenda. On the 17th and 18th July 2008, service users took Ealing Council to court for failure to have proper regard for existing equality legislation, especially the Race Relations Act.

In this instance, in a landmark case, Ealing Council conceded defeat. However, WRC is extremely concerned by anecdotal evidence that indicates that threats to organisational funding are very real for our members – and that this is a growing trend nationally.

Most women's organisations are grossly under-funded and face serious threat of closure. In what is now recognised as a "postcode lottery", one in three local authorities in the UK do not have specialised services for women, such as Rape Crisis Centres and refuges.⁷

Commissioning can, and often does, fail women and children due to the lack of consideration given to the different needs of women and children and the gender-neutral approach to the commissioning process.

Our evidence suggests that, far from leading to 'a more diverse supply of providers' we are finding that increasingly it is large, generic organisations that are taking over contracts that could be better fulfilled by small, specialist organisations who have the expertise to meet the needs of specific groups of people – often the most marginalised and vulnerable.

A prime example of this is the current trend for refuge contracts to be awarded to large housing associations despite the fact that they have no experience of supporting women who have experienced violence.⁸

Preference for economies of scale and ease of administration should not take precedence over specialised services that meet the needs of vulnerable groups.

⁷ Mapping of Gaps: End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2007

⁸ Funding of London Women's Refuges: Report for London Councils, Women's Resource Centre 2007

If the government is committed to promoting a diverse select of service providers that cater to a variety of complex needs, the sustainability of the women's sector is vital. An intelligent commissioning model must be adopted in all areas of the public sector, whereby 'added value' (providing more than just financial gains) is incorporated. Such a model would be cost-effective and beneficial to the aims of the Regeneration agenda, AND result in a thriving third sector that meets the needs of diverse local communities.

In July 2008, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women specifically recommended that the UK government:

- Provide increased and sustained funding to NGOs involved in women's rights
- Conduct an assessment of the impact of commissioning on funding to women's organisations
- Ensure that the Gender Equality Duty is interpreted and applied properly so that women-only services and other activities of women's organisations are not negatively impacted upon.⁹

WRC recommends that Communities and Local Government:

- Adhere to the CEDAW recommendations
- Ensure all commissioning and procurement practices include women's VCS that have expertise to deliver services
- Ensure secure and sustainable funding for the women's VCS, including ensuring continuation of grants programmes (as opposed to commissioning programmes)
- Undertake regular audits to identify how many contracts are awarded to the women's sector, and how much these contracts are worth.

⁹ Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 18 July 2008

Women's Representation in Local Strategic Partnerships

WRC welcomes the Government's *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* paper (9 July 2008), which attempts to address inequality by empowering individuals to be more politically engaged at a local level.

The problem with the individual approach is that it excludes some of the most marginalised, those women who are 'hard to reach' because they are not accessing mainstream services and have not been included in local decision-making processes. Without their involvement in local civic life, vulnerable women will continue to be marginalised and local decision-making processes cannot claim to be inclusive.

In light of the devolution agenda, local civic engagement by all groups within the community has become even more critical.

Women are very often active within their local communities, and 79% of women are "interested in local issues". 46% of women say they know a 'fair amount' about their local council. However, women's confidence in participating within the political system is limited.¹⁰

Given that LSPs are the key mechanism for determining local priorities and allocating funds, *it is vital that women's organisations have the opportunity to 'have a seat at this table' and influence the local agenda.*

Women's organisations in the UK have been at the 'front line' of fighting for women's rights, and providing vital services for women and challenging violence and discrimination for decades.

However, recent research undertaken by WRC (*Where are the Women in LSPs?*) indicates that women are significantly under-represented on LSPs, especially in senior positions. Further, the representation of women's organisations is appalling, with just 1.8% of voluntary and community sector (VCS) representatives on LSPs being women's groups, despite constituting more than 7% of the UK voluntary and community sector.¹¹

Where are the Women in LSPs? highlights that the 'duty to involve' for local authorities should include equalities targets, including increasing representation of women on LSPs, and supporting the engagement of specialist equalities voluntary community services, including women's organisations.

WRC recommends that Communities and Local Government:

- Ensure local grant funding supports women's organisations and other specialist groups to engage with LSPs and other local forums
- Establish minimum standards for gender representation on LSPs and monitor the level of participation on them.

¹⁰ Audit of Political Engagement 5, Hansard Society, 2008

¹¹ *Where are the Women in LSPs?* Oxfam, Urban Forum, Women's Resource Centre, 2007

Summary of recommendations

- Endorse EAW's *Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations* strategy
- Adhere to all CEDAW recommendations, especially as they pertain to violence against women and funding for women's organisations
- Ensure all local authorities have a Gender Equality Scheme in place that sets out how they are addressing violence against women
- Ensure Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) select and report on NIs that address sexual (and all forms of) violence against women, especially in local areas where VAW is prevalent
- Improve the capacity of staff from local authorities to respond to and understand local VAW issues and services, and utilise local women's sector expertise to deliver this training
- Ensure Local Strategic Partnerships have a dedicated women's sector position.
- Ensure all commissioning and procurement practices include women's VCS that have expertise to deliver services
- Ensure secure and sustainable funding for the women's VCS, including ensuring continuation of grants programmes (as opposed to commissioning programmes)
- Undertake regular audits to identify how many contracts are awarded to the women's sector, and how much these contracts are worth
- Ensure local grant funding supports women's organisations and other specialist groups to engage with LSPs and other local forums
- Establish minimum standards for gender representation on LSPs and monitor the level of participation on them.