

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Westminster City Council Domestic Abuse Strategy 'Breaking the Silence'



City of Westminster

PROBLEM :

Domestic violence and other forms of domestic abuse are widely underreported in our communities. At least one in four women in the UK will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

When contextualising sexual violence and abuse, Westminster is unique, owing to the pressures of managing the night time economy in the West End. Westminster has the highest level of sexual offences per 1,000 residents compared with any other borough in London; however for the calendar year 2011, 31 per cent of sexual offences and 40 per cent of rapes were against Westminster residents, highlighting the number of offences which occur in borough to non-Westminster residents.



SOLUTION :

Westminster Council put in place a whole systems approach by all partner agencies to ensure that those who experience domestic abuse receive a service that demonstrates:

- Common understanding of the signs of domestic abuse and how to give an appropriate initial response
- Common assessment tools, which include an assessment of risk and are underpinned by consistent training and workforce development
- Joined-up interventions that are delivered in an integrated and co-ordinated manner and experienced as such by service users.

The Children, Young People and Community Protection Policy and Scrutiny Committee was involved in the development of the policy from the outset, ensuring cross-party political engagement in all levels of the service design.

In addition, the following measures were taken:

- The Council helped establish a dedicated Domestic Violence Court to improve the safety, experience and outcomes of alleged victims of domestic abuse.
- A victimless prosecutions partnership agreement was put in place to tackle, identify and punish those repeat perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- Domestic Abuse Surgeries are being established to offer critical first point of contact information, advice and support. The services available will include IDVA, ISVA, Victim Support, housing support, legal advice and benefits support.

BACKGROUND :

In 2011/12, Westminster recorded a little over 1,200 incidents of domestic violence, 21st highest out of the 32 London Boroughs in the MPS area. Croydon currently has the most at around 2,300, with the Richmond the least at just under 570, while the council's tri-borough partners in Hammersmith and Fulham had around 1,000, and Kensington and Chelsea 670 recorded offences.

Sexual offences in Westminster have fluctuated in recent years from a high of 592 offences in 2006, declining to 521 offences in 2009, before rising again to 577 offences by 2011. Within this, offences of rape have followed a similar pattern, although recent numbers have been slightly higher than 2006 (128 offences) and have been maintained over the last two years (133 and 132 offences respectively).

Domestic abuse cuts to the very heart of local authorities' role in protecting their most vulnerable residents. Of the 120,000 'troubled families' that the Prime Minister has pledged to turn around before the next election, an estimated 80 per cent have been in contact with the police or NHS in relation to domestic violence (4Children, *The Enemy Within*, 2012). One in seven children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood, equivalent to at least 260,000 of London's children and young people (Refuge and NSPCC, *Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London*, 2011). Violence in the home can lead to violence in other areas – on the street, in schools, on estates – and by tackling violence in the home and breaking the silence which often surrounds this area Westminster Council will help some of the borough's most troubled families.

ACTIONS :

Newly commissioned services will work alongside mainstream provision that provide the majority of domestic abuse services. Police, Probation, Children's Services, Adults Services, Housing, Health and a range of voluntary organisations provide domestic abuse services which will be complemented through the new strategy.

The key partners consulted in the strategy were:

- Adult's Services
- Central London Community Healthcare
- Children's Services
- Children, Young People and Community Protection Policy and Scrutiny Committee
- Family Recovery Programme

- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Housing
- Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Probation
- Safer Westminster Partnership
- Survivors
- Violence against Women and Girls sub-group
- Westminster Domestic Violence Forum (a representative body of voluntary and statutory providers operating in the area of domestic abuse within Westminster)
- Westminster Equalities Partnership.

OUTCOMES :

Since the launch of the strategy in April 2012, Westminster City Council and partners have secured commitment to create a Dedicated Domestic Violence at Westminster Magistrates' Court which will launch on the 12th September 2012. The court management group, which will support this process, is evidence of the successful partnership engagement which has gone into the strategy, with membership secured from all partners involved in the customer journey from domestic abuse incident to appearing at court and post-judicial support.

Good progress has been made in the design of Domestic Abuse surgeries, which will provide a wrap-around service for victims of domestic abuse. Negotiations have begun with the area's existing IDVA provider to develop an outreach service offer in key health locations to improve on early intervention and prevention.

FUNDING :

The Safer Westminster Partnerships approved the Domestic Abuse Strategy in April 2012, with funding confirmed for the next financial year. In 2011/12 the investment to tackle Violence against Women and Girls was around £450,000. This will increase to over £750,000 in 2012/13.

Of the nearly three quarters of a million spent on specialist domestic abuse services, only 42 per cent is allocated through core budgets (subject to budget setting process), meaning the rest is reliant on annual grant funding. This can lead to short term commissioning cycles and the inability to commission longer more intensive programmes of support, such as a befriending service for survivors of domestic abuse. Across the Safer Westminster Partnership we are working hard to evaluate the success of current interventions, ensure the delivery model is efficient, and to mainstream delivery of the essential elements.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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