

# GLA Gender Equality Scheme

## Consultation questionnaire

### ROTA Response

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#### Organisation's key aims are to:

- provide evidence-based, high quality policy development focusing on race equality and equality for BAME groups in London which has impact nationally
- broker relationships between policy makers and BAME communities and their sector, and help build bridges and partnerships among different agencies and across sectors
- provide voice and representation of issues affecting BAME communities and the organisations which serve them
- build the capacity of BAME organisations to engage in policy and research by developing the skills of their staff through training and skills development programmes

**No of people in organisation:** 0-49

#### Methodology for this response

ROTA's policy work is evidence-based in the sense that everything we do is informed by the views and real life experiences of BAME communities and the organisations which are set up to serve them. This response is submitted by ROTA on behalf of its Female Voice in Violence Coalition, and focuses on the relevance of the Scheme to women and girls affected by gangs and serious youth violence.

The response is based on:

- evidence collected by ROTA's Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Project (2008-10)
- evidence submitted to ROTA by the following members of the Female Voice in Violence Working Group: Shian Housing Association Ltd, YWCA, and Foundation 4 Life

#### Have we chosen the right themes?

ROTA welcomes the publication of the GLA Draft Gender Equality Scheme and the broad nature within which its impact is being considered. We feel that the chosen themes are all necessary. However, we would encourage more thoughtful consideration of cross-

equalities issues such as age and ethnicity and the impact that these have on women and girls considered by the Scheme.

For example, some of the girls involved in or associated with serious youth violence (SYV) are very young. They already face high levels of risk, and the combination of age, gender and ethnicity can create multiple disadvantage for these girls. Consequently this is an issue that requires particular attention across all the strands identified.

### **Is there any additional evidence we have missed?**

While ROTA welcomes the inclusion of FVV in the Violence and Safety section of the Scheme, we are also aware that the evidence from FVV is not captured across all themes. For example, women and girls affected by gang violence face issues in education and health. At present, the FVV recommendations are addressed through the GLA The Way Forward documents and are therefore raised in the Violence section of this Scheme.

However, documents such as the Mayor's Time for Action plan fail to address the issues to the same extent. While the Gender Equality Scheme has made a case for the importance of violence and safety for women and girls affected by gang violence, the Scheme is yet to include this in other sections, namely poverty, employment and business, education and skills, and health. The Scheme provides an opportunity to apply the FVV findings and recommendations across the family strategies developed by the GLA, and offer a more coherent response for affected females in London.

### **Are we planning to do the right things?**

We have provided commentary in response to this question under the various themes below:

#### **Poverty**

Poverty has an impact on rates of youth violence and the areas where it is more prevalent. Targeting intervention and giving support to neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation and poverty reduces gun and knife crime. Poverty connected with living in social housing, high levels of unemployment and low educational attainment poses a higher risk to young people being involved in gangs and serious violent crime.

There are successful projects, for example Makeda Weaver Project of Shian Housing Association, which work with both young women and young men associated with gangs or serious violence in London boroughs with high BAME populations and high deprivation levels such as Hackney, Islington, Lewisham, Southwark and Waltham Forest.

Other evidence of successful work outside London comes from YWCA's Home Office funded 'Getting Girls Out of Gangs' programme in Kirkby, Liverpool. This programme takes account of the gendered nature of girls' involvement in gangs and delivers an intervention which acknowledges the variety of influences and exposures to risk factors for girls, including environmental factors relating to deprivation and poverty.

The Scheme does not indicate how the issue of women and girls affected by gang violence in the context of poverty is to be addressed.

### **Employment and business**

ROTA welcomes the specific point in the document regarding young women with no qualifications being worst hit by unemployment. However, in outlining what the GLA plans to do, the document makes no reference to plans to support young women, apart from running Women Connect events. The evidence from FVV showed that female offenders have varying levels of individual need, victimisation and offending history which need to be considered. It is important that the GLA uses this information to inform their response to this issue.

There is scope for the GLA to get more involved in providing employment, training and/or volunteering opportunities. YWCA centres for example, find that experiential learning can play a positive part in raising aspirations and challenging stereotypes. They run careers days to encourage young women to explore traditionally male-dominated occupations and invite female role models from these sectors to speak to the young women about their first-hand experiences and success stories. In Doncaster, YWCA runs services for women offenders and women at risk of offending, and provides opportunities for these women to volunteer in reception and in the café.

Further evidence on work with female ex-offenders comes from Foundation 4 Life (F4L). Over the last four years F4L has been working extensively with female offenders as part of their rehabilitation and resettlement back into the community. The organisation works closely with a number of female prisons (HMPs Send, East Sutton Park and Downsview).

In 2008 F4L developed its Custody to Release Project (C2R), offering a holistic package of support which includes specialist training, mentoring, voluntary work placements, employment opportunities and ongoing support and guidance. Over 35 female ex-offenders have come through their system, many of whom have been involved in or affected by gangs and serious youth violence.

F4L currently has 15 females employed as Behavioural Consultants and Mentors who in turn use their own real life experience when working with young women at risk. Ninety-two per cent of the workers who have graduated through their system have never re-offended, and 10 per cent have gone on to secure employment with other organisations.

The London Probation Diversity Directorate recently commissioned research into the C2R Project to see how this type of community-led initiative could run alongside the NOMs services for women leaving custody in order to help identify gaps in their provisions. F4L continues to deliver gender-focused programmes for young women at risk built around its work with female ex-offenders mainly in London and the south east with a view to replicating its service in Manchester by the end of 2010 or early 2011.

The need to apply a gendered approach to all services for women as a minority group is a crucial one particularly in the context of SYV. This is because it is viewed as a masculine concept and policies developed to address it reflect this fact. In youth offending institutions, young women in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), secure training centres, and other areas where women are in the minority, the Scheme must ensure equal outcomes by providing gender-specific services and policy.

### **Education and skills**

This section of the document focuses heavily on the Mayor's Time for Action plan, the use of apprenticeships and the Mayor's support of academies. ROTA would like to take this opportunity to repeat our recommendation, as outlined in FVV report, that the GLA must review the Time for Action plan in light of the FVV findings to ensure it is gender-proofed.

FVV further reported that girls excluded from mainstream education in PRUs are in the minority and that this has an impact on their ability to engage in relevant services. In some cases PRUs of 80 pupils only have four girls and no girl-only space within which to work with them. Girls in alternative education provision who were interviewed during FVV were often the most victimised, exploited and disengaged of all participants, even though they had often been in contact with the highest number and largest variety of services.

The fact that girls out-perform boys academically on average in the school system overshadows those who were not engaging and stopped attending. Addressing such failings in Mayoral academies is central to intervening with females most entrenched in SYV.

ROTA would like to propose ways in which Mayoral academies could engage in the FVV agenda and equip female students to address SYV within the school community. As educational establishments are often the most difficult to engage on issues of SYV or violence against women and girls (VAWG), we recommend that Mayoral academies ensure a gendered approach to addressing youth violence and provide girl-only space for their pupils to consider the impact that youth violence has on their lives.

Educational establishments are essential in identifying and referring young women at risk as most of the young women affected by gang violence are generally not known to

services, apart from in their schools. Relying purely on criminal justice activity and the GLA's work on violence will not produce the desired outcomes for this service user group.

Shian Housing Association through the Makeda Weaver Project has been working in London schools since October 2009 to address SYV and to impact young people from an early age. They work with young girls to equip them with the skills to be aware of sexual exploitation in gangs and to make a choice at an early age not to become involved in violence.

They illustrated the positive outcome of their work in a case study from a London secondary girls' school. Improvements included:

- greater control over frustrations
- fewer exclusions of BAME pupils
- those who were excluded were not undergoing MW programme
- sessions had prompted pupils to confide in teachers
- girls feeling that they did not have to be victims – that they have choices
- there was a general sense that girls had options about their lives
- and a plus for the school was a reduction in bad behaviour and fewer exclusions as a result of murders or stabbings in the community, which would normally be reflected in noticeable unrest in the school

Since its inception, the overall impact of the Project is a 50 per cent reduction in violent incidents in the schools in which they work.

ROTA sees the value of work placements and apprenticeships and is encouraged to learn that the Mayor and the London Skills and Employment Board have been promoting a package of activities to step up apprenticeships in the capital. We are however concerned that those being created are less likely to be taken up by women and young girls affected by gangs who continue to face disadvantages in terms of apprenticeships, skills and the labour market.

There is a particular risk of this given the lack of recognition of these inequalities, the lack of targeted action to overcome them, and the lack of details of monitoring mechanisms.

Given these comments, ROTA recommends that:

1. The Scheme should make a commitment to ensuring targeted action and monitoring mechanisms are put in place so that young women and girls affected by gangs and SYV will equally benefit from the apprenticeships schemes being developed by GLA and family strategies.

2. The Scheme should commit to taking forward the findings and recommendations from the London Schools and Black Child Conferences through all GLA and family strategies.
3. A commitment should be included in the Scheme and work relating to Time for Action to ensure:
  - inequalities are not experienced by young women and girls affected by gangs attending Mayoral academies
  - experiences of different groups are monitored effectively.

### **Violence and Safety**

ROTA welcomes specific attention paid to address VAWG, the funding and support of Rape Crisis and Sexual Assault Referral Centres, and the inclusion of FVV in the Scheme. While the continuation of work with GLA partners the Metropolitan Police Service and Transport for London is welcomed, the inclusion of the London Child Safeguarding Board as a partner to improve safety is important. Child protection and safeguarding plays a significant role in tackling the impact of SYV on women and girls. As reported in FVV, 'SYV was a safeguarding issue and could not be confined to the realms of criminal justice.'

When supporting children who have witnessed violence, it is imperative that this Scheme also considers those who have witnessed extreme violence and assault within their peer groups, or who have known somebody who has been murdered. For children growing up in areas of high SYV, support is needed to prevent murder and serious assault becoming normalised. This is a safeguarding issue and as such experiences will create long term problems and may manifest themselves in other violent displays. Therefore it requires particular attention before these children enter adulthood. Safeguarding responses should be developed for women and girls associated with or involved in gang violence.

### **Health**

The document acknowledges that women in London 'have a slightly higher rate of reporting of limiting long term illness (LLTI) than men. LLTI rate is particularly high for Black, Asian and minority ethnic women'. The Scheme draws greater reference to the Mayor's Health Inequalities strategy, especially in relation to provision for females with mental health needs which is focused on the work of the London Health Commission and the delivery of the Well London strategy.

The FVV report raised a number of concerns about the impact that SYV had on the mental, emotional and sexual health needs of women and girls which is not reflected in the document.

The impact of SYV on the mental health of those associated with it includes fear, anxiety, trauma, post-traumatic stress and bereavement. Furthermore, there are

implications for the sexual health (both mental and physical) of females who experience sexual violence and exploitation in an SYV context.

The FVV report drew evidence from the Corston Review and the Youth Justice Board on the emotional needs of girls at risk of offending and the crucial need to prioritise the health services lead on this engagement. Further in the report it is highlighted that ‘for females ‘at risk’ of violence, or those in need of preventative interventions, their sexual behaviour may not yield teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, but may still have a negative impact and increase their emotional vulnerability, as well as any experience they may have of sexual violence or coercive sex.’

The Mayor’s current Health Inequalities Strategy fails to sufficiently capture these more subtle areas of risk, many of which would apply to females involved in serious youth and gang violence. There is a role for the Mayor to lead on this aspect of SYV, in order for work to be appropriately commissioned at a local level to meet the health needs of those affected in both preventative and responsive manner.

The issue of support services was also mentioned in FVV report but not captured in the Scheme. FVV highlighted the fact that participants ‘struggled to identify wider avenues of support beyond the family or the boyfriend’ and for those who could identify other services, ‘there was confusion about which services were independent of the state and where support could be offered on a confidential basis.’

Their struggle to identify or name services presents an initial barrier when seeking to support those most in need. Furthermore, participants repeatedly raised the concern that seeking support could expose them to risk, as well as their family members, partners or other children, in the form of reprisals.

These concerns and the fact that service provision in this area is so limited and/or non-existent in most boroughs reduces the ability of girls, who are gang affected, to access them. This means that services need to be aware of this, raise their profiles and become more accessible to local people.

### **The GLA as an employer**

ROTA welcomes the proactive steps being taken by the GLA to ensure that women play a role at all levels within the authority. In relation to women and girls affected by gang violence in the capital, we recommend that the GLA offer apprenticeships and work experience placements to young women affected by violence. When developing strategy in relation to young people or on issues around VAWG, It is important that that these young women are engaged in the process and understand how decisions are made.

Simply inviting young people to meetings or asking them to take part in surveys does not fully engage them, as they do not appreciate what they are taking part in or what happens to the information they provide. Skilling up young women to understand how to influence policy, and the impact that this has on their lives, is the only way in which true service user, and youth, engagement can actually take place.

**Do you have any other comments regarding the scheme as a whole?**

**Please use the space below if you have any other general comments about the equality work of the GLA**

1. GLA to make commitment to work with London's BAME sector to ensure best practice in developing systems to support its compliance with the Equality Act 2010.
2. GLA to use a definition of BAME that includes white ethnic minority groups to ensure it is working to address the inequalities they face.
3. GLA to ensure all policies and practice are based on the concept of substantive equality, which recognises that entitlements, opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout societies and that different groups may need to be treated differently to correct situational imbalances and ensure equality of outcomes.
4. The Scheme should describe mechanisms to ensure that relevant targets relating to BAME communities and the inequalities they face are mainstreamed through all areas of GLA policy and commit to the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to monitor progress against them.
5. GLA to establish a senior stakeholder group that brings together expert representatives of different ethnic groups, including white disadvantaged groups, to look at the potential differential impact of policies on different groups, to inform the development and delivery of implementation plans, and to monitor progress and outcomes. There are currently groups advising on all equalities strands other than race. Lack of a stakeholder group could be viewed as discriminatory.
6. GLA to include fuller recognition of and describe steps to address multiple inequalities. Greater links should be made between GLA's gender, race and disability equality Schemes.
7. The targets specifically referring to the health of BAME communities included in



the Scheme to be integrated through mainstream areas of GLA policy which are relevant to health.

8. GLA to make a commitment to address misunderstandings about educational inequality particularly within the context of work under GLA's Time for Action Strategy.
9. GLA to further consider and respond to the inequalities faced by Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children and their communities.

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