

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Lambeth Council Safer Lambeth VAWG



PROBLEM :

Violence against women is a significant issue in Lambeth. The national domestic violence helpline reports that the number of calls received from women in Lambeth is the highest of all London local authorities. Existing services to reduce Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) often duplicated one another and the services did not properly meet the needs of all service users, particularly younger women and girls.



SOLUTION :

Redefining the service to deliver a pioneering integrated VAWG centre in the UK – saving money which enabled the expansion of the service. The new service also led in dealing with emerging issues, such as the rising problem of gang violence against females.

BACKGROUND :

The Violence Indicator Profiles for the English regions show Lambeth ranked 329 out of 354 local authorities in recorded sexual offences (the higher the ranking the greater the number of offences).

Lambeth ranks as the highest volume borough in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) for reported Most Serious Violence against Women, and has the fifth highest volume of reported domestic violence offences out of the 15 boroughs that are most similar. Data from the National Domestic Violence helpline shows that for the period of April-October 2011, 431 calls were made from Lambeth residents. This was the highest amount of calls from all London local authorities (5.7 per cent).

Based on an analysis of offences of domestic violence reported to Lambeth Police between January 2011 and December 2012, there were 1,683 Domestic Violence Offences in Lambeth, compared to 1,733 in 2010. This shows a slight decrease in the level of offences of 2.9 per cent (50 offences). In comparison to regional and national averages, Lambeth has a high number of sexual offences; the Violence Indicator Profiles for the English Regions (VIPER) ranks the borough as 319 out of 326 authorities in the country (326 being the highest for sexual offences), and the fourth highest in London. However, total sexual offences in Lambeth for 2011 were at their lowest level since 2008, with 519 offences. Of these, 82.6 per cent were classed as serious sexual offences. All sexual offence categories saw a decrease compared to 2010.

Lambeth is one of the first councils in the UK to develop an integrated VAWG strategy and is the first to develop and deliver a service specifically addressing all forms of VAWG under one roof. Lambeth's vision was to prevent violence by changing attitudes; providing support when violence does occur; to work with partners to deliver the best outcomes for victims, and to reduce the risk of repeat violence and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

The existing service was somewhat fragmented, consisting of various different schemes and with users unclear as to how the process worked. The services often duplicated work, wasting valuable resources. The age range covered by the existing services also was not designed to address issues relating to younger service users, particularly gang violence against young women.

The Safer Lambeth VAWG Strategy 2011-2014 was developed using innovative co-operative council principles, which included listening to the insights of women who had accessed the service, to identify what worked well and what did not. The Gaia peer mentoring scheme, which brought a more informal touch to the service, was one innovation that came out of this exercise. In-depth consultations with stakeholders, and involvement and 'reality checking' through the domestic violence forum also informed the plans.

Listening to service users, partners and providers through the Lambeth VAWF Customer Insight Project told the team that they needed to do more to address all strands of VAWG and the relationship between them, to better coordinate their services and to react to a world of rapidly changing technology and attitudes.

In response to this, they developed a whole range of activities designed to ensure that Lambeth will both prevent and respond to all forms of VAWG effectively.

A major component and commitment of the strategy was the re-commissioning of the Gaia Centre, bringing together all strands of their work on VAWG under one roof to provide a better, more responsive and more appropriate service for users.

ACTIONS :

The objective of this initiative was to increase the Gaia centre's capacity, to increase the age range of service users they could support and to refocus its approach towards all strands of VAWG, rather than just domestic violence. By 2014, the new service aims to support approximately 1,200 women per year, an increase of 50 per cent on the previous provision.

In order to ensure that the new Gaia Centre delivered a truly seamless VAWG service, the commissioning team brought together a range of funding streams with the aim of using this "joint pot" to commission one service model.

The team then designed a single specification addressing the areas prioritised in the VAWG Strategy, taking into consideration the findings from the Lambeth VAWG Customer Insight Project. Innovations were based on users' feedback: i.e. a single, clear VAWG service delivery model, a peer mentoring scheme and child care provision.

In recognition of the increase in concern and prevalence of VAWG affecting younger women and girls, the service specification for the Gaia Centre also contained a requirement for the new provider to deliver a young women's advocacy scheme. The service also undertook outreach work in schools, youth settings and colleges, in partnership with the schools work commissioned by NHS Lambeth and CYPS, to address the links between serious youth violence, gangs and the exploitation of young women and girls. Young women and girls who are at risk of gender based violence, including risk from gang involvement and/or gang exploitation, would be provided with a support service at the Gaia Centre.

It was decided that, to provide essential stability during a difficult time, the existing domestic violence council staff, would be seconded to the new provider for the life of the contract. Following an open tender process, Refuge was awarded the contract to run the service.

FUNDING :

The scheme brought together a range of funding streams from Lambeth Council Supporting People (LBL), Housing Regeneration and Environment (LBLE) and Lambeth First (Strategic Partnership), with the aim of using this "joint pot" to commission one service model. Some additional funding was also provided from Home Office grants.

Cost of VAWG in Lambeth

The impact of VAWG is most keenly felt by the victims but they also present significant costs to the public sector and the economy as a whole. The following costs for Lambeth are estimates using the Home Office data and are based on domestic and sexual violence for the twelve months 2010-2011.

Total costs (not including human and emotional costs) £25,694,222

Physical and mental health care costs £5,536,740

Criminal justice costs £3,487,402

Social services costs £656,746

Other costs (incl. housing, civil legal and employment costs) £16,013,333

Human and emotional costs £82,036,428

(This is not police reported data and is an estimate from the VAWG ready reckoner)

Prevalence of VAWG in Lambeth - number of incidents

Domestic violence 6,439

Sexual Offences (excluding rape) 5,754

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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