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| Committee(s): Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee – For Information Department of Community and Children’s Services Committee | Dated: 03/07/2023 17/07/2023 |
| Subject: City of London’s Women Project Update | Public |
| Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly? | 1,2,3,4,10 |
| Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending? | N |
| If so, how much? | N/A |
| What is the source of Funding? | N/A |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department? | N/A |
| Report of: Judith Finlay, Director of Community and Children’s Services | For Information |
| Report author: Fleur Holley-Moore, Rough Sleeping Services Manager | |

Summary

This report introduces members to the City of London’s Women’s Project that opened in April 2023. The project provides CoL’s first dedicated accommodation service for single women and those who identify women in the City of London who are homeless and fleeing domestic abuse. By outlining the rationale behind the project's creation, this report explains its significance in fulfilling the City of London's legal and ethical obligations towards these vulnerable women, while also reinforcing its commitment to addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as part of the broader City of London agenda.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Example: Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The number of households being made homeless because of fleeing domestic abuse continues to be one of the leading causes for homelessness across England.

2. During Quarter 3 2022, it was the second most common reason, accounting for 16.4% of households, an increase of 3.2% from the same quarter last year¹.
3. This is reflected at the acute end of homelessness, where recent data from a nationwide homeless charity revealed that a third (33%) of its female residents that had slept rough, reported that domestic abuse contributed to them becoming homeless².
4. Demand for women specific accommodation support services across London continues to outstrip supply, and without any single-sex accommodation of its own, CoL had to rely on mixed provision in its pathway to meet the need of its homeless women.
5. In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) was introduced that strengthened duties owed by local authorities to those who are homeless due to fleeing domestic abuse.
6. CoL, driven by a Working Group from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Team, saw the introduction of this Act as an opportunity to improve our service offer to those fleeing domestic abuse and to do that, CoL needed to ensure we have a safe place for homeless applicants to go to.

Legal Framework

7. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) changed homelessness legislation to include those fleeing domestic abuse as automatically in priority need for assistance.
8. This means that if the local authority is satisfied that an applicant is homeless as a result of domestic abuse, they must offer safe temporary accommodation for the duration of their application without needing to meet any other qualifying factors.
9. The Act also created a requirement that that temporary accommodation must be safe. CoL recognised that we could not offer any safe accommodation, by the definition of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) due to its reliance on mixed sex accommodation provision.
10. In response, the City of London Women's Project has been established as a women's only temporary accommodation project. This Project reflects the CoL's commitment to meet its statutory and moral duty to provide suitable accommodation to women experiencing homelessness as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.

City of London Women's Project

¹ [Statutory homelessness in England: October to December 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statutory-homelessness-in-england-october-to-december-2022)

² [New research reveals women experiencing homelessness are often hidden from help - St Mungo's \(mungos.org\)](https://www.stmungos.org/news/new-research-reveals-women-experiencing-homelessness-are-often-hidden-from-help)

11. Following funding being identified through the Rough Sleeping Initiative 2022-2025, the City of London Women's Project opened in April 2023.
12. The service is a 6-bed unit, located in a nearby borough identified through an existing accommodation provider. The location of the service is kept confidential to protect the safety of the women accommodated there.
13. The project is temporary accommodation that will remain available to the women until an offer of longer term, suitable and safe accommodation can be made.
14. Day to day support is provided through a dedicated worker in CoL's commissioned Mobile Intervention Support Team, who also leads on the coordination of external wrap around services including drug and alcohol support services and mental health services.
15. Placements are agreed and overseen by a dedicated Working Group comprising of members from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Team, and to be considered for the project domestic abuse must be an aggravating factor in a women's homelessness.
16. Move on from the project is supported by the appropriate team (Rough Sleeping Team or Statutory Homelessness Team).
17. To date, we have had five women placed in the project with one having bid successfully for a City of London secure council tenancy and is soon due to move on to stable, long-term accommodation.
18. The women are actively encouraged to suggest ideas to make the property feel like a home, including gardening and placing artwork on the walls.

Assisting City of London's Rough Sleepers

19. Women experience rough sleeping differently to men and are at higher risk of exploitation and abuse.
20. Previously, without any single-sex accommodation, women rough sleeping in CoL where domestic abuse was an aggravating factor in their homelessness, had to choose between mixed sex supported accommodation options or an unsupported discretionary temporary accommodation placement.
21. Women who sleep rough have equal rights to access the City of London Women's Accommodation Project, although there is no set allocation between the two groups.

Violence Against Women and Girls

22. The City of London Women’s Project also supports CoL’s Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2019-2023³, that outlines its priorities for VAWG services across the square mile.
23. Under the strategy, CoL’s vision is that “The Square Mile is free from Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) and is a place that is safe for everyone to live, work, learn and visit.”
24. The Project specifically supports “Priority Two: People affected by VAWG have access to support services” by providing an accessible, safe, supported accommodation service, tailored to meet the needs of the service users.
25. Accessible accommodation provision has been identified as a key driving factor for a women to leave an abusive partner, and to not return.

Options

26. There are no additional options arising from this report

Proposals

27. There are no proposals arising from this report

Key Data

28. There is no key data arising from this report

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Financial implications – N/A

Resource implications – N/A

Legal implications – N/A

Risk implications – N/A

Equalities implications – N/A

Climate implications – N/A

Security implications – N/A

Conclusion

29. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) along with funding from the Rough Sleeping initiative 2022-2025 presented an opportunity for the City of London to enhance their accommodation offer to meet the urgent needs of women fleeing domestic violence.

³ [City of London Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy](#)

30. Furthermore, the City of London Women's Project also addresses the pressing issue of suitable accommodation for women who sleep rough in the square mile, and domestic abuse serves as a significant factor.
31. The Project opened in April 2023, and to date five women have been placed in the service who have received support from a dedicated Mobile Intervention Support Team worker.
32. The Working Group behind the City of London Women's Project, plan on continuously evaluating and evolving the project to meet the needs of the women and best practice.

Appendices

- None

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