

Funding for Support Services for Victims and Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls in London



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1. Executive Summary

This report investigates the funding landscape for support services for victims and survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). VAWG support services provide a range of support to victims and survivors, including safety planning and advocacy, safe accommodation, support navigating statutory services and long term recovery support. These services are primarily delivered by specialist third sector VAWG organisations. Services are funded through a combination of different statutory and non-statutory sources, including central government, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), local authorities and charitable trust and grant giving organisations. The aim of the research was to understand the current funding landscape for support services in London, and evaluate the impact this has on service providers and the people they support. The research consisted of two phases:

1. Mapping available funding for VAWG support services delivered in the financial year 2022/3, and analysing trends in distribution.
2. Qualitative research with commissioners and service providers, to understand the impact of funding arrangements.

Findings

The research found that:

- Funding arrangements for VAWG support services are fragmented, complex and difficult to understand. Inconsistent reporting by organisations providing funding makes it difficult to track funding through the system. 50 funding organisations and 96 discrete funding pots were identified through the mapping.
- The majority of funding available for VAWG support services is short term, which has a negative impact on the ability of commissioners and service providers to respond effectively to need and deliver sustainable services.
- There are inconsistencies across London in terms of joined up commissioning, such as co-commissioning of services, at a local and sub-regional level. Some positive examples of collaboration across boroughs were identified, but collaboration is not taking place consistently across London.

- Specialist VAWG services experience significant barriers accessing funding due to issues with the administration of funding, including short application windows and complex monitoring requirements. Specialist VAWG services reported being underfunded for the contracts they deliver, and service providers often subsidise service contracts, including by using their reserves or relying on unpaid labour by staff.
- Specialist by-and-for organisations, that provide support to victims and survivors who are minoritised and experience barriers accessing more generic services, face additional structural barriers in accessing funding. 27% of identified funding was received by by-and-for organisations.
- Recovery focused services and services focusing on children and young people received a relatively low proportion of funding, despite high demand from victims and survivors. 5.7% of funding identified was explicitly for services for children and young people and 12.9% was for recovery work. Central government funding is focused primarily on crisis support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- Commissioners and service providers consistently felt that genuine co-production was essential for effective funding and commissioning of services; there are some positive examples of co-production already in London.

Recommendations

The report makes eight recommendations. For recommendations to be successfully implemented, funders and commissioners should commit to transparency and co-production in funding processes and adopt a shared understanding of specialist VAWG services and by-and-for services based on VAWG sector developed definitions of these services.

1. Short term funding is one of the biggest barriers to the sustainability of specialist VAWG support services and there needs to be a concerted effort by all commissioners to shift to multi-year funding and ensure it is available across all forms of support.

2. All commissioners should commit to commissioning on the basis of full cost recovery, covering all costs associated with the delivery of the service, including core costs and accreditation. Contracts should be reviewed to ensure they take into account rising core costs and the impact of inflation on service providers.
3. Building on their commitment to cross-governmental oversight and collaboration on victim support service funding, the government should create a single point of communication about funding opportunities and should create a proactive communications strategy to ensure specialist organisations are regularly informed of funding opportunities.
4. All funders and commissioners should commit to addressing the barriers faced by by-and-for organisations, including through evaluating the impact of funding administration on by-and-for organisations and co-designing better ways of working with by-and-for organisations.
5. Collaboration between boroughs to provide specialist support across borough boundaries is key for improved support for victims and survivors. Boroughs should ensure the sharing of best practice in collaborative commissioning and central government funding should allow for regional complexity when designing funding streams.
6. Our findings support the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's recommendation for the Department of Education, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to take steps to address the lack of specialist support for children affected by domestic abuse. Funders and commissioners in London should review and prioritise support for children and young people in their strategic approach to VAWG.
7. We support the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's call for the Ministry of Justice and Department of Health and Social Care to develop plans to address the paucity of specialist therapy and counselling provision for victims and survivors. We call on NHS London Region and the five London Integrated Care Boards to consider mental health and therapeutic support for victims and survivors of VAWG as priorities within their strategic plans.
8. London Councils should work with the VAWG sector, MOPAC and London Funders to establish a London Commission on VAWG funding with the aims of:
 - a. Developing a single integrated funding VAWG strategy across London which includes a Funding Charter
 - b. Lobbying for improved central government funding arrangements to support a fairer funding system for VAWG in London
 - c. Identifying and testing solutions that can improve the funding and commissioning of services in London

2. Introduction

This report was commissioned by London Councils in order to understand the current funding and commissioning landscape for specialist services to support victims and survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls in London.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) encompasses a range of violence that disproportionately affects women and girls, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, harmful practices, and so called ‘honour’ based violence.

Specialist Support services for victims and survivors of VAWG are primarily delivered by specialist third sector organisations but are also delivered in house by local authorities and other statutory organisations.¹ These services are funded through a combination of funding from central government departments, regional and local statutory bodies, charitable grant giving and trust organisations and independent fundraising by service providers. Specialist support services support victims and survivors as they navigate statutory services, and reduce pressure on statutory services.

We have identified and mapped funding made available for specialist VAWG support services from statutory and charitable funders for services delivered in 2022-3. Funding was identified through publicly available grant and contract registers, the 360giving GrantNAV register, and information shared directly by funders and commissioners. A full explanation of the methodology used is included in Appendix B.

To understand the impact that current funding arrangements have on the commissioning and delivery of services, we conducted focus groups and interviews with service providers, commissioners, and funders of services. A full list of questions used in interviews and focus groups is included in Appendices D and E.

1 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, “A Patchwork of Provision – Technical Report”, 2022.

3. Context

This report has been commissioned in the context of growing recognition of the importance of specialist support for victims and survivors of VAWG. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created a statutory obligation on local authorities to commission support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and their children, in safe accommodation. The Act also provided the first statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognised children affected by domestic abuse as victims in their own right.² Subsequent government strategies^{3,4,5} have included commitments to support victims and survivors through the provision of specialist services.

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales suggests that in the last year, approximately 360,000 people in London will have experienced Domestic Abuse and 150,000 people in London will have experienced some form of sexual assault⁶. A recent London Councils survey found that 25 per cent of Londoners had been personally affected by domestic abuse, either experiencing abuse directly or knowing someone who had been affected.⁷ Victims and survivors still face significant barriers to access the support they need. In her review⁸ of domestic abuse and sexual violence support services in England and Wales, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that most victims were not able to access the support they wanted, and there was a significant regional variation in access to services. Disabled survivors, LGBT survivors and male survivors reported particularly low levels of support.

Support organisations reported an increase in demand during the Covid-19 pandemic, and demand for services has remained high.⁹ The rising cost-of-living has had a profound impact on victims and survivors of domestic abuse. When surveyed by Women’s Aid, 73 per cent of victims who lived with their perpetrator and had

financial links to them said that the rising cost-of-living had either prevented them from leaving or made it harder for them to leave.¹⁰

Despite new funding introduced for support for victims of domestic abuse in safe accommodation, in 2021/22, almost 20,000 households in England and Wales were unable to receive support in safe accommodation. In 40% of cases, this was due to lack of service capacity.¹¹

In London, 34 per cent of organisations providing services to victims and survivors reported having to cease services due to limited funding.

London Picture

London shares many challenges with the rest of the country, but London also faces specific issues that make it harder for victims and survivors to access support. Lack of affordable housing presents a barrier to victims and survivors escaping abuse and successfully moving on from safe accommodation services.¹² London is experiencing an acute housing crisis. Approximately 166,000 homeless Londoners live in temporary accommodation¹³, of whom 65% are women.¹⁴ Two-thirds of UK households in temporary accommodation live in the capital. Demand for safe accommodation support in London is higher than the national average¹⁵ and victims and survivors in safe accommodation have a longer average stay than victims and survivors outside London.

The funding and commissioning of support services in London is complex due to London’s size and the number of funding and commissioning bodies operating in the capital. At a regional level, services are typically commissioned for a significantly larger¹⁶ and more diverse population than in other parts of the country.

2 Home Office, “Domestic Abuse Act 2021: overarching factsheet,” 2021.

3 Home Office, “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy”, 2021.

4 Home Office, “Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan,” 2022.

5 Ministry of Justice, “Victims Funding Strategy,” 2022.

6 Calculated using data drawn from 2021 Census results and the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

7 Ipsos, “London Councils Survey of Londoners”, 2022.

8 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, “A Patchwork of Provision – Technical Report”, 2022.

9 Women’s Aid, “The Domestic Abuse Report 2023”, 2023.

10 Women’s Aid, “Cost-of-living and the impact on survivors of Domestic Abuse”, 2022.

11 Department for Levelling Up, “Annual progress report from the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group 2021-22”, 2023.

12 Solace Women’s Aid, “Safe as House”, 2019

13 London Councils, “Boroughs warn at least one child in every London classroom is homeless”, 2023

14 London Councils, “65% of homeless Londoners in temporary accommodation are women, figures reveal,” 2022.

15 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, “A Patchwork of Provision: Technical Report,” 2022 DAC

16 ONS, “Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables”, 2023.

Commissioners sit at a pan-London level (including the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime (MOPAC), the London Violence Reduction Unit and the London Councils grants programme), the sub-regional level (including the five Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) responsible for commissioning health services) and the borough level (32 London boroughs and the City of London). Services are also commissioned via sub-regional borough partnerships and directly from central government departments. The impact of these complexities on the strategic funding and commissioning of support services is considered within this report.

4. Findings from the data mapping

Scope

We mapped central and regional funding, local authority spend, and charitable funding available for specialist support services for victims and survivors of VAWG, focusing on the total financial envelope available for services in 2022-23. The mapping covered funding that had been announced for services delivered during the financial year 2022-23, and included multiyear funding up to the year 2027/28. Data was collected between October 2022 and February 2023. Definitions of the forms of specialist support can be found in Appendix A. This research is focused on funding for dedicated, specialist support services aimed at victims and survivors of VAWG. Victims and Survivors will often access a broader range of support from non-specialist services, such as debt and money advice services, health services, housing and homelessness support and social care. This broader support is not included within the scope of the mapping. The funding identified therefore does not represent the totality of what is spent supporting victims and survivors.

Funding for work that aims to prevent VAWG but does not involve direct support for victims and survivors, such as communications or awareness raising campaigns, was also out of scope.

Limitations

The data mapping presents a snapshot of funding available to support services in London for the period. Due to challenges in data collection, it does not present an exact picture of funding in London and cannot be used to draw conclusions at a granular level. It can however be used to draw conclusions on broad trends in funding across the capital.

It was not possible to collect the following data:

- Donations from individuals or corporate funders
- Service provider income earned outside of service delivery contracts, but used to subsidise services
- Ad hoc or in-kind funding
- The distribution of funding within service provider partnerships

NHS funding for support services for victims and survivors of VAWG was not included in the data mapping

due to challenges in data collection. Funding for clinical services delivered by the NHS for victims and survivors of VAWG, such as Sexual Assault Referral Clinics (SARCs) is therefore not included within the scope of the mapping. However, some of the funding identified in the mapping will have been used to deliver support in NHS settings, such as Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) co-located in hospitals.

Previous research on the funding and provision of support for victims and survivors in health settings in London has found challenges relating to insufficient funding and fragmented commissioning.¹⁷

Data on local authority spend

Data collection was challenging, due to inconsistency of available records across commissioning bodies and inconsistency in the formatting and presentation of information. This made it challenging to identify and compare funding streams, especially at a local level. Consequently, it is probable that not all local authority spending was surfaced through the mapping, especially spending on services delivered directly by the local authority. The funding sources for local authority commissioned services were not always clearly delineated, and therefore it is possible that some external funding for services was counted against the local authority total. Therefore, data on local authority spend should be treated with caution.

Overview of funding

**Total Central Government funding:
£54 million
Over five years**

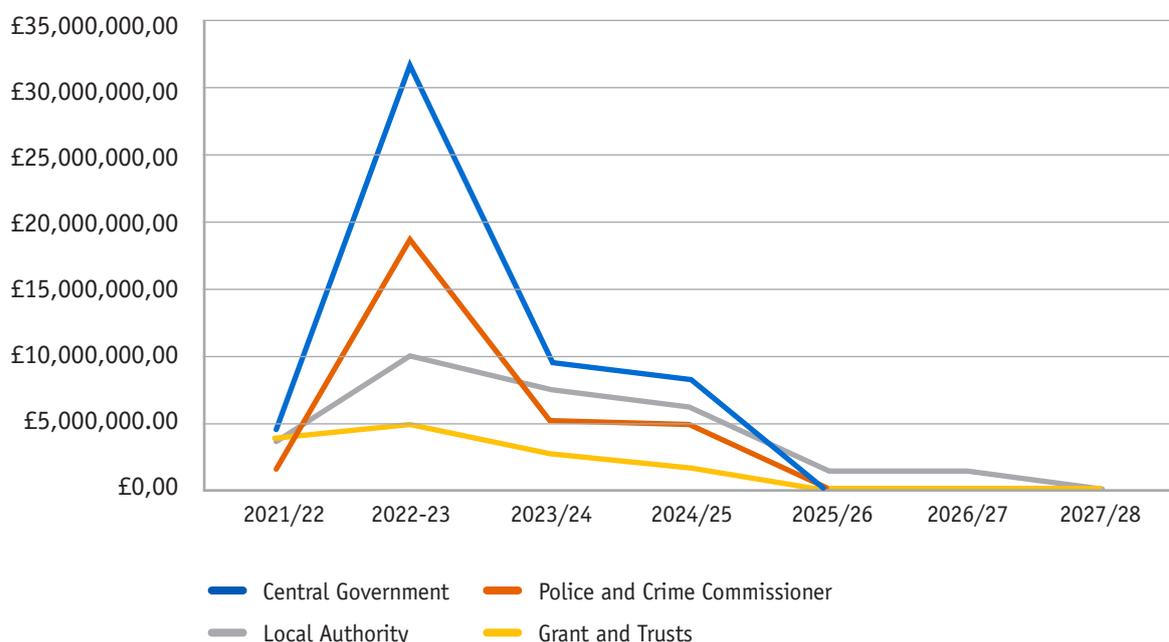
A total of £54 million in funding for VAWG support services in London from central government over five years was identified through the mapping. 2022-23 saw an increase in available funding for accommodation-based support services, due to funding made available under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. When additional Police and Crime Commissioner funding is included, the total funding identified for services across London is £85.14 million. The mapping identified £30.5 million

¹⁷ Safelives, "We only do bones here", 2021.

in local authority spend on support services, and £14.2 million in funding from charitable and grant funders.

The majority of funding identified was short term, with at least 60 per cent of funding available on a year-to-year basis. Some examples of longer-term funding were identified, with some London boroughs issuing service contracts of up to five years. The longest central government funding pots available were three years, for the provision of community-based advocacy services.

Funding Over Time



Central government provides the highest proportion of funding for services - 42 per cent of funding identified was from central government. Funding opportunities were identified from five government departments, with most of the funding provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) or the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Additional funding from MOPAC represented 24 per cent of all funding identified. 23 per cent of identified funding available was provided by local authorities. 11 per cent of available funding came from charitable trusts or grant giving organisations. Of charitable funding, 42 per cent was provided by the National Lottery Community Fund.

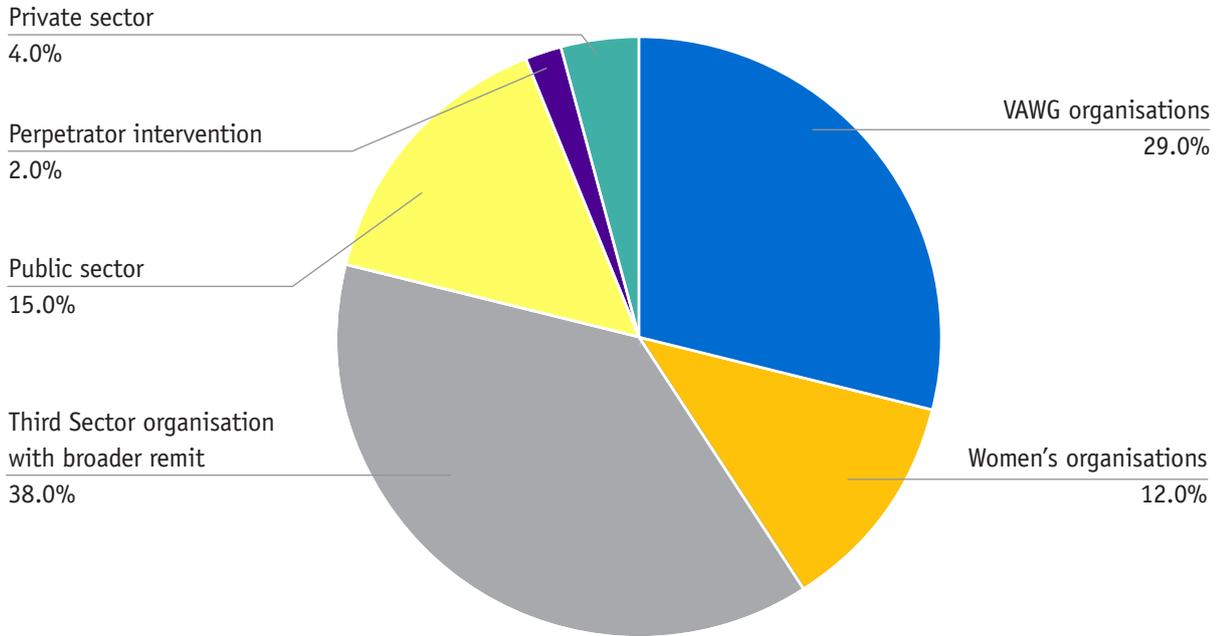
Fifty separate organisations providing funding were identified through the research, of which 25 were statutory bodies and 25 were charitable funders. Eighty-six discrete funds and 619 funding awards were identified, which funded 271 identifiable projects or services.

Much of the funding identified was multi-layered, with funding passing through multiple funders and commissioners before reaching service providers. It was challenging to track funding as it moved between organisations. Funding streams were presented in different formats, creating a barrier to tracking and comparing funding. These issues, combined with the large number of funding organisations, means there is little transparency in spending.

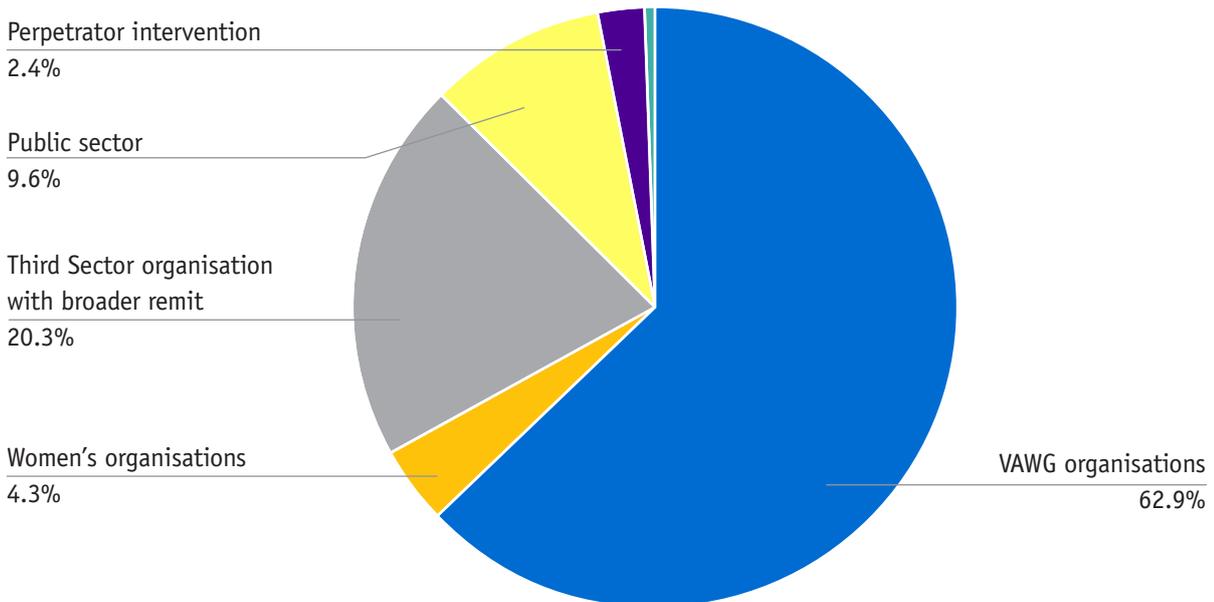
Funding recipients

The research identified 232 recipients of funding for the delivery of VAWG support services.

Number of different organisations

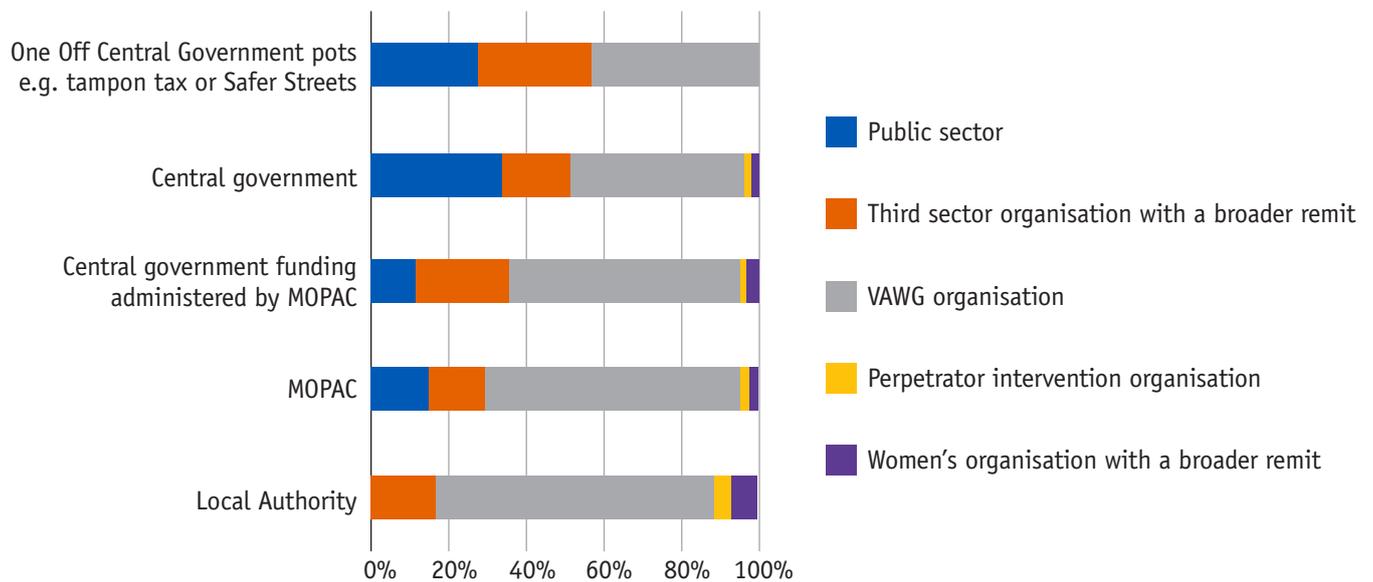


Distribution of Funding



Twenty-nine per cent of recipients were specialist VAWG organisations, which received 62 per cent of the available funding. Third Sector organisations with a wider remit received 20% of available funding.

Allocation of funding for each funder type



By-and-for organisations

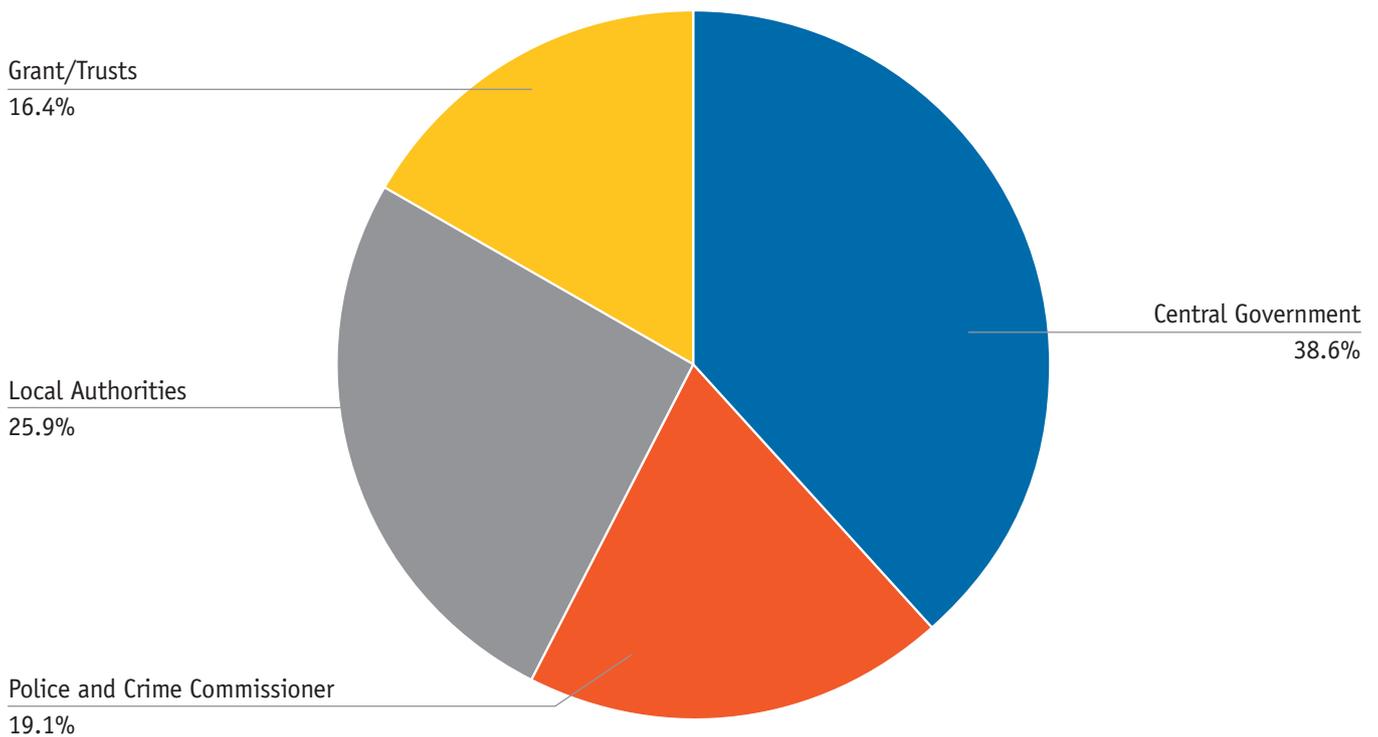
By-and-for organisations represented 30% of all recipients. 65% of by-and-for organisations identified were VAWG specialist or Women and Girls organisations and nearly 80% of funding provided to the by-and-for sector reached VAWG specialist organisations.

The available data suggests that by-and-for organisations received 27 per cent of the available funding. By-and-for organisations are more likely to receive funding within partnerships than non-by-and-for organisations, with 35 per cent of their funding received through partnerships.¹⁸ It was not possible to identify funding distribution within partnerships and therefore, funding was allocated evenly across all partners for the purposes of the data mapping. Evidence from focus groups with service providers, and from other research¹⁹, suggests that inequalities exist in the distribution of funding within partnerships, with smaller organisations receiving less funding. More research is necessary to fully understand this, but this suggests that 27 per cent may be an overestimate of the total funds received by by-and-for organisations.

18 Compared to 23 per cent of the total funding received by non-by-and-for organisations

19 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, "A Patchwork of Provision – Technical Report", 2022

Funding sources for By-and-For organisations



By-and-for services received a higher proportion of their funding from charitable trust and grant funders than non-by-and-for VAWG specialist organisations (16%). 39% of funding for by-and-for organisations came from central government funding, 19% came from additional MOPAC funding, and 26% from local authorities.

The proportion of funding allocated to by-and-for services from additional MOPAC funding significantly increased in the year 2022-23. This increase was primarily attributable to the creation of ring-fenced funding for by-and-for organisations.

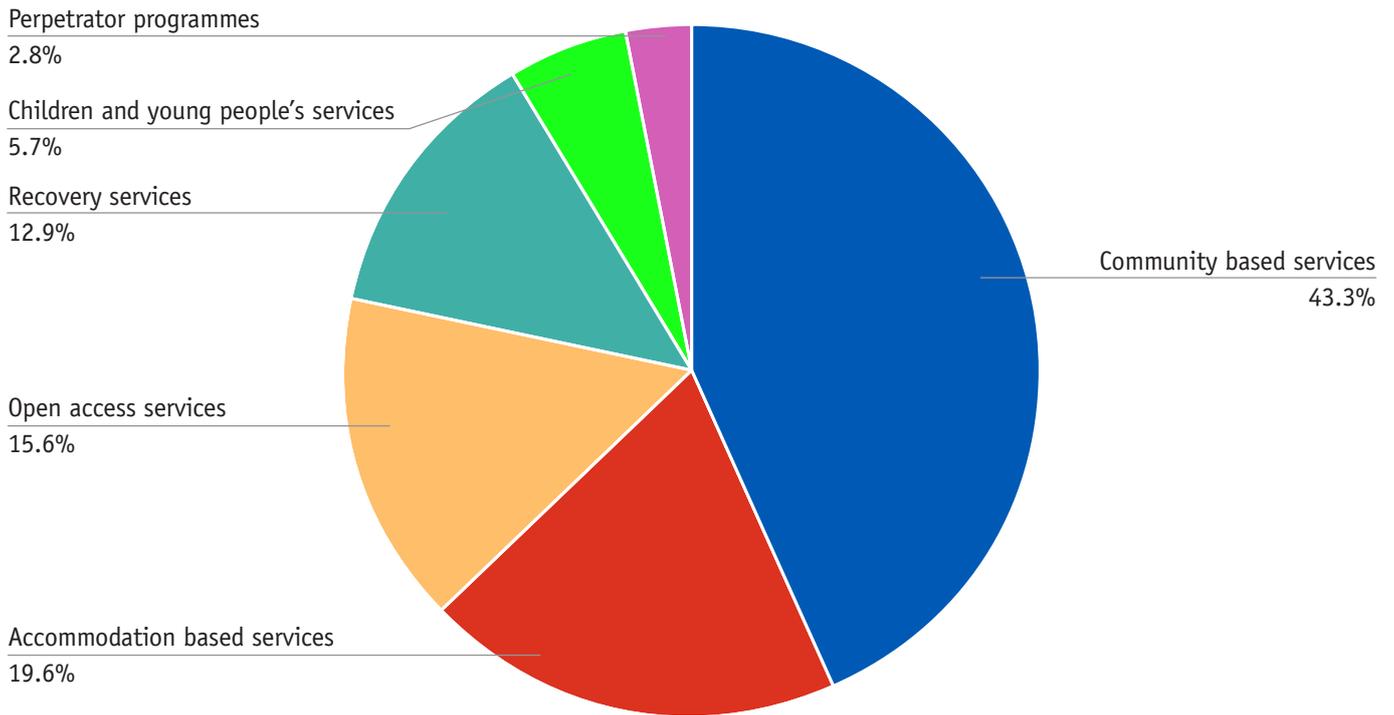
Partnerships

26% of funding identified went to partnerships made up of multiple service providers, jointly bidding to deliver a service. Most of the funding allocated to partnerships was allocated to partnerships composed of both VAWG specialist and broader remit organisations (85% of identified funding for partnerships). A quarter of identified partnerships had no by-and-for members.

What services are being funded

Where possible, funding streams have been mapped according to the type of support service or activity funded. However, not all funding was explicitly targeted at a particular service area, and many organisations provide integrated holistic services that do not fit neatly into a single stream of activity. Thirty-eight per cent of identified funding was for service delivery across multiple activities.

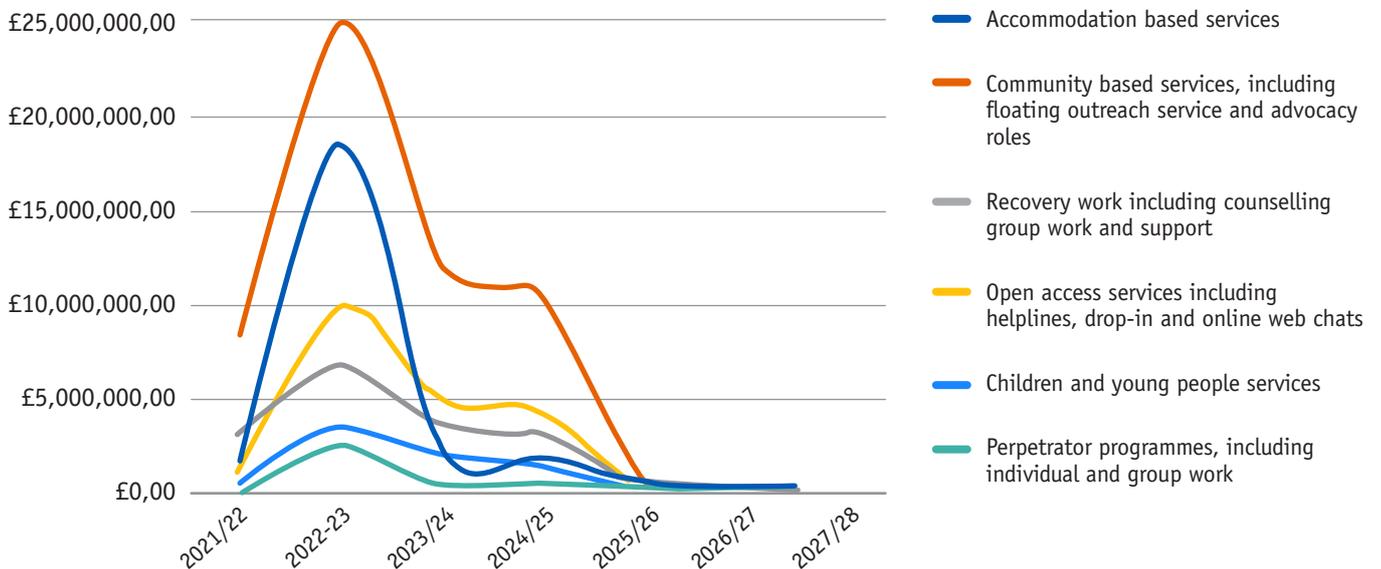
Funding by Service Type



Community Based Services, including floating support, outreach and advocacy accounted for the highest proportion of funding available (43.3 per cent). The second highest proportion was for accommodation-based support services. Funding for recovery work (such as counselling and therapeutic support) accounted for 12.9 per cent of funding identified. 5.7 per cent of funding was specifically targeted to support for children and young people.

42% of central government funding was ringfenced for the provision of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs). 27% was ring fenced for the provision of support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation.

Service type over time



In comparison to central government, local authorities used a higher proportion of their overall funding to commission recovery work, with 21 per cent of local authority funding going to these services.

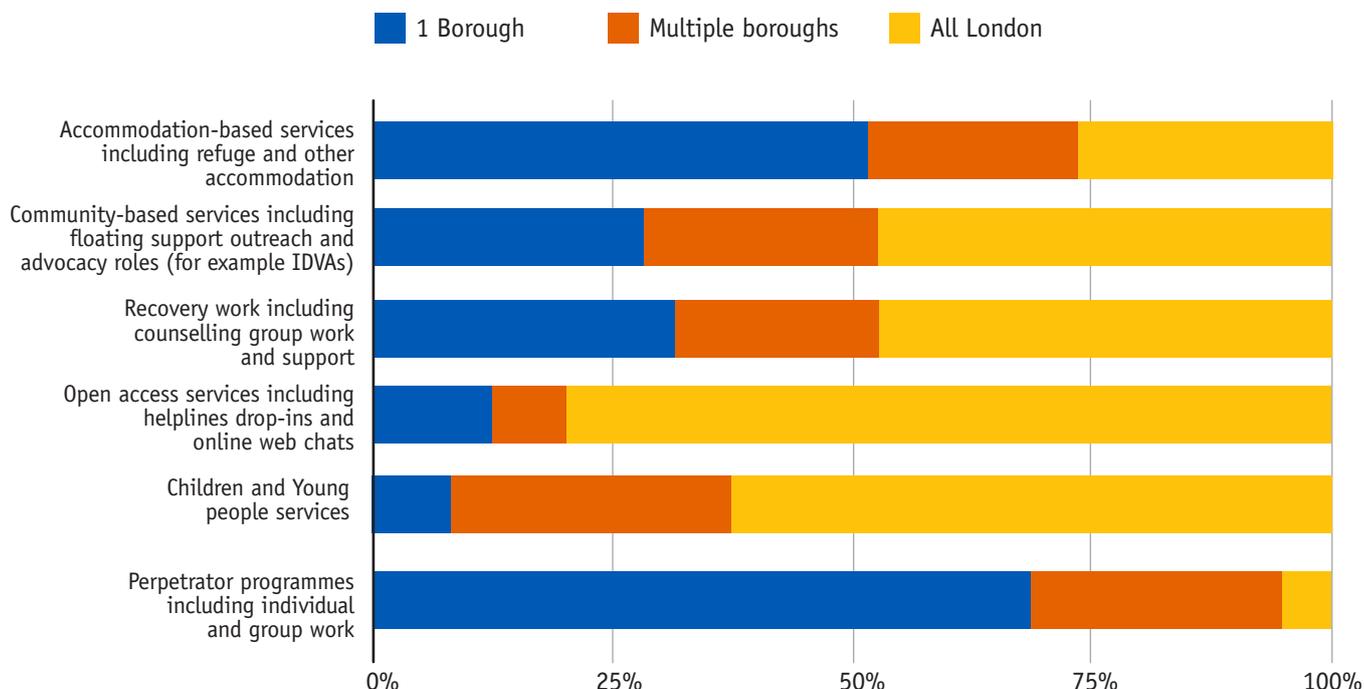
The majority of funding for VAWG services from charitable grant and trust funders was not available through dedicated VAWG funding streams, but through funding programmes with a wider remit, such as tackling multiple disadvantage. No funding for accommodation-based support from charitable trust and grant funders was identified in the mapping. The majority of grant and trust funding went to community-based services (57 per cent). Twenty per cent of funding went to open access support such as helplines and 17 per cent to recovery work.

Where funding was targeted towards victims and survivors of specified forms of VAWG, it was predominantly targeted to services responding to domestic abuse (34 per cent) and sexual abuse (25 per cent). Five per cent of funding identified was explicitly designated for services supporting survivors of other forms of VAWG, such as so called “Honour Based Violence” and Harmful Practices.

Spread of funded services

Fifty-five per cent of funding is targeted at pan-London support, although it was not possible in the mapping to identify whether services were in practice accessible at a pan-London level. Twenty-six per cent of identified funding was targeted at multiple-borough provision. Geographic patterns varied depending on the type of service provided. Funding for open access provision is more likely at a pan-London level. In contrast, over 50 per cent of accommodation-based support provision is commissioned or tendered at borough level.

Service Areas by Geographic Coverage



Key Findings from Data Mapping

The findings from the mapping demonstrate the complexity of the current funding system, and the difficulties in understanding funding arrangements, which is reflected in the challenges described by both the commissioners and the service providers who participated in the qualitative research. The current administration of funding reduces transparency, which hinders strategic long-term planning and makes it harder for victims and survivors to hold statutory bodies to account for how they fund services.

There are inconsistencies across London in terms of joined up commissioning at a local and sub-regional level. While strong examples of co-commissioning were identified through the research, arrangements are variable across London.

Most of the funding for support services identified was short term, with 60 per cent of identified funding being confirmed on a yearly basis. This lack of long-term secure funding prevents providers from investing in services and wider infrastructure, including support and security for staff, as organisations have to use valuable capacity and resources to secure basic funding year on year.²⁰ This presents a challenge to the sustainability of support services; the Ascent 2021 Needs Assessment of London VAWG specialist organisations found 90% of respondents had serious concerns about their ability to run their services effectively.²¹ Short term funding does not meet the needs of victims and survivors, as they are often faced with changes or reductions in their support due to services losing funding.²²

Central government funding is focused primarily on crisis support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence at high risk of harm. While this support is essential and welcomed, victims and survivors also want and need longer term, holistic support, including counselling and therapy.²³

5.7% funding identified was explicitly for services for children and young people. This should be considered in the context of research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, which found that both nationally and in London there is a gap in services providing

dedicated support for children and young people who have been affected by domestic abuse. Eighty-two per cent of victims and survivors in London surveyed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner reported that their child did not receive any support from domestic abuse services, even though the survivor would have liked them to. 64 per cent of female victims and survivors of domestic abuse in London reported having children under the age of 18 in the house at the time they experienced abuse, so this represents a major gap in provision.²⁴

By-and-for organisations received 27% of the identified funding, which should be considered within the context of London's diverse population. More than half of Londoners belong to minoritised communities, and 27% of households speak a language other than English as their main language. London has proportionately more LGBT+ people than England, and a quarter of the Trans+ population in England live in London.²⁵ Minoritised victims and survivors face additional barriers in accessing support, and highly value access to specialist, by-and-for services delivered by their own community.²⁶ Therefore, the relatively low level of funding towards these specialist services is concerning.

The impact that these arrangements have on the ability of commissioners and service providers to effectively deliver services for victims and survivors is explored in the following section.

20 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, "A Patchwork of Provision – Policy Report", 2022

21 Women's Resource Centre, "Ascent Second-Tier Support Services Strand Needs Assessment 2021". 2021

22 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, "A Patchwork of Provision – Policy Report", 2022

23 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, "A Patchwork of Provision – Technical Report", 2022

24 Mayor of London, London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment, 2021

25 ONS, "Census Data 2021", 2023

26 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, "A Patchwork of Provision – Technical Report", 2022

5. Qualitative research findings from service providers

Semi-structured Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a range of service providers to understand the impact the current funding landscape has on their services. Twenty service providers were represented. Seventy five per cent were specialist VAWG organisations, and 50 per cent were by-and-for organisations. Sixty per cent were small-size organisations, and 25 per cent were large organisations, including one large non-specialist VAWG organisation.

Participants' experience of the funding system reflected the complex and multi-layered landscape described in the data section. Participants described a system in "perpetual crisis", in which service providers frequently subsidise service contracts from their own funds and have to turn away women in need due to lack of capacity. Participants described services delivered by passionate and committed staff and volunteers, who work well beyond their contracted hours to support victims and survivors. Participants described the impact of working long hours at low wages, which contributes to burnout.

Challenges applying for funding

Service providers described the challenges of operating in a competitive commissioning system which is designed for larger, commercial providers. Small VAWG specialist organisations described struggling to compete with larger, generic organisations that can reduce costs through economies of scale. The current system of funding is not designed for specialist VAWG organisations, which creates challenges for these organisations. Specific challenges identified by service providers included being ineligible to access funding due to falling between funding thresholds and struggling to fulfil social value or environmental requirements attached to funding opportunities.

"We feel we need to be competitive, and so [...] we don't fully cost things. But also I think [...] what we've seen is particularly some of the sort of the larger, more generic services coming in with a low cost unit price, providing [...] more or less anything and everything type of what we would say is a specialist VAWG service, and for [...] a lower price. And so from our point of view, either

we cut our prices and undersell ourselves and we have to find that funding elsewhere, but you get a really decent specialist service delivered. Or you know that women locally are gonna be poorly served."

(Medium-size specialist VAWG organisation)

Participants described the burden placed by short bidding timelines. This was especially felt by participants from smaller organisations, which were less likely to have specialist fundraising staff. Participants highlighted that short bidding timelines disincentivise the formation of partnerships, as partnership bids require additional administration and co-ordination. As the data mapping demonstrated, by-and-for organisations are more likely to rely on partnership bids to access funding, so this is an issue that disproportionately impacts these service providers.

Multiple participants noted that bidding timeframes often do not account for school holidays, which is challenging as Specialist VAWG services and broader Women and Girls Organisations are primarily staffed by women. As women still perform the majority of unpaid childcare²⁷, this means these organisations face a gendered barrier to accessing funding.

Organisations described inconsistent communication on availability of funding. Involvement in professional networks was highlighted as a key route for finding out about funding opportunities, which can create barriers for organisations not included. Participants representing smaller by-and-for organisations described being left out of key communication routes. Service providers described an expectation that they take on the burden for ensuring information and systems are workable and current. One participant highlighted how the discrepancy in expectations of responsiveness and effort underscored power imbalances in the funder-beneficiary relationship.

Participants described the impact of strict requirements that funding be spent within the financial year, which had an impact on both application and delivery times.

"There was actually several million pounds worth of funding available to projects that could have fitted ours perfectly, but it all had to be spent by

27 Office for National Statistics, "Families and the labour market, UK: 2021", 2022

the end of the financial year. It was absolutely no good at all because we had funding for the financial year. It would've been double funding, which we couldn't obviously accept. And there is no flexibility at all around continuing the project past the end of the financial year. So I can imagine they've got a few million pounds worth of funding, which was absolutely useless and nobody could spend."

(Small-size Specialist VAWG organisation).

Relationships between Service Providers and Commissioners

A common theme across focus groups and interviews was the importance of trusting relationships between funders and providers, and the importance of funders recognising the specialist work of VAWG services. Multiple interviewees described a lack of understanding from commissioners and funders of the work undertaken by specialist VAWG organisations and highlighted a lack of flexibility in funding arrangements.

"When we are applying for funding, what happens in most of the cases is we try to fit too much into the criteria, and then we miss the main point. The thing is, there is no flexibility from the funder side."

(Small-size Specialist VAWG organisation)

Participants also described how valuable it is when commissioners have a strong specialist understanding of VAWG.

"I would say that best practice means that the commissioner actually cares about the contract, and they have affinity with domestic abuse. And they understand what it is that they're commissioning."

(Large generic organisation)

Monitoring and Reporting

Onerous monitoring and reporting requirements attached to funding were highlighted by service providers as a significant challenge that had a disproportionate impact on smaller VAWG specialists and by-and-for organisations. Participants highlighted that reporting requirements often did not consider the size and capacity of the organisation or the barriers in getting feedback and information from frontline staff, who must prioritise delivery of support to service users. Participants described inflexible and complex reporting

requirements that did not always reflect the actual work of the service. The required use of multiple platforms and reporting mechanisms was also highlighted as a challenge. The experience of service providers reflects the large number of distinct funders and commissioners evidenced in the data mapping, who have separate reporting requirements and systems.

"The monitoring is so complicated and that all gets done at [...] one or two in the morning when women have put their kids to bed."

(service provider)

One organisation provided an example of positive practice in monitoring from funders, where funders were open to using a provider developed template for reporting on services. The template allowed the provider to report narrative detail and provide nuanced data on the story of the change experienced by service users, in addition to the required quantitative reporting.

Short-term funding

Short term funding was frequently raised by participants as a major challenge for service provision, especially for smaller VAWG specialist organisations. Participants described the impact of late decisions on funding extensions - a common challenge experienced by service providers was loss of experienced staff due to insecurity of funding arrangements. Participants highlighted the impact of this on victims and survivors accessing services, who did not know whether they would continue to receive support. As the data mapping has demonstrated, most of the funding available for these services is short term, which means these challenges are likely to be widespread.

"Generally, it's very last minute that you find out. Often you don't know how much money you're going to be getting. It really does cause a lot of uncertainty not just for us, but for our commissioners as well. Which obviously then has an impact on the staff within the services. So it is a theme generally with funders ... it's just not well administered, I have to be brutally honest."

(Large generic organisation)

Participants described struggling to access funding for existing provision, instead experiencing pressure to develop innovative proposals to secure funding. Multiple organisations described having to "repackage"²⁸ work they had already demonstrated the positive impact of, to appeal to funders. Participants stated this erodes the

28 direct quote from specialist VAWG organisation

trust of the funder-beneficiary relationship, as specialist VAWG organisations are repeatedly required to demonstrate their expertise and value despite extensive experience in delivering effective services.

Some participants described having to cover the cost of delivering services before contracts are fully in place and payments have been made. While organisations want to ensure the consistency and provision of their services, subsidising services can create the expectation that providers have the resources to subsidise services on an ongoing basis.

“Once you’ve subsidised once, sometimes [...], the local authority thinks that you can do that. ... and you think: did we shoot ourselves in the foot there?”
(Large, specialist VAWG organisation)

Research participants also noted that the short-term nature of funding could make it harder to successfully bid for funding, as they could not demonstrate that they would be able to achieve the required outcomes within the time frame of the funding. Supporting victims and survivors to recover from their experiences requires long term casework:

“The length of casework doesn’t really reflect the reality of the needs of the women that we’re supporting.”
(Small-size, Specialist VAWG organisation)

Insufficient Funding

Participants consistently highlighted that VAWG services are chronically under-funded, which inhibits collaboration and undermines work to tackle the structural and cultural causes of VAWG. One participant commented on the “false economy in having such scarcity of resource”, and how:

“The funding landscape for VAWG services is [that] the resources are scarce. It encourages an atmosphere of competitiveness as opposed to collaboration.”
(Medium-size Specialist VAWG organisation)

The fragmented funding landscape demonstrated through the mapping research has a significant impact on service providers. Providers described piecing together funding streams to cover service gaps, with some services funded through multiple contracts with different funders, each with different reporting and monitoring requirements.

“A lot of our current contracts don’t allow us to deliver best practice in terms of refuge worker to clients caseloads.”
(Large specialist VAWG organisation)

VAWG specialist organisations described subsidising the funding they receive using core funds, paying low wages, and staff and managers contributing unpaid labour to keep services going. Participants described a range of essential work done by service organisations, which is typically not funded through tenders and grants, such as additional advocacy for service users on issue such as accessibility, translation, and support with paperwork for victims and survivors with complex legal situations, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or insecure immigration status.

“VAWG services grow because of women’s unpaid labour.”

(Small-size VAWG specialist organisation)

The challenges around pay, and unpaid labour described by research participants has had a significant impact on retention within the sector. 67.6 per cent of Women’s Aid member organisations reported they had lost staff who had left either to work in a higher paid role elsewhere or could no longer afford to keep working.

“We’re still just so tired. [...] A lot of people have left the sector. They just couldn’t do it. [...] They had enough. ... some funding to support the people that are delivering that service would be helpful.”

(Small-size specialist VAWG organisation)

The majority of research participants reported receiving static funding that has not risen in line with inflation or in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. It was however noted that some trust funders have given VAWG organisations a cost-of-living increase to reflect the current crisis. Many of the research participants have been delivering contracts for over ten years without any inflationary uplift. Service providers reported struggling with increased core costs, such as property and maintenance costs, which is exacerbated by London’s high rental prices.

Contracts for services typically place limits on overhead costs such as management, administration, HR and other operational work. Participants flagged that coverage of overhead costs is more challenging for smaller organisations with fewer contracts.

“The utopia would be to have full cost recovery, and for services to be able to be investing in their capacity and their training and their staff. But we are all consistently [...] running on a shoestring

and knowing that staff do way more hours than we pay them for.”

(Medium-size specialist VAWG organisation)

Focus group participants raised that funding allocations were often not based on the needs of victims and survivors, with funders and commissioners not drawing on knowledge and expertise of specialist organisations.

A participant shared an experience of a service that was commissioned despite VAWG specialists advocating it was not the best use of resources. Participants also described unrealistic outcomes required by funders that do not reflect the complex nature of abuse, such as outcomes based on perpetrators ceasing their abuse.

Lack of funding for long term recovery support such as counselling was raised as a serious issue by research participants. This reflects findings from existing research conducted directly with survivors by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, which found 83% of survivors²⁹ wanted access to counselling and therapeutic support.

“If we don’t have that intensive therapeutic support [...] women can’t recover. And then, you have repeat victimisation, you have women coming back into services, that constant [...] revolving door situation where women are just going into crisis services [...]. And I think we’re seeing, now, [...] there are some clients who have experienced horrendous trauma, particularly in childhood, and are just constantly being bounced into the crisis system and never getting the right types of support. And that just gets worse.” (Small-size specialist VAWG organisation)

Additional challenges for by-and-for organisations

Participants representing by-and-for organisations described structural barriers to accessing funding. By-and-for organisations are typically smaller organisations with more limited fundraising and bidding capacity. Research participants representing by-and-for organisations described being excluded from funding opportunities:

“We don’t know when the commissioning process is opening – we don’t know how to apply for it like, we don’t get the invitation. So it’s a bit of a fight with local authorities to try and get the services commissioned, because what tends to happen – I

30 Women’s Aid. “The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit” 2023

31 Imkaan, “Research Commissioned by Imkaan on the Impact of COVID 19 Emergency Measures on Frontline Black and Minoritised Women and Girls Services”, 2020

know this is a bit further down the line – is that even though local authorities don't commission specialist services, in a lot of the cases, not all of the cases, they still use the by-and-for services.”
(Small-size by-and-for organisation)

By-and-for organisations reported additional challenges in recruiting staff, especially as they are typically trying to recruit from a particular community, which lengthens recruitment timelines and can increase costs. Existing research suggests that staff working for by-and-for-services have been disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Black and minoritised women's services were more likely to be unable to pay a cost-of-living pay raise to their staff than more generalist VAWG services (53.8 per cent compared to 28.4 per cent).³⁰

By-and-for service providers described a lack of understanding of the specific needs of their communities from funders and commissioners. One issue raised was the lack of representation of black and minoritised people, disabled people and other communities likely to be supported by by-and-for-organisations, on panels making decisions about funding. Research participants described how this lack of understanding means they often must 'prove' and re-explain the value of the work they do to funders and commissioners from outside their community.

Representatives from by-and-for organisations described supporting victims and survivors with highly complex needs that could not access support elsewhere. One participant described being a “last chance saloon” for highly marginalised service users. Research participants described staff working unpaid to ensure these victims and survivors are supported. Imkaan research³¹ shows that 40 per cent of women supported by Black-led services fell into the category of destitute.

Partnership working

Research participants reflected on the value of partnership working, but also described how the current funding arrangements disincentivise partnerships, which require more administrative work and coordination. Participants also described power imbalances between larger and smaller organisations within the same partnership:

“It shouldn't be for a funder to say – they're not saying this explicitly – but they are by their guidelines saying the bigger organisations are in the position to effectively be choosing their partners, because they're the only ones that can

be the lead partner and putting an application. So an organisation like ours can inadvertently become the ones with the power deciding whether or not those small local organisations are gonna get funding or not, depending on whether we partner with them or not.”
(Large specialist VAWG organisation)

“I think we've been guilty – and I don't think we've been alone – but I think we've been guilty previously perhaps in a partnership of having a funding bid and giving that little bit to that organisation and that little bit to that organisation rather than it being a truly equitable arrangement.”
(Medium-size specialist VAWG organisation)

Working across boroughs

Working across boroughs and at a pan-London level was viewed as especially important by service providers.

“If I want to run a project in [specific borough], but it's for clients coming from pan-London, the funder is going to say: “no, I want you to focus on [specific borough] and not other boroughs”. But for [...] the kind of services we offer, our clients are not restricted to one borough. They come from different boroughs. So I'm just giving an example, so that way it doesn't let us actually deliver the project.”
(Small-size by-and-for organisation)

Service providers noted that pan-London and multi-borough work can be challenging due to the different needs, relationships and levels of engagement from different boroughs. Service providers also described experiencing challenges accessing pan-London funding to support service users who are not evenly dispersed across London.

“I think London is very diverse, not just in its entirety, but within its boroughs. So sometimes there are things that are really specific to one borough that are worth looking at and worth protecting that may not be applicable so much to other boroughs. So how (do) you protect those projects and ensure their sustainability when they may not fit a more generic model of funding?”
(Medium-size specialist VAWG organisation)

6. Qualitative research findings from Commissioners and Funders

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 20 commissioners and grant funders of VAWG support services. Fifty per cent were from London boroughs, with representatives from inner and outer London, 10 per cent were from London Councils, 25 per cent were from MOPAC and 15 per cent were charitable grant and trust funders.

Commissioners described an overly complex funding system that is driven by differing political and strategic priorities which are often influenced by external factors, including election cycles, in which it is very difficult to target funding towards need.

Complexity of the Current Funding System

Commissioners' experience of the funding system as complex and multi-layered reflected the data mapping and the experiences of service providers. They reported that the current system does not enable them to fund services based on need.

Participants reflected that there is little data or best practice examples and guidance to help them to align different funding pots. Commissioners find it difficult to understand the full picture of the funding landscape, especially due to the siloed nature of available funding and lack of strategic alignment between organisations. Commissioners described the challenges of attempting to align commissioning decisions with different strategies and organisational priorities:

“Whether the work that we do in our consultations demands it or not, it has to fit in and align with your commissioners and then your national strategies as well, because our strategy to make some sense needs to underpin those - the Metropolitan police strategies, our local BCU plans and what the Mayor of London, what his vision and what he sets out in his strategy. It’s a lot of trying to make sure that everything fits in, so that you manage to get money.”

(London borough commissioner)

Commissioners reflected on the complexity of central government funding arrangements. Due to the cross-cutting nature of VAWG, funding for services sits across multiple government departments which are not always aligned. Each department may have several discrete funding pots - such as the Ministry of Justice, which has

six separate funding schemes. Commissioners described feeling limited by the narrow requirements attached to available funding.

Research participants noted that the complexities and challenges of the current funding landscape make it challenging to forward plan and strategically commission services.

“It’s just a really challenging space, demand continues to outweigh the capacity and the money that’s available in the system. And when you’re trying to reform and support at the same time, it’s not easy. We’d like to be in a space to be more forward looking and forward planning rather than reactive.”

(MOPAC commissioner)

Charitable trusts and grant giving organisations face different pressures to public sector commissioners, as they are accountable to their boards and the requirements of board members. Charitable trusts and grant giving organisations have more flexibility in how they allocate funding than statutory bodies, and in interviews explained that they often aim to fill gaps left by government funding. In interviews, representatives of charitable trust and grant funders noted that funding decisions from public sector bodies impact their decision making and prioritisation. Statutory funders need to work more closely with non-statutory funders so the whole funding system can plan more effectively.

“So if the central government or local authorities are funding a particular thing, we would prefer to fund something separate. (...) Ultimately, we would like our priorities to become more about creating opportunities.”

(Grant Funder)

Commissioners and funders acknowledged that the current system – short term funding, multiple funding pots with differing reporting requirements, financial year restraints - creates barriers and needs to be improved. Commissioners agreed that the current system disadvantages smaller, specialist organisations and that larger generic organisations are more likely to access public funding. Participants noted the high level of skill and capacity required of both commissioners and service providers to navigate funding processes.

Experiences of Accessing External Funding

Commissioners highlighted their heavy reliance on securing external funding to commission services, typically from central government funding sources, which is reflected in the data mapping. Commissioners described how this reliance on bidding to central government funds creates uncertainty in service provision, prevents commissioners from offering long-term contracts, and limits the ability of commissioners to respond to need in a planned and strategic way. The short-term nature of most funding arrangements that was evidenced through the data mapping exacerbates this and hinders commissioners' ability to meaningfully impact the causes of VAWG. Like service providers, commissioners also face challenges with short application timeframes to access national government funding streams. Commissioners said that they could see the pressure this creates on service providers.

Commissioners described similar administrative challenges to service providers, including having to complete different and complex requirements on monitoring and reporting. Commissioners described the impact of having to pass on rigid and lengthy reporting requirements to service providers:

"We're putting so much pressure on, especially when it's at difficult periods of time."

(MOPAC commissioner)

"It is a headache. It is difficult. If there's only one of you, you do have to find the time. And then the monitoring can be a bit of a challenge sometimes."

(London borough commissioner)

Commissioners described frustration with short-term funding, which negatively impacts their relationships with service providers. At the same time, commissioners described wanting to be able to offer long term contracts. Where local authority commissioners had been able to offer longer term contracts for services, this was typically achieved through allocation of core council funding. Commissioners did note the positive impact of some recent long term funding decisions, such as the Ministry of Justice's commitment to three-year funding for IDVA/ISVA services. Local authority commissioners also noted the impact of the wider pressure on local authority budgets as a barrier to sustainable funding.

"That in the time that I've been here has been a phenomenal constraint, a huge constraint that we face. It's just that working on annual funding settlements, you don't have any idea what's in them until quarter four. You can make assumptions, but you don't know." (Commissioner)

Charitable Trust and Grants funders described different constraints on sustainability, which are dependent on the governance structure and funding sources of the organisation.

"There's a limit to the benefit of creating something for a year if there's not going to be continuation of that." (Grant funder)

Commissioners also raised the lack of funding available to service providers for core functions and overheads, and the impact this has on providers. This reflects the experience of service providers, especially smaller organisations who described struggling to cover core costs in their focus groups.

Commissioning Processes and Value for Money

Commissioners described being restricted by organisational procurement and commissioning processes that emphasised "value for money" (cost being a significant factor) over quality of provision. Commissioners stated they wanted to change the assessment criteria to place the emphasis on quality. One research participant had succeeded in advocating for decision making processes completely based on quality, but most commissioners interviewed described having to apply a Quality:Cost ratio of 70:30. The evidence from service provider interviews suggests that the prioritisation of value for money disadvantages smaller organisations, who are more likely to be by-and-for.

"It's not just the cheapest is the best, it's what do you get for your money? And are you spending enough money to be able to deliver the outcomes?"

(MOPAC commissioner)

Grant funders discussed the need to simplify their systems. A membership body for funders described its role in helping to simplify systems across multiple funders through the development of standardised applications.

Funding provision

All commissioners and funders who participated in the research agreed that the available funding is not sufficient for VAWG services to meet demand and that services have been historically underfunded. Many commissioners highlighted the wider context leading to increased need for services, especially considering the cost-of-living crisis.

A common theme across focus groups and interviews with commissioners was a lack of understanding within organisations, at a strategic level, of the extent of the need for support for victims and survivors.

“What is sad is working with providers, they think you’re not funding them, or you’re not recognising them... you’re not recognising specialist services. But it’s not that – it’s just you literally have no funds to do any of this.”

(Local authority commissioner)

Commissioners reported that funding for provision often depends on their ability to influence decision making and make the “business case” for funding. Local authority VAWG commissioners described the challenge of working in isolation within their local authority, often in roles with little seniority. There was also variation in the level of subject matter expertise among commissioners. Participants highlighted the difference that an influential senior officer or political leader can make to champion the importance of specialist provision and increase funding.

Collaboration Between Commissioners

Commissioners said that joint working can improve the provision and funding that is available across the system, through sharing expertise and best practice, and pooling resource. Collaboration was also seen as a way to reduce the isolation of VAWG leads and upskill commissioners. Commissioners described, and the data mapping also found, examples of multi-borough service commissioning, which enabled boroughs to meet shared need and gain efficiencies.

“I have to say you know my equivalents in those boroughs, we have worked really well as a little micro team.... what I found over the years is working in the DA field, it can be a very lonely place on your own, you just keep fighting on your own.”

(London borough commissioner)

MOPAC noted that they had a key role to play in enabling system join up, including through convening commissioner forums to share good practice, and developing shared principles for funding and commissioning across London. Commissioners from MOPAC described the co-commissioning arrangements with boroughs, health and probation for supporting women in contact with the criminal justice system as an example of where collaboration has worked well. Commissioners described barriers to joined up working, including lack of capacity, unaligned organisational

strategies, and different political leadership. There were positive examples of borough collaboration. One borough commissioner described the process of co-commissioning a collocated sexual health IDVA service with neighbouring boroughs with similar demographics. As growing need was identified by the service, joint commissioning arrangements allowed the service to expand.

Grant funders felt that working more closely with statutory funders and commissioners could help improve the targeting of funding and provision, as this has been successfully achieved in service areas other than VAWG. However, they discussed sensitivities associated with this kind of collaboration, including concerns about duplicating work.

London Context

Commissioners from MOPAC raised the challenges caused by the lack of recognition from national government about London’s complexities, such as the size and diversity of its population and the large number of local authorities within a single Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) area compared to the rest of the country

“The total bid, and total numbers of bids are the same for London as they are for all PCCs around the country. So it’s not done on a needs basis at all. We can get the same maximum amount as the smallest one in the country.”

(MOPAC)

Active engagement and co-production

Many commissioners participating in focus groups felt that better engagement and co-production could help support specialist providers’ ability to access funding and improve monitoring arrangements.

“One thing that we’re doing at MOPAC is being very clear and co-designing the monitoring outcomes to make sure that we understand ‘what story does the service need to tell us’ in order to make us better commissioners.”

(MOPAC)

It was also recognised by commissioners and grant funders that there is a power imbalance due to the competitive nature of commissioning, which means it can be hard to determine needs of organisations and service users. This can be a barrier to honest engagement on the challenges faced by funded organisations.

“I know from my experience with ... managing services, that there’s a certain amount of honesty that you probably want to hold back from your funder, you want to present things in a more positive way, because it’s a competitive industry.”
(Grant funder)

The importance of including survivor voice to improve commissioning was a key theme across focus groups and examples of good practice were highlighted. Commissioners described using a range of methods to incorporate the voices of survivors into the commissioning process, including through feedback from providers, lived experience consultation and service design co-production, and the use of survivor advisory and “expert by experience” panels. One borough described the impact of appointing a survivor to chair their VAWG strategy board:

“The biggest difference was made when our VAWG Strategy Board started being co-chaired by the survivor ... it just completely shifted the whole conversation. We’re quite experienced at delivering [but] the way that that meeting changed completely just blew our mind, because we were just so stuck in our own routines.”

The importance of survivor voice was echoed by a grant funder, who said that grants should be *“as far as possible, guided by people with lived experience of whatever area we’re funding”*.

Understanding and Responding to Need

Commissioners described challenges in understanding need, which is a significant barrier to effective strategic commissioning. Commissioners described feeling “reactive” rather than strategic in their response. Local areas are very reliant on national data sets; a lack of local analytical expertise, compounded by under-reporting, means existing data does not reflect need. Commissioners raised particular concerns about using data based on recorded offences, which do not accurately represent need due to significant under-reporting.

Commissioners found it especially difficult to find local data on prevalence of issues such as sexual exploitation, so called “honour based violence”, female genital mutilation and stalking. Lack of good quality data makes it difficult for commissioners to advocate for additional funding for service provision.

Charitable trust and grant funders explained that understanding of need relating to VAWG depended

on the overarching focus and priorities of the funding organisation. Participants highlighted that VAWG is rarely a focus for grant funders in its own right, and VAWG services typically receive grant funding through programmes that are aimed at addressing wider issues, such as multiple disadvantage. Grant funding for VAWG services is therefore dependent on VAWG specialist organisations demonstrating wider impacts than just reducing VAWG. This was reflected in the mapping research, which found that dedicated funding streams from charitable funders for VAWG services were rare. Charitable grant and trust funders are therefore less likely to have a specialist understanding of need in this area.

Many commissioners felt that funding decisions are politically driven and determined by election cycles, and that election cycles do not generally align with commissioning cycles. Commissioners also reflected on having to work to multiple strategic requirements and priorities, which do not always align. Commissioners working at pan-London level noted a significant disconnect between understanding of need by government departments and ministers, and the feedback from victims and survivors.

Additional challenges for by-and-for organisations

Most commissioners who participated in the research agreed that the current system does not encourage or enable smaller by-and-for organisations to access funding, especially statutory funding. Commissioners discussed the lack of understanding and data about demand for by-and-for services and the impact these services have. Commissioners described advantages held by larger, generic organisations over smaller, specialist ones, such as greater lobbying and communications capacity and existing relationships with commissioners due to delivering a wider range of services. The quality and impact of Equality Impact Assessments was felt to be limited due to the limitations of available data and assessments being undertaken by those without expertise in VAWG.

Participants highlighted ways they had tried to enable more participation of by-and-for organisations, including:

- Supporting marketplace arrangements, where a larger, main provider can buy in provision from smaller organisations to meet specialist need
- Supporting the development of partnerships between larger and smaller organisations
- Focused market engagement with by-and-for organisations

- Extending timeframes and simplifying processes for smaller organisations as far as possible
- Offering workforce development to upskill smaller organisations.

“We ensure that the organisations that are less likely to be able to participate in just the commissioning processes, we do things to make sure that we can make it as accessible as possible so that they can reach those communities. And it’s not about hard to reach communities, it’s about making our processes better.”

(MOPAC commissioner)

Some participants highlighted the importance of dedicated pots for by-and-for organisations and organisations addressing specialist need, but pointed out that this can cause extra complexity in an already complex system. For these funds to be effective, they must have clear criteria with shared definitions that are understood by both funders and service providers, and systems and processes that work for the organisations they target.

Partnerships and collaborations

- Commissioners saw partnerships between providers as an effective way to overcome some of the structural challenges faced by specialist organisations, particularly by-and-for services. Commissioners were more likely to speak positively of partnerships than service providers, and did not reflect the same concerns about power imbalances that were raised in the service provider workshops, especially around the impact on by-and-for organisations. Some commissioners and funders acknowledged the complexity of partnership work and that they had a role in ensuring that partnership and collaboration went beyond just providing funding. Commissioners also raised that lack of funding and the competitive funding landscape creates limitations on partnership working.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The current system of funding for VAWG services in London is fragmented and complex. Funding is often short term, and poorly targeted for specialist services. This leaves thousands of victims and survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls across London without adequate support. Service providers, especially smaller by-and-for services, are often stretched to breaking point by the challenge of navigating the funding system. Commissioners are frustrated by the challenges of meeting local needs within the restrictions of public sector funding rules and procedures. Funding isn't currently meeting need at a national or London level. We support the Domestic Abuse Commissioners call for additional statutory funding to meet the current need, including ringfenced funding for by-and-for specialist organisations. Based on the findings of this research, we have eight recommendations for funders and commissioners of VAWG services.

In order to successfully implement our recommendations, funders and commissioners will need to:

- Commit to transparency by publishing clear information about funding allocations and spend on specialist support services. This will enable comparison and tracking of funding, which will allow progress to be measured.
- Ensure meaningful co-production and co-design with women and girls when implementing these recommendations and when designing funding opportunities going forward. Sector representatives and victims and survivors contributing to co-production should be recognised as providing professional expertise and should be compensated accordingly.
- Adopt a shared understanding of VAWG specialist services, by using the VAWG sector definition of specialist services and by-and-for services, which are included in Appendix A.

Recommendations

1. Short term funding is one of the biggest barriers to the sustainability of specialist VAWG support services and there needs to be a concerted effort by all commissioners to shift to multi-year funding and ensure it is available across all forms of support.
2. All commissioners should commit to commissioning on the basis of full cost recovery, covering all costs associated with the delivery of the service, including core costs and accreditation. Contracts should be reviewed to ensure they take into account rising core costs and the impact of inflation on service providers.
3. Building on their commitment to cross-governmental oversight and collaboration on victim support service funding, the government should create a single point of communication about funding opportunities and should create a proactive communications strategy to ensure specialist organisations are regularly informed of funding opportunities.
4. All funders and commissioners should commit to addressing the barriers faced by by-and-for organisations, including through evaluating the impact of funding administration on by-and-for organisations and co-designing better ways of working with by-and-for organisations.
5. Collaboration between boroughs to provide specialist support across borough boundaries is key for improved support for victims and survivors. Boroughs should ensure the sharing of best practice in collaborative commissioning and central government funding should allow for regional complexity when designing funding streams.
6. Our findings support the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's recommendation for the Department of Education, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to take steps to address the lack of specialist support for children affected by domestic abuse. Funders and commissioners in London should review and prioritise support for children and young people in their strategic approach to VAWG.
7. We support the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's call for the Ministry of Justice and Department of Health and Social Care to develop plans to address the paucity of specialist therapy and counselling provision for victims and survivors. We call on NHS London Region and the five London Integrated Care Boards to consider mental health and therapeutic support for victims and survivors of VAWG as priorities within their strategic plans.
8. London Councils should work with the VAWG sector, MOPAC and London Funders to establish a London Commission on VAWG funding with the aims of:
 - a. Developing a single integrated funding VAWG strategy across London which includes a Funding Charter
 - b. Lobbying for improved central government funding arrangements to support a fairer funding system for VAWG in London
 - c. Identifying and testing solutions that can improve the funding and commissioning of services in London.

Appendix A: Definitions

Where possible, definitions have been aligned with those used by the Domestic Commissioner in her national mapping research.

Categories of Support Service

Accommodation Based Support Services – as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act as “support, in relation to domestic abuse, provided to victims of domestic abuse, or their children, who reside in relevant accommodation.” Relevant Accommodation is defined in statutory guidance as “accommodation which is provided by a local housing authority, a private registered provider of social housing or a registered charity whose objects include the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse” and is “refuge accommodation; specialist safe accommodation; dispersed accommodation; second stage accommodation; or other accommodation designated by the local housing authority, private registered provider of social housing or registered charity as domestic abuse emergency accommodation.”

Children and Young People Support – support services specifically designed to meet the needs of children and young people affected by VAWG.

Community Based Support Services – support services for Victims and Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls that are delivered in the community, including floating support, outreach and advocacy roles (for example, IDVAs).

Open access services – services offering support and advice such as helplines, in person drop ins and online web chats.

Perpetrator programmes – specialised programmes that work with perpetrators to support them to change their behaviour. These programmes can also include support elements for victims and survivors.

Recovery Support – services designed to support long term recovery from VAWG, including counselling and therapeutic support work

Other Terms Used

By and For Organisations - Lived Experience organisations that are led by and for the communities they serve. For example, organisations led by and representing Black and Minoritised women and girls or disabled women and girls, among other groups of women (or survivors) with specific intersectional needs. By and for organisations meet the needs of victims and survivors that are not met by generic provision because of the nature of the services they require. Staffing, governance and membership structures of these organisations emerge historically from grassroots struggle and reflect the women and girls/communities they serve.

Domestic Abuse – as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act, an incident or pattern of behaviours including physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, and psychological and emotional abuse, perpetrated by someone with a personal connection to the person they are abusing.³²

Harmful practices - as defined by the National FGM Centre, Harmful Practices are persistent practices and behaviours that are grounded on discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other grounds as well as multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination that often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering. Examples of harmful practices include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.³³

“Honour” Based Abuse (HBA) - There is no statutory definition for “honour” based abuse. HBA is defined by the crown prosecution services as “an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/ or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour.”³⁴

32 Home Office, “Statutory Definition of domestic abuse factsheet”. 2021

33 National FGM Centre “Harmful Practices” 2023

34 Crown Prosecution Service, “So-Called Honour-Based Abuse and Forced Marriage: Guidance on Identifying and Flagging cases”.

Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) – an advisor who works with victims of domestic abuse to understand their experiences and their risk of ongoing harm. They will develop an individual safety plan with a victim to ensure they have everything they need to become safe and start to rebuild their lives free from abuse. This plan may include supporting victims to access statutory services (such as health care and housing services), representing their voice at a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference and accessing other voluntary services in their communities (Definition taken from Victim’s Code).

Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) – an adviser who works with people who have experienced rape and sexual assault, irrespective of whether they have reported to the police (Definition taken from Victim’s Code).³⁵

Third Sector Organisations with a broader remit – Third Sector organisations who deliver services or activities to a broader cohort than victims and survivors of VAWG or Women and Girls. This includes organisations that provide support relating to housing and homelessness or services for children and young people.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) – As defined in the United Nations Declaration (1993)³⁶ on the elimination of violence against Women: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) – specialist organisations - Third Sector organisations whose primary remit is to tackle Violence Against Women And Girls or provide support to victims and survivors.

Wider Remit Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) – Third Sector Organisations whose primary remit is to serve the needs of women and girls and whose activities are broader than VAWG specific services. Wider remit WGOs may deliver services related to VAWG alongside other work aimed at a wider cohort of women.

35 Ministry of Justice, “Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victim’s Code)”

36 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women,” 1993

Appendix B: Funding Data Analysis

Detail on funding sources and data related to funding for VAWG was collected and mapped using thirteen different data sources provided by London Councils or available from public sources including 360 giving and contract registers on borough websites.

- 1) All the data was standardised and organised into agreed fields
- 2) Duplicates were identified and removed
- 3) Potential values for each field were standardised and, where applicable, aligned with Domestic Abuse Commissioner definitions
- 4) Where appropriate, a mechanism was defined for the allocation of funds at the most granular level, such as splitting funds allocated to partnerships.
- 5) A data quality and completeness measure for each data source was developed to enable monitoring of the overall status of the data
- 6) Desk research was completed and service providers surveyed to fill data gaps
- 7) Data was reviewed again for duplicates
- 8) A set of interactive visualisations were built to allow analysis of the data.

A note on Administration of Funding

Central government funds for support services are often allocated directly to the Police and Crime Commissioner (MOPAC), which then makes commissioning decisions at a London level and, in some cases, passes funding on to local authorities or other bodies to administer funding. For the purposes of this research, funding that was made directly available by central government for the delivery of support services has been classified as central government funding, although in many cases the commissioning process is administered by the MOPAC or another organisation. Funding made available under the Domestic Abuse Act for the commissioning of support in safe accommodation was allocated to the Greater London Authority (GLA) and administered on behalf of the GLA by MOPAC. Where additional funding has been made available by MOPAC from MOPAC's core budget this has been classified as MOPAC funding. Funding is classified as local authority when it represents local authority spend on services.

Appendix C: VAWG Funding Mapping Fields

Field	Categories /Examples/Explanation
Funder	e.g. Ministry of Justice, Comic relief, Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime (MOPAC) London Borough of ...
Funder Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Government • Local Authority • Police and Crime Commissioner • Lottery Distributor/Grantmaking/Charity
Funds	e.g. Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Fund, MOPAC Grassroots VAWG Fund, VRU VAWG fund
Amount	Amount allocated in £
Geography (Requirements for Recipients)	Category used in cases where funder attached specific geographic requirements to delivery. For example, where the funder specifies that services must be delivered at Pan-London Level. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borough (Smallest Geographic Area of Delivery) • Multiple Boroughs • London
Duration	Financial years
Target Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based services, including floating support, outreach and advocacy roles (for example, IDVAs), • Open access services, including helplines, drop ins and online web chats, • Recovery work, including counselling, group work and support, • Accommodation-based services, including refuge and other accommodation, • Children and Young people support • Perpetrator programmes, including individual and group work

Field	Categories /Examples/Explanation
Target Service Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims / survivors with complex or high mental health needs • Victims / survivors experiencing alcohol misuse • Victims / survivors experiencing other substance misuse • Victims / survivors experiencing homelessness • Victims / survivors with no recourse to public funds • Immigration status, NRPF • Victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse • Victims and Survivors of Sexual Violence • Victims and Survivors of Forms of VAWG other than DA or SV • Women and Girls • Men and Boys • Black and minority ethnic (BME) victims / survivors • Deaf or disabled victims / survivors • LGBT+ victims / survivors • Age (provision under 18 yrs old, provision for 65+) • Perpetrators (18+) • Young people (under 18) using violence or abuse
Project name	Name of the project/service being funded, e.g. Wiser project, ISVA provision, Refuge provision, core funding.
Recipients details	Name and charity/company information
Type of Recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAWG Organisation • Women’s organisation with a broader remit • Third sector organisation with a broader remit • Public sector • Private organisation • Perpetrator intervention organisation <p>An additional data field was used to indicate whether or not the organisation was By-and-For</p>

Appendix D: Services, including 'by and for' services focus-group questions

Applications

1. What barriers do you face in applying for and securing funding? Are there eligibility criteria which you don't meet for certain kinds of funding, if so what?
2. Does your organisation have a dedicated & funded fundraising post? How much time does your organisation spend fundraising? What impact does fundraising have on staff / organisation's resources?
3. How does the funding available to you influence your priorities as an organisation? Does the funding available to you enable you to deliver the services you think are most needed?

Relationships with funders

4. What does a good relationship with a funder look like to you? Do you have any examples of good practice by funders that should be more widespread?
5. Did your relationships with funders change during the COVID-19 crisis period? If so, how? Are there any changes that would be helpful to maintain long-term or in response to future crises?
6. Have you received continuation funding in the past? If so, how did you receive it? Have you ever asked for it, and not received it?

Delivery

7. Thinking about the programmes/services you are delivering with your organisation's main source/s of funding, is the funding sufficient to cover the true costs of delivery? If not - what are the drivers of undercosting?
8. At the start of the financial year 2022-23, did you experience any time period where one or more services did not have any dedicated funding? E.g. number of 'dead days'.
9. How did your organisation continue to run services where they did not have a dedicated funding stream?
10. At the start of the 2022-23 financial year, were there any services that the organisation used to offer that had to cease due to limited funding?
11. Are there ways any funders adapted their practice to help you?

Appendix E: Funders and commissioners focus group questions

Strategy and coordination

1. How does your organisation decide upon strategic priorities for VAWG funding and commissioning?
2. For health commissioners: What are the opportunities and barriers to health commissioners being involved in VAWG commissioning?
3. How do you assess need? What factors other than need impact on your funding/commissioning priorities and approach?
4. What constraints do you face in delivering strategic priorities and commission effectively? e.g. the wider funding landscape, national government policy, resourcing, internal organisational pressures#
5. For London Funders: How do changing commissioning arrangements, including statutory funding, impact your approach to grants funding?
6. How do you align the services you commission with services commissioned by other organisations? Do you co-ordinate with other funder/commissioners? What are the barriers? How does the funding landscape impact funder co-ordination?

Funding processes

7. What determines the length of your grants/ contracts?
8. What impact do you think your application/bidding process has on the type of organisations that apply and secure funding for VAWG services/programmes?
9. Do smaller and specialist organisations led 'by and for' marginalised groups apply and secure funding from your organisation? If not, what are the barriers? If they do, how have you overcome those barriers?
10. How do you measure value for money in your assessment of funding applications? How much relative weight is value for money given compared to organisational expertise?
11. Do you conduct Equality Impact Assessments as part of your commissioning/funding processes? How much time and resource does this take?

Applying for external funding

12. For London Boroughs: What has been your experience like with applying for external funding pots in order to deliver or commission services? What barriers do you face in applying for and securing funding? e.g. central government, MOPAC funding pots

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AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) is a feminist charity committed to a world without gender based violence and abuse. They are an expert and independent national charity particularly recognized for their specialist expertise in multiple disadvantage and children and young people's work. Their core work includes training, policy, research and consultancy.



Chayn is a non-profit that creates digital, multilingual resources to support the healing of survivors of gender-based violence.



Dot Project are a co-operative technology consultancy with a social purpose. They consult, mentor, coach and convene social organisations to help them build digital resilience and confidence.

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