

Women's Resource Centre comments

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About the Women's Resource Centre

WRC is a unique charity that 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 try to educate 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, prevention of violence against women and girls, 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 approximately 20,000 women's organisations across the country serving millions of women every year.

WRC and The Way Ahead

WRC has been funded by the City Bridge Trust to support the development of the Way Ahead and specifically to engage with the Way Ahead (TWA) - System Change Group and thematic sets. In the initial 12 months of this funding, WRC is coordinating key research and connecting the women's sector specialist providers, practitioners and service users' voices in policy engagement.

The Draft New London Plan (Summary)

WRC has worked extensively with its members, collating evidence in support of the development of a number of the Mayor's strategies, the content of which has direct relevance to sections of the London Plan framework. As a member of the Equalities Impact Assessment Group supporting TWA identify and embed good equalities practice, WRC worked with colleagues of this group, JustSpace and the GLA to host a community led, equalities event at City Hall on 5 February for community representatives of London's diverse civil society including the women and girls sector to discuss the London Plan and better inform individual responses. WRC also attended the London Funders and GLV event on 16 February to look specifically at the Social Infrastructure section of the Plan to identify and give support to some commonly shared themes:

- Considering equalities and inclusion throughout the plan
- Looking at the integration of services to promote whole-person support
- Embedding principles of coproduction into the design and planning process

Considering equalities and inclusion throughout the plan

WRC welcomes the 'Good Growth' ambitions of social and economic inclusivity and is heartened by the declaration that there is no hierarchy of sections within the plan, however it would be more powerful to see the plan contain key performance indicators which clearly demonstrate success in social as well as economic value and these underpinned by robust and ratified impact assessment covering as a minimum the nine equalities characteristics and specifically for this sector, a gendered lens to give robust assessment and analysis..

Looking at the integration of services to promote whole-person support

The success of women's specialist support is built on working with the whole women. Women's organisations are increasingly pressured to provide services to men, regardless in some circumstances where women are the overwhelming majority of service users. This results in lack of effective services for women with specific needs (e.g., BME women, disabled women, LGBTQ women) and they repeatedly state the need for specialist women's services, which also save money.[1]

Equally, small specialist BME women's organisations are more likely to be experiencing crises. They are experiencing increased demand for their services due to the impact of the UK decision to leave the EU,[2] on-going cuts to grants and statutory services, and the channels for halting this trend are becoming harder for smaller civil society groups and organisations to access, and contribute to due to reduced capacity.

Services run by non-specialist are usually less effective due to lack of expertise, religious or language barriers, fear of cultural discrimination and racism and/or disablism faced by women who experience intersectional or multi layered discrimination.[3] Which underlines the fact that specialist BME women's led by and for services are best placed to deliver services that BME, disabled, or women with multiple needs require[4].

Embedding principles of coproduction into the design and planning process

WRC has extensive, robust evidence on the diverse and highly complex characteristics of inequality affecting women, the compounded, negative impact on their families' lives and in turn the impact on women and their individual and organisational ability to play a full part in civil society.

A Fair Deal for Women[5] is a women's sector collaborative campaign of 13 organisations led by WRC, and is a resource of research, statistics and expert opinion on the interconnected nature of women's inequality. It ranges from poverty, to violence, racism, disablism, unequal access to justice and human rights.

It also provides solutions to the many ways in which civil society can be called upon to play their role in coproducing key elements of the London Plan, particularly in terms of sector needs and contribution to developing London's social infrastructure..

Chapter 5 Social Infrastructure

S1 – Developing London's Social Infrastructure

5.1.2

- Many women's centres and women's organisations have been lost over recent decades. We need to re-provide safe, accessible and affordable physical spaces where women can meet, organise, learn, train, network and seek advice, care and help.
- Women are still the major care-givers, and the provision of free / affordable crèches and childcare in such centres is essential

- The GLA owns many assets surplus to operational requirements, including those previously owned by TfL, NHS etc. We would ask that the Mayor works with the women and girls sector to identify a suitable site for a London Women's Centre to be built, housing WRC and other organisations.
- Secular 'Open' spaces are particularly needed for women, outside of religious structures as these can sometimes be also the source of oppression.
- Offices and women-only start-up provision. There are far more women trying to set up their own businesses and safe and affordable spaces are needed with crèche provision.
- Violence against women and girls is still a key issue; two women a week are killed in the UK by their male partners / ex-partners and we need the provision of more safe and protected and high quality refuges.

S2 – Health and social care facilities

The women's health sector is as rich as it is diverse and continues to operate on the front line, supporting some of the most marginalised and vulnerable women and girls in our society, significantly within VCS organisations run by and for women.

We know that women make up 52% of the population, that 90% of single parent families are headed by women; that women live for longer in poor health (except for homeless women who have shorter life expectancy – 43 years to homeless men – 47 years). In fact, they continue to be disproportionately affected on every characteristic of health inequality making it impossible to meaningfully achieve a Plan with ‘good growth’.

S2/A5: Development proposals that support the provision of high-quality new and enhanced facilities to meet identified need and new models of care should be supported.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the GLA in identifying solutions to support better use of existing and proposed infrastructure. Particularly in identifying opportunities to develop proposals that support high-quality and enhanced facilities to meet need as well as supporting specialist models of care.

For example WRC has completed the feasibility process for a Women’s Building in London which is not only financially self-sustainable but would provide London with a hub for women’s leadership, provide safe spaces for women’s organisations to grow and improve sustainability. And ultimately strengthen sector ability to collaboratively maximise its contribution to London’s vision of “good growth”.

S6 – Public Toilets

5.6.3 Planners are welcome to provide gender-neutral toilets should they wish. However it is vitally important that women-only toilets are also provided; as they continue to face dangers where men are allowed to use the same facilities.

Attention also needs to be paid to understanding the difference between sex and gender. Gender as a social construct makes women vulnerable to those who may or may not self-identify as another gender and who may also present a threat and/or danger to women.

Chapter 4 - Housing

H14 – Supported and specialised accommodation

- The Plan acknowledges the priorities for supported and other forms of social housing and aims to tackle homelessness. What is missing however is the hidden state of Women's homelessness, not counted separately for example within the rough sleepers statistics.
- There is generally a lack of data on women and housing issues in London neither Government nor the Mayor's office provide sufficient gender breakdown of the statistics they publish.
- Cuts and changes to social security benefits, including but not only relating to housing benefit have worsened the housing crisis for women.
- There is huge importance in improving the housing strategy to incorporate Women's needs. Without a home, everything else fails.

"Women's homelessness requires forms of preventative intervention and service models that recognise and respond to women's specific needs." [6]

- 78 women and 78 children are turned away from refuge on the average day. About 1 in 4 referrals to refuge services in 2015/16 were declined due to lack of spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include a section highlighting the contribution, needs and requirements of the voluntary and community sector as a specific sector of London's economy.
- Bring in teams at City Hall working on the civil society narrative, to ensure that strategies align and there is consistency in how the GLA plans to celebrate civil society.

- Ensure the role of civil society is recognised in all sections of the plan, not just as part of ‘Social Infrastructure’ chapter. It is relevant across the whole Plan.
- Clarify the meaning of ‘community space’ and outline more clearly how communities and voluntary and community sector need to be involved in coproducing this.
- Ensure robust equalities impact assessment across the Plan, including a disaggregation of all data by equality groups.
- Use and reasonably resource the sector to facilitate the engagement and involvement of the Women and Girls sector.

[1] Women’s Aid(2015) Change That Lasts <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/our-approach-change-that-lasts/#1447243625589-62f871a3-8144>

[2] <https://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/brexit-the-impact-on-womens-organisations/>

[3] See Imkaan’s report on specialist service provision https://drive.google.com/file/d/OB_MKSoEcCvQwcGo0NHRWbGVjdFk/

[4] Independent (2016) UK Entering ‘unchartered territory’ of Islamophobia after Brexit vote <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-muslim-racism-hate-crime-islamophobia-eu-referendum-leave-latest-a7106326.html>

[5] <https://.fairdealforwomen.com/>

[6]<https://phys.org/news/2017-04-uk-hidden-homeless-lone-women>

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Page: [Policy S2 Health and social care facilities](#)

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Page: [Policy S6 Public toilets](#)

Section: [5.6.3](#)

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