



# **Consultation response**

## **Consulting the Capital: London Councils voluntary sector commissioning programme**

**2011-2015**

Submitted to the London Councils

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Understanding and supporting  
women and their organisations

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## **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 health, 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:

Rebecca Veazey  
Policy Officer  
Email: [Rebecca@wrc.org.uk](mailto:Rebecca@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](http://www.wrc.org.uk)



## **Introduction**

In the year ahead London Councils (LC) faces the challenging task of reconciling its priorities with limited resources. As a consequence, we acknowledge the possibility of future funding cuts and the need for LC to reassess its funding priorities. From previous experience we are pleased with LC's approach to consultation and welcome the use of equalities impact assessments to inform their decisions. As experts in monitoring and evaluation; the Women's Resource Centre are able to help on this particular area and we look forward to being of assistance to LC.

The current funding environment and the accelerated use of competitive tendering in commissioning processes have placed increasing pressure on the women's sector. Access to financial support is highly competitive; and due to issues surrounding gender inequality women's VCOs experience unique disadvantages in acquiring funding. The availability of third sector funding is expected to decrease during the recession and local councils cannot be relied upon to fund key women's services. LC is unique in providing a large amount of funding for specific areas of the women's sector and a withdrawal of funding would leave a large gap in service provision.

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) has not completed the first section of the consultation; as our members work across all of the different service areas and it would be inappropriate to rank one area over another. Whilst we understand that LC needs to ascertain people's and organisations' views of what they consider to be London's priorities, we feel that a 'voting' system is unhelpful and may not accurately represent need. As an advocate for the women's sector our response focuses on why LC must maintain the budget for the women's sector and illustrating the value of the sector.

## **Evaluation and increased effectiveness**

Restructuring the service specifications could provide an important opportunity to increase the efficiency of LC funding processes. A merger of service areas could have a positive effect and could result in smarter specifications to deliver the same services. Alterations will allow LC to remodel service specifications with appropriate outcomes. Following revisions, organisations who provide a broad range of services would only have to apply to one funding specification rather than having to apply for numerous specifications. Restructuring could help to package services more effectively and allow the funding process to operate more effectively overall, particularly in reducing the amount of bureaucracy of having to apply and report on funding. For example, violence against women services span a wide range of specifications, restructuring would allow women's organisations to apply for one contract rather than three. However, WRC strongly advocates that the current amount of funding for VAW services, regardless of the number of specifications, is, at minimum, maintained.

Restructuring also provides an opportunity for LC to review its borough spread methodology. Under the present LC system, funded organisations are often delivering above and beyond what they are funded for, but are unable to report on this support because of the impact on their 'borough spread' statistics.

Equality impact assessments (EIAs) will allow LC to make an informed decision about future priorities and provide a more detailed insight into the voluntary sector. The WRC is able to assist LC with EIAs. As a second tier organisation we specialise in monitoring and evaluation and can assist organisations to articulate their value. The WRC has already conducted research into the economic and social impact of women's VCOs funded by LC and can use this expertise to positive effect. In doing so we can demonstrate the social return on investment and help LC decide where to invest, and later assess performance and measure progress over time. The WRC provides specific evaluation training to the women's sector and can help to make improvements to VCOs services if any particular problems are identified. We are committed to increasing the effectiveness of

women's organisations and will provide support and advice tailored to the needs of individual VCOs.

## **General funding issues**

Over the past few years the voluntary sector has seen a significant shift from grant giving to commissioning<sup>1</sup>. Increasingly, local authorities are reducing their use of grant aid and boroughs such as Waltham Forest now solely use competitive tendering to commission services<sup>2</sup>. Voluntary organisations have reported inequality in competitive commissioning processes and local authorities have displayed a tendency towards contracting bigger organisations<sup>3</sup>. This commissioning approach has been thought to be encouraging 'super providers' (organisations with contracts in multiple boroughs) and a WRC study has shown that over a three year period at least seven women's refuges in London had been taken over by larger organisations<sup>4</sup>.

Sustainability is key in ensuring a diverse and effective women's sector and many women's organisations are struggling to meet demand. Women's VCOs are chronically under resourced<sup>5</sup> and many organisations are deeply concerned about funding cuts.

In the recession we anticipate a contraction of general funds which will consequently impact on funding for the third sector. As levels of funding are reduced it is likely that value for money will be decided by the lowest possible costs and this may worsen the position of women's organisations. Women's organisations are often excluded from tendering processes as commissioners

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Resource Centre, 2008, The Impact of Commissioning and Procurement on the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/i/impact\\_of\\_commissioning\\_on\\_wvc\\_s.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/i/impact_of_commissioning_on_wvc_s.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> WRC, Why women only?

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Women's Resource Centre, 2009, Not just bread but roses too: Funding to the women's voluntary and community sector in England 2004-07,  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2009/f/final\\_report\\_version1.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2009/f/final_report_version1.pdf)

wish to enlist a generic provider to save money<sup>6</sup>. A reduction of third sector funding may increase cost consciousness and encourage funders to disregard the social value of services.

## **Why is pan-London funding needed?**

- In 2007 the majority of councils spent just 2% of their Supporting People funding on domestic violence<sup>7</sup>.
- The women's sector only receives 1.2% of central government funding despite making up 7% of the voluntary sector<sup>8</sup>.
- LC is unique in that it has a substantial budget for the violence against women sector (around 12% of its total budget).

The levels of funding LC provides is very substantial when compared with figures for central and local government funding. A withdrawal of LC funding would leave a large gap in provision and it is likely that the VCS and specifically VAW organisations would get even less funding, as it would force them to rely upon local authorities for this funding, via the commissioning process.

London has a world class women's sector and a third of women's organisations in England are located in the capital. As funding contracts in the recession local councils cannot be relied upon to fund key women's services. Funding violence against women's services is discretionary and as such local councils are not required to fund essential VAW services. Increased dependency on local funding

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<sup>6</sup> Women's Resource Centre, 2008, The Impact of Commissioning and Procurement on the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/i/impact\\_of\\_commissioning\\_on\\_wvc\\_s.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/i/impact_of_commissioning_on_wvc_s.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Women's Resource Centre, 2007, Funding of London's Women's Refuges, Report for London Councils,  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/f/fullreportrefugefundingresearch.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/f/fullreportrefugefundingresearch.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Impact of Commissioning on Women's Voluntary Services  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/i/impact\\_of\\_commissioning\\_on\\_wvc\\_s.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/i/impact_of_commissioning_on_wvc_s.pdf)

will compromise the sustainability of women's services and subject organisations to short term funding cycles and further financial struggles. We are concerned that adequate funding will not be a priority for local boroughs; therefore this makes the unique 12% VAW budget from LC even more crucial. This view is supported by the fact that only two local authorities have chosen domestic and/or sexual violence indicators for their Local Area Agreement targets.

LC funding transcends the politics of local decision making and secures funding for 'less' popular groups such as LGBT people and women with no recourse to public funds. Boroughs do not have a strong record on commissioning specialist services and pan-London funding helps to provide funding where there is most need. As local authorities are placed under pressure to make their money go further whilst reducing council tax, it is likely that funding for specialist services will be reduced in the recession. Reliance on local funding would jeopardise diverse services, as the arguments around funding priorities can be dictated by local politics rather than actual need.

The problems of local funding have been shown by recent criticisms of Hammersmith and Fulham Council. A local government watchdog has reprimanded the borough for failing to provide emergency accommodation for a pregnant female who was assaulted by her husband. The police referred this matter to the council but the woman was asked to provide proof of her need, and subsequently ended up spending four nights on a park bench.<sup>9</sup>

Women's organisations face unique disadvantages in accessing alternative forms of funding. Commissioning processes often exclude women's organisations from tendering processes as commissioners wish to enlist a generic provider (serving

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<sup>9</sup> Evening Standard, Wednesday 27 January 2010, Beaten up and pregnant... but left to sleep on a park bench, [http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23799566-council-leaves-homeless-and-pregnant-womhttp://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/i/impact\\_of\\_commissioning\\_on\\_wvcs.pdf](http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23799566-council-leaves-homeless-and-pregnant-womhttp://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/i/impact_of_commissioning_on_wvcs.pdf)

men and women) to save money<sup>10</sup>. This problem is intensified by the minute influence women's VCOs exert on policy decision making due to commissioners lack of understanding about the conditions needed to achieve women's equality or the differing needs between women/girls and men/boys.<sup>11</sup> Gender neutral policies are fuelled by the misperception that gender equality has been achieved and this contributes under valuation of the importance of women-only services<sup>12</sup>.

In a Women's Resource Centre (WRC) study of 101 organisations, 70% of respondents felt that being a women-only organisation made it harder to access funding<sup>13</sup>. Respondents stated that they felt they had to justify the need for women-only services, indicating a perception that they equate to a form of exclusion for men, rather than the most effective way to meet women's needs<sup>14</sup>.

The precarious position of women's organisations is heightened by the under representation of women in local decision making processes. Women's organisations represent around 7% of the total voluntary and community sector, however they account for fewer than 2 percent of voluntary and community sector representatives on local strategic partnerships (LSPs)<sup>15</sup>. LSPs are a vital way of securing local contracts, and as government increasingly devolves funding to local authorities this inequality reduces women's organisation's access to income. Despite the implications of this disparity, gender equality is not treated as a priority and remains unmonitored by 80% of local councils<sup>16</sup>.

The combination of the aforementioned factors means that women's VCOs cannot compete for funding on an equal playing field. Pan-London funding provides an essential opportunity to address inefficiencies featured in local

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<sup>10</sup> Women's Resource Centre, 2008, The Impact of Commissioning and Procurement on the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/i/impact\\_of\\_commissioning\\_on\\_wvc\\_s.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/i/impact_of_commissioning_on_wvc_s.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Women's Resource Centre, Why Women?

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Where are the women in LSPs? Urban Forum, Oxfam, Women's Resource Centre, 2007,  
[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/womenlsp.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/womenlsp.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

decision making and promote equality to ensure that women receive the services they need. LC funding provides a safeguard for the protection of services that benefit the majority of London's population.

Pan-London funding makes a huge difference to WRC members; one key example of this is the funding of the free phone National Domestic Violence Helpline. LC provides 11.5% of the help line's funding, but in fact 35% of the callers are from London, indicating the high demand for the service from Londoners. Beneficiaries of the helpline service come from all London boroughs; while the contribution of each borough to the funding of the service is small, the impact on the availability of the service to residents is large. For a relatively small funding contribution each borough is benefiting from economies of scale so that residents get a helpline service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A helpline that is funded by and for residents in just one London borough is unlikely to be able to offer the same availability in terms of number of hours. Purely local "helpline" services often offer staff who take calls between other duties, have limited availability and are only able to signpost rather than offer the in-depth support and information needed to those experiencing domestic violence. This kind of in-depth support and advice ensures that women are able to access services, both statutory and voluntary, as quickly and efficiently as possible, thus saving statutory services money, as women are accessing the right kind of support at the right time.

The vast majority of VAW services funded by LC provide a range of support and expertise that individual boroughs would be unable to fund locally. Pan -London funding allows women's organisations to provide added value by enhancing the quality of services provided to women across London.

WRC research on the economic and social impact of the women's voluntary and community sector have shown that LC funding of women's VCOs is highly

effective<sup>17</sup>. Analysis of two LC funded organisations; the Asian Women's Resource Centre and the Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre have shown that women's VCOs yield greater value than the initial level of investment that they receive. As LC seeks to reduce its funding we insist it must extend its outlook to ensure its consideration of the social contribution of services and adopt a broad concept of 'value'. Analysis of the social return on investment will allow LC to have a holistic understanding of the impact of services and assess social, environmental and economic costs and benefits. Contributions of organisations cannot be solely captured by rigorous monetary evaluations and examination of SROI will allow organisations to demonstrate the positive externalities of their work; such as supporting statutory organisations.

In areas where the LC decides to reduce or end funding, LC should provide transitional funding and signpost unsuccessful organisations to alternative sources of funds. LC should allow long leading times prior to the withdrawal of funds in order to allow organisations to secure alternative funding arrangements.

## **Value of women-only services**

WRC and the women's sector more generally, values LC's approach to funding gender-based stopping violence services, and specifically naming this violence as being against women and girls. LC needs to continue to fund women only services. Women-only spaces are seen as a source of safety and sanctuary where women can discuss their shared experiences in a supportive environment<sup>18</sup>. A poll by ICS Research of a random sample of 1000 women across the UK found that 97% believed women who had been sexually assaulted should have the choice of accessing women-only support.<sup>19</sup> From women's refuges to local counselling services, it is widely acknowledged that gender sensitivity is a vital way of ensuring

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<sup>17</sup> Matrix and The Women's Resource Centre, 2006, The economic and social impact of women's voluntary and community sector-a pilot study

<sup>18</sup> Women's Resource Centre, October 2007, Why Women Only?

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

effective service delivery<sup>20</sup>. 'Women report feeling emotionally and psychologically supported in women-only settings because their diversity and their needs are appreciated in the context of their complex lives'<sup>21</sup>. As shown in the field of health; women-only services provided by VCOs compliment the work of statutory services<sup>22</sup>. Generic provision often fails to recognise the importance of surrounding issues that impact on women's realities such as poverty, social isolation and past and present abuse<sup>23</sup>. Women's VCOs holistically address women's problems and provide a range of services that are supportive and responsive to women's requirements. As an active endorsement of this unique value, the government has commissioned women-only community day services for women with mental health issues and has pledged to eliminate same sex accommodation in hospitals by April 2010.<sup>24</sup>

Women led organisations allow women to identify their own needs and co-ordinate their own responses to them. This is essential amongst minority female groups who experience greater levels of marginalisation and intersectional discrimination such as racism<sup>25</sup>. Women's VCOs are a vital gateway into accessing ethnic minority communities, and services that are led 'by and for' ethnic minority women have greatest success in promoting cultural sensitivity and integrating women.<sup>26</sup> This outreach empowers women to address discrimination, assert their rights and engage in mainstream opportunities that we often take for granted.<sup>27</sup> BME organisations both provide the help women need and enhance the voluntary sector as whole by publicising the unique plight of ethnic minority women<sup>28</sup>. These organisations have played an essential role in placing issues such as so called

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Health, February 2006, Supporting Women Into the Mainstream, Commissioning Women Only Community Day Services.

[http://www.socialinclusion.org.uk/publications/Womens\\_Day\\_Services\\_Doc.pdf](http://www.socialinclusion.org.uk/publications/Womens_Day_Services_Doc.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> NHS, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, Same-sex accommodation

<http://www.nhs.uk/choiceintheNHS/Rightsandpledges/samesexaccommodation/Pages/Overview.aspx>

<sup>25</sup> Women's Resource Centre, October 2007, Why Women Only?

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders', p75

honour killings and female genital mutilation firmly on public and political agendas.<sup>29</sup>

Integration of women promotes broader benefits to society by tackling social exclusion and promoting community cohesion. Women-only services across all areas promote solidarity, empowerment of women and gender equality by acknowledging the gendered nature of issues and seeking to redress female disadvantage<sup>30</sup>. These actions provide a source for social change by raising awareness of gender discrimination and unmet women's needs that wouldn't otherwise have been addressed<sup>31</sup>. Women-only services promote additional positive externalities such as assisting women's access to employment and challenging the underrepresentation of women by increasing women's involvement in public life.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore the externalities of women-only work help to support families by increasing the wellbeing of mothers<sup>33</sup>.

## **Violence against women**

- In 2009, 2,475 women in London reported being raped and 42,294 women reported being victims of domestic violence<sup>34</sup>.
- Last year, rape reports across the capital increased by 24.2% and women accounted for 93% of all victims<sup>35</sup>.
- On average only 10% of women who go to rape crisis centres report incidents to the police.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Women's Resource Centre, October 2007, Why Women Only?

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Metropolitan Police FOI Request, January 2010

<sup>35</sup> Metropolitan Police FOI Request, January 2010

<sup>36</sup> Women's Resource Centre, Crisis in Rape Crisis, 2008,

These shocking statistics conceal the true extent of this violence as they only include women aged over 18, and violence against women is consistently underreported.

Violence against women is a wide spread problem that has high social and economic costs.

- The financial cost of sexual violence to UK society in 2003-4 was £8.5 billion<sup>37</sup>;
- The annual cost to the UK of domestic violence has been estimated at £20 billion;<sup>38</sup> and
- Each incident of rape and its ensuing problems (such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases) cost the state £76,000.<sup>39</sup>

According to the government Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan, “much of this cost is made up of lost output and costs to the health service resulting from long term health issues faced by victims. Addressing problems early should help prevent these long-term costs”<sup>40</sup>. Any work done by the women’s sector to prevent instances of rape and to mitigate its devastating effects results in a direct saving for statutory services across London.

Evidence from a consultation with LC funded organisations shows that the women’s VCS gets many referrals from local authorities, the metropolitan police and the NHS. From this, it is clear that these statutory agencies rely upon the women’s VCS to provide appropriate services to women and children who are victims of violence. A brief survey of the domestic violence web pages of 10 local authorities<sup>41</sup> shows that all of them direct their residents to services offered by the women’s VCS, many of which are funded by LC. This shows that the statutory

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<sup>37</sup> HM Government (2007) Cross-government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse. Home Office: London.

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexual-violence-action-plan2835.pdf?view=Binary>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Islington, Hackney, Barking and Dagenham, Hounslow, Sutton, Havering, Brent, Redbridge, Lewisham

sector firmly relies on the women's VCS to deliver these crucial services to its resident women and children.

Women's services provide a crucial lifeline to women who are in immediate danger. Refuges provide a sanctuary where they can safely speak about their experiences and start the journey of rebuilding their lives<sup>42</sup>.

VAW services emotionally support women to move forward from past experiences and discuss abuse as part of women's personal history rather than treating each attack as an 'isolated incident'<sup>43</sup>. Women's services play an important role in addressing the past and future of female abuse. Rape Crisis Centres complement statutory services by providing crucial support to women with historic experiences of sexual abuse and promote violence prevention by public education on this issue<sup>44</sup>. Whilst frontline services address the legacy of former abuse, second-tier organisations challenge social attitudes towards VAW and provide public education to promote awareness about women's rights<sup>45</sup>. Violence prevention is equally as important as victim support and is the key way of ending the cycle of abuse.

Violence against women is both a social and criminal issue, the repercussions of abuse reverberate across society and negatively impact on London as a whole<sup>46</sup>. Abuse leaves a lasting legacy on future generations and children exposed to domestic violence are at 'greater risk of substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy and criminal behaviour than those raised in homes without violence'<sup>47</sup>. Men who are violent to their partners are likely to be violent to their children<sup>48</sup> and children are more likely to suffer from poor mental health, experience suicidal tendencies or repeat the cycle of violence that they have seen.<sup>49</sup> Research has shown that rates

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<sup>42</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

<sup>43</sup> Women's Resource Centre, Crisis in Rape Crisis, 2008,

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> UNICEF, 2006, The Impact of Domestic Violence Behind Closed Doors, <http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

of domestic abuse were' higher among women whose husbands were abused as children or who saw their mothers being abused.<sup>50</sup>

Physical and sexual abuse has a detrimental effect upon women's physical and mental health, financial status and their futures<sup>51</sup>. Women who leave their partners whilst unsupported can go on to experience problems of destitution, prostitution, drug use and homelessness. Studies by charity Crisis indicate that domestic violence is the largest cause of female homelessness, 63% of women between 30 and 49 years cited domestic violence as the key reason for their homelessness<sup>52</sup>. There is a clear correlation between unemployment, domestic violence and homelessness. Financial difficulties contribute to greater tensions in relationships and levels of domestic violence are anticipated to increase across Britain during the economic down turn<sup>53</sup>.

While an economic recovery might be on the horizon, the social impact of the recession is only just beginning to be felt. In periods of recession, women are more vulnerable due to a number of reasons: "women are more likely to live in poverty, especially in old age, have fewer financial assets, more likely to manage a household budget and act as shock absorbers when this changes, are more likely to experience violence, and as mothers and carers will need to make a complex set of decisions about their family and work life influenced by - among other things - the cost of childcare, the tax and benefit system, etcetera."<sup>54</sup> The Metropolitan Police reported an increase in domestic violence and rape in the year up to January 2009 and a number of domestic violence services have also reported an increase in referrals.<sup>55</sup> As the effects of the recession continue to be felt, these social trends will continue and the women's VCS needs to continue to be funded to deal effectively with increased demands on its services. Funding from LC is especially important in a time of economic downturn, as there is a danger that a thirst for economic efficiency will encourage local councils to ignore the full social

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis, 31 May 1999, New Research Cites Domestic Violence as Biggest Trigger of Women's Homelessness

<http://www.crisis.org.uk/pressreleases.php/58/new-research-cites-domestic-violence-as-biggest-trigger-of-womens-homelessness>

<sup>53</sup> HM Government, Real Help Now, March 2009. <http://www.realhelpnow.gov.uk/pdf/women.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Are women bearing the burden of the recession?, Fawcett Society, March 2009

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

consequences of their policies and disregard the impact their funding decisions will have on women. Value for money will be decided by the lowest possible costs and vulnerable female service users will pay the ultimate price.

Women's VCOs acknowledge the diversity of the female experience and design and deliver services that are sensitive to women's needs<sup>56</sup>. London has the largest and very active black and minority ethnic women's sector. BME women face more difficulty than other women in dealing with issues of VAW due to cultural and social attitudes<sup>57</sup>. In certain communities 'domestic violence is even more stigmatised and victims who leave their attackers often face being disowned by their extended families'<sup>58</sup> and fear dishonoring them. BME women can also face forms of violence that are unique to their cultural traditions, such as honour crimes, forced marriage and female genital mutilation<sup>59</sup>. Women's VCOs provide culturally specific support to women and services that are run by ethnic minority themselves are most effective in engendering women's trust<sup>60</sup>. Due to their unique reach into London's communities, women's VCOs are able to integrate marginalised women into voluntary support services and ensure that they receive the help that they need.<sup>61</sup> This kind of access is not guaranteed through generic statutory services.

The women's voluntary sector actively reaches out to women who are most at risk and work with socially excluded groups such as refugees and undocumented migrants<sup>62</sup>. Women with no recourse to public funds who experience domestic violence are placed in an even more precarious situation due to their immigration status<sup>63</sup>. Unable to access the state benefits such as housing benefit and income support, required to enter refuges, these women are left with limited routes to

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<sup>56</sup> Women's Resource Centre, Why Women? Report, March 2006, p47

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/wrcwhywomenreport.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/wrcwhywomenreport.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Women's Resource Centre, Why Women? Report, March 2006, p47

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/wrcwhywomenreport.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/wrcwhywomenreport.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

escape violence<sup>64</sup>. Despite funding difficulties women's VCOs seek to provide refuge to female refugees and publicise their plight to authorities as their voices often remain unheard.<sup>65</sup>

Poppy Project research indicates there is evidence of trafficking in every borough of London and with the lead up to the Olympics there are substantial fears that sex trafficking will rise<sup>66</sup>. Trafficked women are often afraid to reveal their experiences to authorities due to threat of deportation and women's projects can provide a haven for women and provide access to sources of support.<sup>67</sup> Sex workers are more vulnerable to being subjected to physical and sexual abuse and are '18 times more likely to be murdered'<sup>68</sup>. Despite their vulnerability, due to the controversial nature of their profession, prostitutes are often socially ostracised and treated with contempt.

Women's VCOs allow women to access essential support without fear of judgement, and focus on their personal welfare rather than treating prostitution as a criminal issue<sup>69</sup>. Local authorities provide limited funding for prostitution services and often view them as a social nuisance, rather than providing a victim focused approach<sup>70</sup>. In the past boroughs such as Camden have used ASBOs as a way of shifting 'the problem' to another area<sup>71</sup>.

By 'passing the buck' local authorities exacerbate women's vulnerability by alienating them from their support systems and failing to provide assistance to women who are need.<sup>72</sup> Pan-London funding on violence against women helps to provide a comprehensive co-ordinated approach to address the causes and consequences of prostitution.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> 2012 Games Sex Trafficking Fears, BBC News 23 March 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/6483407.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6483407.stm)

<sup>67</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> London Assembly, 2005, Street Prostitution in London

<http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/pubserv/prostitution.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> New Philanthropy Capital, 2008, Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for Donors and Funders'

## **Why is Pan-London funding essential for VAW services?**

All the benefits of funding the women's VCS on a pan-London level as outlined above would not be possible without LC funding. Any reduction in the budget would be devastating for the women and children in London who find themselves in need of specialist and expert support. Violence against women holds no boundaries. As women flee their homes and seek sanctuary in other boroughs, anonymity assists them and their families to rebuild their lives and escape abusive partners. Variability of local funding is insufficient in this area and leads to inconsistency in service provision of life saving services. Refugees are already engaged in ongoing struggle for sustainable funding and many have already had to reduce their services due to a lack of income. There is a huge need for these services which is not being fully met by current provision and a reduction of funding as demand increases in the recession could hold grave consequences.

When women seek VAW support they should be able to choose where and how they access services, according to their specific and complex needs.

The nature of London means that home, work and school may all be in different boroughs and borough boundaries are not the same as the boundaries of social relationships. Unlike the often disjointed statutory services characteristic of the borough system; pan-London services provide women with choice. LC funding provides boroughs with a much wider pool of expertise than they could ever hope to fund locally and enhances the quality of services provided to women from their area. It is not cost-effective to have separate provision of the same service in each of the boroughs and LC funding ensures efficiency as well as a coordinated and comprehensive support.

LC funding can have a significant impact on delivering VAW strategies at national, regional and local level. Pan London funding contributes to consistent service provision across the UK and helps to harmonise local and central government actions. LC income offers an opportunity to holistically address the causes of VAW and can facilitate partnership working to increase effectiveness. For example, VAW organisations can work across sectors with drug and alcohol organisations to tackle the causes and consequences of both social problems.

The Women Together Against Abuse Partnership, a ground-breaking multi-agency response to domestic violence, would not have been possible without LC funding as these organisations are based in a number of different boroughs. VAW services are stronger when boroughs act together and synchronisation creates greater impact.

## **Second-tier services**

Second-tier organisations support frontline services to be effective and have a voice. Time pressed and money poor, women's VCOs often do not have the opportunity to vocalise their concerns or express the key problems facing women. Gathering intelligence from hundreds of women's organisations, second-tier organisations act as a bridge between the VCS and politicians and helps to inform better policy making. The WRC has helped the LC obtain information from women's organisations on repeated occasions and 27% of the voluntary and community organisations that responded to the LC consultation on 'Commissioning Voluntary and Community Services' (January 2006) were supported by WRC to do so.

Uniting organisations enables VCOs to communicate with greater impact and allows smaller organisations to have their messages heard by a senior audience. For example, the WRC has raised the profile of the women's sector at an international level in its consultation response to the United Nations women's committee. The committee, for the first time, raised a number of key issues about the sustainability and engagement of the women's sector with the UK government. The second-tier is a vital way to communicate the needs of women and ensure appropriate policy solutions are implemented to remedy their problems.

LC funding enhances the effectiveness of the women's sector and enables organisations to exercise a degree of independence in campaign work. Second-tier scrutiny enhances democracy and helps to hold authorities to account. The second-tier is able to express difficult comments on behalf of VCOs and challenges gender inequality at all levels of government. Through lobbying and

campaigning; umbrella organisations seek to prioritise women's issues on the political agenda. Promoting the work of frontline services is an important way of securing further funding and spurring swifter action to remedy women's difficulties. This impact is shown by the WRC's campaign on the financial sustainability of Rape Crisis centres. Our campaign directly led to two emergency funds being established (2008 and 2009) to prevent further centres closing. The research has helped London's only Rape Crisis centre to lobby the Mayor of London to resource extra services for women and girls in London.

Second-tier organisations challenge social attitudes and vocalising the voice of the sector plays an essential part in garnering public support and challenging social attitudes. Education provides the key to ending gender inequality and by raising awareness of women's issues women's, organisations act as the driving force towards that goal.

Second-tier research strengthens public policy and brings together information from hundreds of diverse women's groups. Their analysis provides an accurate snapshot of the issues arising in the women's sector and allows authorities to monitor core issues in London's communities. Policy units possess indispensable knowledge on women's issues and have a holistic understanding of how causes and consequences of gender inequality; and how they interact with other social issues. Policy teams are a source of innovation in women's research and provide policy recommendations to provide solutions to women's problems. Second-tier expertise is renowned and respected and provides an essential source of information for authorities who wish to make informed policy choices about issues affecting women.

Second-tier research provides a strong evidence base which demonstrates the value of the women's sector and acts as a resource to frontline services wishing to exemplify their worth. For example, WRC research found that only 2% of Department of Health funding went to women's organisations. As a result, WRC brought women's health organisations together to form a consortium and apply to the Department of Health funding. The consortium was successful and has

directly led to a number of actions to better address gender equality within the health sector.

Frontline services lack the skills and capacity to review their work themselves and second-tier assistance in monitoring and evaluation enables them to articulate their value and ensure their survival. As value for money becomes the focus for authorities during the continued existence of the second-tier is imperative. Second-tier organisations such as the Women's Resource Centre have played a major role in promoting women's organisations political participation. Our current feminist participatory action project seeks to examine and address the reasons for women's exclusion from decision making processes and encourage them to influence their local priorities.

Umbrella organisations increase the sustainability and effectiveness of women's VCOs. Capacity building is a key function of the second-tier and organisations seek to equip VCOs with the skills training they need to succeed. Organisations are firmly committed to the personal development of their members and provide specialised training support/advice tailored to the needs of individual VCOs. The second-tier facilitates cross sector learning and provides networking opportunities so members can also learn from one another. Organisations create forums to encourage women to connect with each other, share their ideas and resources and maximize their external impact by exploiting opportunities for joint working. With the threat posed by cuts in LC budgets, the second-tier will have a vital place in brokering partnerships between organisations should frontline providers be forced to merge to ensure the survival. With the sector trend towards the use of contracts in commissioning processes, the second-tier will again need to mobilize groups to work together to allow them to compete with larger organisations for alternate sources of funding.

## **Summary of recommendations**

The Women's Resource Centre is extremely concerned about the implications of the LC reduction of funding to voluntary services. We recommend that LC:

- Consider the full value services before making cuts and promotes equality in its commissioning processes;
- Recognise the value of women only services and the unique disadvantages the women's sector faces in securing local funding;
- Acknowledge the importance of pan-London funding to the women's sector and maintain the VAW budget; and
- Recognise the added value of the women's voluntary sector and reaffirm its financial commitments to women's VCOs.