

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee

From: Rosanna Wilcox, Director, Service, Innovation and Performance

Subject: Update on United Nations Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Initiative (Safe Cities London)

Date: March 2, 2021

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Director, Service, Innovation and Performance and with the concurrence of the City Manager, the following report entitled 'Update on United Nations Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Initiative (Safe Cities London)' **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces is a worldwide United Nations (UN) Women initiative that draws attention to the issues of violence against women and girls in public spaces.

On September 20, 2017, Municipal Council unanimously endorsed London's participation in the UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces initiative. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on this initiative, including an overview of the work completed to date by a community-led table, the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee.

The Safe Cities London Advisory Committee is comprised of researchers, community leaders, service organizations, community members, and individuals with lived experience and is co-chaired by Anova and the City of London. Safe Cities London is committed to making London a safe city where women and girls access public spaces and participate in public life without fear or experience of sexual violence.

As a requirement of the UN initiative, the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee undertook a scoping study to better understand the local context related to targeted acts of violence experienced by women and girls, including sexual violence in public spaces, as well as factors that influence the perceptions of safety for women and girls. The scoping study also explored the unique experiences of Indigenous women and girls, newcomer women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community in relation to incidents of violence and factors that promote or reduce safety in public spaces.

Using the results of the scoping study, the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee has developed its 2021-2024 Safe Cities London Action Plan, which articulates a vision, strategic areas of focus, outcomes, expected results, strategies and initial actions to be undertaken.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

Council's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan identifies 'Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls' as a strategic area of focus. This includes the outcome 'London has enhanced the potential for women and girls to live safe lives' and the expected result 'Decrease male violence against women and girls who are subjected to abuse, assault and non-state torture in their intimate relationships; sex trafficking; sexual assault; and workplace harassment.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

Community and Protective Services Committee (CPSC): September 12, 2017; March 20, 2018.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Background

United Nations Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces

In 2013, the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women identified various forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces as a distinct area of concern and called on governments to prevent it. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also sets “the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres” as one of its specific goals.

Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces is a worldwide UN Women initiative that draws attention to the issue of violence against women and girls in public spaces.

Cities participating in the UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces initiative commit to:

1. Identifying gender-responsive locally relevant and owned interventions.
2. Developing and effectively implementing comprehensive laws and policies to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces.
3. Investments in the safety and economic viability of public spaces.
4. Changing attitudes and behaviours to promote women’s and girls’ rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence.

Cities are also required to undertake a scoping study of the incidence (where, what, who, when) of sexual violence and harassment in public spaces in order to determine locally relevant actions to prevent and better respond to sexual violence and harassment in public spaces.

Safe Cities London

On September 20, 2017, Municipal Council unanimously endorsed London’s participation in the UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces initiative, appointing Anova as the lead organization for this work. London became the third Canadian municipality to be part of the UN initiative, along with Winnipeg and Edmonton.

On March 27, 2018, Municipal Council approved the allocation of financial resources and interim assistance to Anova for the completion of the scoping study. Funding was used to build a website, purchase participative mapping software, and hire a Project Coordinator to oversee the administration of local activities related to the Safe Cities London initiative.

A community-led Safe Cities London Advisory Committee and Research Sub-Committee were created to guide the scoping study. The Safe Cities London Advisory Committee is co-chaired by Anova and the City of London and includes representation from across the community and the City of London.

The Safe Cities London scoping study was conducted between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018 through participative mapping and focus groups. Throughout 2019, the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee and Research Sub-Committee prepared the Safe Cities London Scoping Study which included local and national statistical data, results, and a series of next steps.

In 2020, the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee worked collectively to develop the 2021-2024 Safe Cities London Action Plan

2.2 Safe Cities London Scoping Study

Trigger Warning

The Safe Cities London Scoping Study examines the realities of violence against women and girls and includes detailed descriptions of violence experienced in our community. This subject matter may create feelings of discomfort and may be triggering to survivors of sexual assault or violence.

It is important to practice self-care when engaging with this material. If you or someone you know requires support or information relating to violence, please call Anova's 24/7 crisis and support line at 519-642-3000.

Purpose

The Safe Cities London Scoping Study, attached as Appendix A, sought to better understand the local context related to targeted acts of violence experienced by women and girls, including sexual violence in public spaces, as well as factors that influence the perceptions of safety for women and girls. The scoping study also explored the unique experiences of Indigenous women and girls, newcomer women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community in relation to incidents of violence and factors that promote or reduce safety in public spaces.

Methodology

Social media, radio, community partners and events were used to invite community members to participate in the scoping study. Invitations to participate were also distributed through digital billboards, local magazines and newsletters, posters at post-secondary school campuses, and the websites of local counsellors and agencies whose work focused on addressing sexual violence.

CrowdSpot, a geography-based, interactive online mapping tool was used to provide women and girls with an opportunity to identify locations across London where they either felt safe or unsafe and to share information about their experiences at those locations, including factors that negatively impacted or promoted their sense of safety. Promotional recruitment tools provided participants with a description of the study and a link to the online interactive map.

Between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018, 1,825 pins were created on the online map of London at locations where self-identifying females felt safe or unsafe. Paper copies of the mapping tool questions were made available at community organizations and events.

Additionally, four focus groups were conducted with individuals from specific target populations which were chosen by the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee based on research conducted about groups that are known to experience high rates of sexual violence. These groups included Indigenous women and girls, newcomer women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community. Focus group participants self-identified as being a member of one of the specific population groups. All focus groups were facilitated by an Anova staff member. In total, 36 individuals participated in the focus groups.

Participating in a focus group or the participative mapping tool was optional. The results of the analysis reflect the information individuals chose to share and were comfortable disclosing.

Data Analysis

Quantitative responses from the participative mapping tool were collated and analyzed to prepare descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from both the participative mapping tool and focus groups were analyzed to identify themes about the nature and types of violence occurring in public spaces in London, factors that promote or negatively impact feelings of safety, perpetrators of violence, and the types of locations where violence occurred.

Results

The Scoping Study outlines the results of the data collected through the participative mapping tool and focus groups. This includes the age of respondents, extent of violence and harassment, length of time since an unsafe occurrence, who is perpetrating violence in public spaces, and the nature and type of violence experienced in public spaces.

The Scoping Study also identifies risk and protective factors. These are factors that influence perceptions of personal safety and/or the risk of experiencing violence. These include:

- Structural factors: public illumination, built environment, police presence and response, security conditions and measures, strong communities, education and training.
- Social and cultural factors: alcohol and drugs, culture of street involvement, presence of people, bystander intervention and receiving help from others, knowledge of previous incidents in an area, disruptive behaviour, social norms and discrimination, traffic and driving.

The most identified types of public places and spaces where respondents reported experiencing or witnessing an incident of violence were:

- In transit
- Parks, paths, and green spaces
- Residential areas
- Local businesses, shopping areas, and service centres
- Downtown
- Nightlife entertainment spaces
- Campuses and schools
- Workplaces

As part of the scoping study respondents were asked to describe how they felt at locations they reported as unsafe and were provided with a list of response options to choose from. 80% reported feeling scared, 41% reported feeling upset, 35% reported feeling angry, 35% reported feeling violated, and 27% reported feeling unwelcome.

When asked to choose from a list of responses about how they felt at locations identified as safe, 79% of respondents reported they felt physically secure, 56% reported feeling happy at safe locations, 52% reporting feeling like they belonged, and 43% reporting feeling supported.

2.3 Safe Cities London Action Plan, 2021-2024

Safe Cities London is committed to making London a safe city where women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors access public spaces and participate in public life without fear or experience of sexual violence.

A collaborative, city-wide initiative, Safe Cities London engages researchers, community leaders, service organizations, community members, and individuals with lived experience. It is the first city-wide initiative that brings together service providers, researchers, community, and individuals with lived experience to address sexual violence in public spaces. This new approach extends beyond UN Safe Cities requirements and is designed to meet the specific needs of the London community.

Development of the Action Plan

The development of the Safe Cities Action Plan was an intensive, collaborative process led by the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee. Between August 2020 and February 2021, Committee members conducted research and critical analysis, engaged in robust dialogue and challenging debate, and prepared content for the Action Plan.

Strategic Framework

The 2021-2024 Safe Cities London Action, attached as Appendix B, establishes a vision for our community where ‘London is a safe city where women, girls, nonbinary, trans, and survivors access public spaces and freely participate in public life without fear of experience of sexual violence.’

The following principles have been established to guide how the community will work together to implement the Plan:

- Intersectionality: We will prioritize the use of an intersectional lens.
- Accountability: We will take responsibility for actions and outcomes.
- Innovation: We will take calculated risks and implement innovative approaches.
- Collaboration: We will provide strategic guidance and share roles and responsibilities.
- Evidence-Informed: We will make decisions based on evidence.
- Accessibility: We will ensure that everything we do is in an accessible format.
- Trauma-Informed: We will embed a trauma-informed lens in our work.

The Safe Cities London Action Plan articulates three areas of focus:

- Social Norms
- Policy and Practice
- Collaboration

Each of these areas of focus have corresponding outcomes, expected results, strategies, and initial actions, which are described in the 2021-2024 Safe Cities London Action Plan.

Moving to Action

The success of the Safe Cities London Action Plan requires commitment and contributions from individuals, organizations, and businesses connected to this work.

A governance structure has been developed to oversee and guide the Safe Cities Action Plan. This structure includes the Safe Cities London Advisory Committee that will be responsible for overall outcomes and the implementation of strategies and actions. The Committee will continue to be co-chaired by Anova and the City of London.

On an annual basis, work plans will be developed with critical timelines to deliver on specific initiatives and actions, as well as complete a review of the Plan to ensure it addresses emerging issues and trends. Safe Cities London will also monitor and measure the performance and impact of the work and report to the community.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Financial Considerations

There are no financial impacts or considerations associated with this report.

Conclusion

When women and girls are not safe in public spaces, it has a significantly negative impact on their lives. The threat and experience of sexual violence affects their access to social activities, freedom of movement, education, employment, leadership opportunities, psychological well-being, and ultimately their potential to live safe lives.

Council’s 2019-2023 Strategic Plan identifies ‘Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls’ as a strategic area of focus. This includes the outcome ‘London has enhanced the potential for women and girls to live safe lives’ and the expected result ‘Decrease male violence against women and girls who are subjected to abuse, assault and non-state torture in their intimate relationships; sex trafficking; sexual assault; and workplace harassment.’ This strategic area of focus also includes a specific strategy to support

community-based initiatives and organizations committed to ending male violence against women and girls, including UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces.

While the work of Safe Cities London is focused on public spaces, the strategic framework has been structured to focus on a systemic and comprehensive approach to community change. Intentional linkages will be made between the work of Safe Cities London and that of Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls in order to enable shared information and learnings, and identify potential opportunities and synergies. Intentional connections will also be made to other corporate and community priorities such as the Core Area Action Plan and the forthcoming Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan in order to create meaningful and lasting change.

Recommended by: **Rosanna Wilcox, Director, Service, Innovation and Performance**

Concurred by: **Lynne Livingstone, City Manager**