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**29<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

**Dear Mayor Fiaz and the members of the London Borough of Newham Council Cabinet,**

cc Lyn Brown MP, Stephen Timms MP, Councillor Peter John OBE and Mayor Sadiq Khan

**Re: 5<sup>th</sup> November Decision on Decommissioning London Black Women's Project specialist refuge**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> November you will be announcing your decision as to whether the specialist refuge for BME women run by London Black Women's Project will be decommissioned, thereby potentially closing a vital service that has been serving the community of Newham for over 30 years.

We write to urge you the Mayor, and the Cabinet to take the decision to fully re-instate the funding to London Black Women's Project. A decision that will reflect the importance the Council gives to values of equality and non-discrimination - principles that should underpin any contract to deliver sensitive and specialist work such as refuge provision.

In June of this year LBWP were forced to challenge the Council's original decision that awarded the refuge contract to a non-specialist provider. This was on the basis that the procurement process had not given due consideration to their Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 and that the Equality Impact Assessment did not properly consider the needs of BME women and girls in the borough.

Tendering and procurement processes can adversely impact small voluntary and community sector organisations that embedded within communities. Procurement processes too often leave smaller specialists "set up to fail" against large generic providers. What is necessary is ring-fenced grant funding that will allow LBWP to securely and sustainably continue their life-saving and life-changing work.

We know that the Mayor has committed to ensuring representation from such VCS organisations in Newham, and that in Council meetings, the Mayor herself has acknowledged the long, positive history LBWP has had in the borough and the specialist and essential support LBWP provides for BME women and children.

LBWP services were developed more than three decades ago from the grassroots up to meet the specific and unique needs of BME women and children in the community who are arguably the most marginalised. LBWP understands the barriers that BME communities face and have shaped their work to reflect these specific needs via a **by and for service**. This means support services that are run by and for women from the communities they wish to serve. This model offers an empowering experience to women and children, as the service users can see themselves reflected in an organisation that looks like them, speaks their languages, represents their needs and values their voice, agency and presence.

We know that BME women would not have accessed the life-saving refuges, legal advice and counselling services, had they not been BME specialists, as generic organisations do not always provide the support they need. 75% of women and girls who access LBWP for support come by word of mouth, having heard about our services from friends, trusted colleagues and family. They come to LBWP exactly because they offer a specialist women and girls-centred focus under a human rights and empower framework in safe and confidential space.

We the undersigned call on the LB Newham Mayor, Cabinet members and Councillors to make the right decision for Newham's diverse communities of women, and the borough as a whole and re-instate the funding for the London Black Women's Project.

Yours sincerely,

***London Black Women's Project***

***Meera Syal, Actor and Patron of London Black Women's Project***

***End Violence Against Women Coalition***

***Imkaan***

***Million Women Rise***

***Rape Crisis England & Wales***

***Southall Black Sisters***

***The Fawcett Society***

***Women's Aid Federation England***

***Women & Girls Network***

***Women's Resource Centre***



"In solidarity. By joining together we are stronger. Now is the time to stand in unity with all Black, minority ethnic and refugee women and girls in promoting zero tolerance and stopping racism." - Aqum Mouj, Chair

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