



Executive
24 March 2014

**Report from the Assistant Chief
Executive**

Wards Affected:
ALL

**Task Group Report on Tackling Violence against Women
and Girls in Brent**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Members of the Health Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HPOVS) on a number of occasions, expressed an interest in forming a task group to tackle violence against women and girls in Brent; focusing on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour Based Violence (HBV) and Forced Marriages (FM).

The task group was agreed by HPOVS in March 2013 and has used this time to conduct an in-depth review into harmful practices. The task group report is attached as appendix A. The findings of the task group's review is wide reaching, effects many pubic services and has a direct impact on the lives of women, children and young people.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive consider the contents of the report;
- 2.2 The Executive tasks officer to consider the individual findings of this important report and bring forward appropriate recommendations on their implementation by the end of June 2014. Responsibility for co-ordinating and monitoring the council's response to the task group's findings will be with the Assistant Chief Executive's Service.

3.0 Detail

The task group's key findings are as follows:

3.1 **The scale and nature of Harmful Practices in Brent**

The task group wanted to establish the prevalence of harmful practices in Brent. We found that there was very little data held and the data that was held by the organisations we contacted was not shared between partners. We met with a number of community groups to gather anecdotal evidence based on their experiences and talked to national and local charities with expertise in this area. While we can't be certain about the extent of these practices within Brent we believe that they are significant enough to recommend that a mapping exercise is undertaken to establish the number of women and girls at risk and that this work should be coordinated with partners and specialist charities.

3.2 **Awareness, Knowledge and Criminality**

The task group believes that there is a worrying lack of knowledge and understanding in Brent about harmful practices, the impact they have and the legislation relating to them. All of the women's groups we met with agreed that raising awareness within affected communities was key to tackling harmful practices. The task group recognises the important role that schools have in raising awareness and safeguarding. We undertook some research with school governors and whilst 64% of our respondents were aware of all three offences, only 21% said that they were covered as part of existing safeguarding training.

The task group has therefore made recommendations focussed on community engagement, awareness raising, obtaining resources, involvement in local and national media campaigns and highlighting harmful practices as criminal offences.

3.3 **Partnership working including referral processes and pathways**

The task group found that while there are many organisations currently working with women and girls affected by harmful practices, there was frequently a lack of coordination between partners and a lack of clarity about referral pathways. This contributed to the negative experience of many of the women we talked to. The task group is therefore recommending that a harmful practices strategy is developed within the wider Violence against Women and Girls Strategy which will provide a clear framework for partners to work within. We also recommend that all key staff from relevant agencies undertake training to ensure a better understanding of the issues, identification of those at risk and establishing referral pathways.

3.4 **Services and accessing available funding**

It is clear that for better more coordinated services to be available voluntary and statutory agencies need to work together. This will not only enable organisations within Brent to pursue all avenues of available funding but ensure that services that are commissioned will have a real and lasting impact.

3.5 Task Group Recommendations

1. That tackling harmful practices becomes a high partnership priority within Brent and that a clear partnership strategy is developed within the context of the wider Violence against Women and Girls Strategy. The harmful practices strategy should include:
 - 1.1. Developing services to protect women and girls at risk
 - 1.2. Developing services to support women and girls subjected to harmful practices
 - 1.3. Robust recording and better quality of data and sharing of data from all partners
 - 1.4. Clear and consistent guidance for reporting risk, pathways for referrals and services
 - 1.5. Provide clear guidance to all key staff and the public on how to report a crime against a women affected by these issues.
 - 1.6. A single point of contact is established for those affected
 - 1.7. The adoption of good practice from elsewhere, health service, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and educational institutions.
2. That work in relation to the implementation of the Harmful Practices Strategy is the responsibility of:
 - The Children's Safeguarding Board
 - The Health and Wellbeing Board
 - Safer Brent Partnership
 - The Assistant Chief Executive Department will take the overall lead responsibility
3. That mapping of practising communities is undertaken to establish the number of women and girls at risk and should be undertaken as part of the Safer Brent strategic assessment process. This work should be completed using tested methodologies, such as those used by Forward and in coordination with Brent's partners and specialist charities such as Forward, the Asian Women's Resource Centre, the Jan Trust and the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO).
4. That a programme of community engagement about violence against women focussing on harmful practices is developed which ensures that

members of affected communities play a lead role. Awareness raising events should be aimed at all sections of the local community, partners, relevant staff and Council Members.

5. That awareness raising resources, leaflets and posters are clearly displayed in medical and educational establishments particularly GP surgeries, clinics. Hospitals, schools and colleges. These should include a single point of contact for those affected by harmful practices.
6. That Brent Council and its partners work with local and national media, including community radio and television stations, to raise awareness and educate the public on harmful practices and the negative effect it has on women and girls in our society.
7. That a programme of training is developed for all key staff from all relevant agencies who are likely to have contact with affected women and girls that will ensure a better understanding of the issues, identification of those at risk and referral pathways. Funding is available to the voluntary sector to assist Brent in delivering this training programme.
8. That all awareness raising and training activities highlight the changes in the law which make these harmful practices criminal offences.
9. That joint working is undertaken with schools to ensure that all head teachers, school governors and those responsible for safeguarding receive training and that all year seven children receive information as part of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE).
10. That Brent Council in conjunction with its partners, particularly Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) Brent, pursue all avenues for available funding and support specialist charities and local voluntary organisations to bid for money from government agencies such as the Forced Marriage unit and the European Union fund.
11. That Brent Council along with its partners annually take part in the International UN sponsored awareness day that takes place 6th February each year. Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation day is set up to make the world aware of Female Genital Mutilation and to promote its eradication.
12. That Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) should commission services for women and girls affected by the harmful practices of Female Genital Mutilation, Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriages.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 None

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1 None

Background Papers

Task Group Report – Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Brent

Contact Officers

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