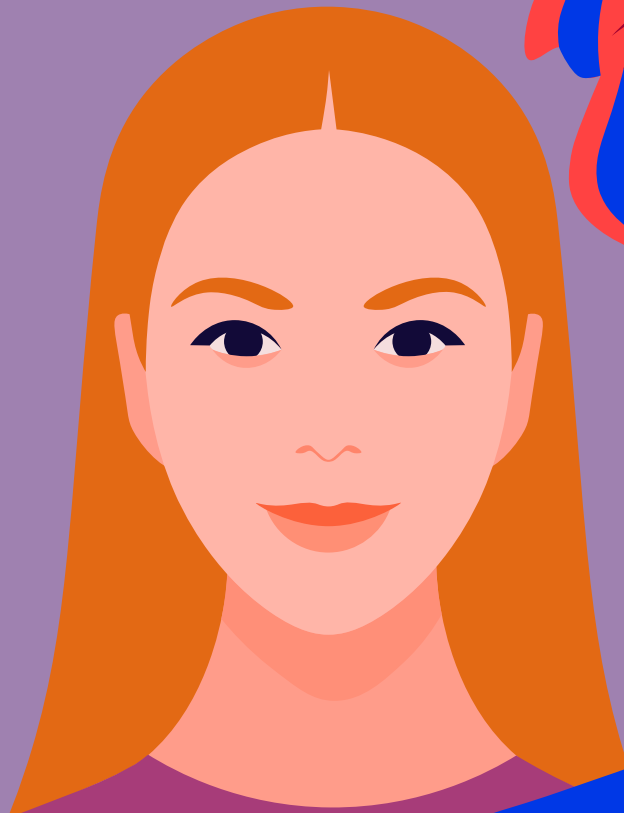


Camden Women's Forum

**Domestic
violence and
abuse inquiry**

December 2021



women
make
Camden

Chair's foreword



The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent murders of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman and closer to home Nicole Hurley, have put into sharp focus that there is an epidemic of violence against women. This has left women and girls feeling unsafe on our streets, and in their own homes, and impacts children. Now is the time to put in place long overdue protections for women and girls against unacceptable violence. Not just action against domestic homicides, rape, and street harassment, but also a strategy to tackle attitudes that underpin the abuse women and girls face.

This is why Camden's Women's Forum launched its second inquiry into domestic violence and abuse in November 2020.

The problem

- Nationally, a woman is killed every three days and the number of women who are murdered is at its highest level in 15 years.¹ Women and girls face harassment and abuse in their daily lives – 97% of women aged 18 to 24 have been sexually harassed.²
- Latest figures show that last year rape prosecutions and convictions fell to their lowest on record with only one in 60 reported rape cases leading to a charge.³
- Too many children (one in seven) live in homes where they see abuse daily, impacting on their education outcomes, emotional wellbeing and life chances.⁴
- Women subjected to abuse too often end up leaving their homes and not having the right access to justice and support.

In producing our report, the members of Camden Women's Forum have worked closely with service providers, experts and professionals from across the public and voluntary sectors to ensure we listened to and learnt from their valuable insights and work. Central to this has been the HOPE Survivors Group, who have been instrumental in sharing their traumatic personal experiences, and you will hear their voices throughout the report – they have shaped the recommendations. Too often these women were not believed, and had to constantly repeat their abuse experiences, and the system had failed them.

We did however, identify that there is good practice taking place in Camden, including new policies and procedures, to be scaled up and funded, and across all services there was a huge appetite to work together to end the damage domestic violence and abuse causes. Currently there is an implementation gap, and services across Camden need to work together to provide a co-ordinated response to victims. Everybody praised the work of Camden Safety Net as being literally a life saver.

¹ Femicide Census 'UK Femicides 2009 – 2018', 2020 (<https://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf>)

² UN Women, 'Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces: a report by the APPG for UN Women', 2021 (unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Report_Updated.pdf)

³ The Guardian, 'Fewer than one in 60 rape cases lead to charge in England and Wales', 23 May 2021, (theguardian.com/society/2021/may/23/fewer-than-one-in-60-cases-lead-to-charge-in-england-and-wales)

⁴ Women's Aid, 'How can my children be affected by domestic abuse?', 2021 (womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/children-and-domestic-abuse)

I would like to thank Camden Council officers for being open and honest about the change needed, to all the forum members for their support, for those that attended our inquiry sessions and gave evidence, and a special thank you to the Hope Survivors Group.

Helene Reardon-Bond OBE

Camden's Gender Equality Champion and Chair of the Camden Women's Forum

Helene Reardon Bond, OBE

Camden's Gender Equality Champion and Chair of the Camden Women's Forum



Overview of Camden Women's Forum

Camden Women's Forum (CWF) was established in 2019 and aims to ensure that all women and girls living, visiting or working in Camden have equal opportunities, and the chance to live freely and safely without suffering prejudice or discrimination.

CWF is an independent body that is co-chaired by Camden's Gender Equality Champion, Helene Reardon-Bond OBE, and co-chaired with Cllr Angela Mason CBE, the Council's Cabinet Member for Best start in Life and families. Helene is supported by 20 CWF members and women who represent the diversity and breadth of Camden, including women from Black, Asian and other ethnic communities, young women and girls, business leaders, voluntary and community sector organisations, mothers and carers, schools and colleges, and experts on gender equality and LGBTQIA+. The inclusive membership of CWF has ensured that we have been able to draw on a wide range of girls' and women's voices and experiences.

CWF works on the same lines as a Parliamentary Select Committee. We hold inquiries on priority issues during which we make calls for evidence, hold oral hearings, visit women's organisations and run informal sessions so that we can hear directly from Camden's women and girls. Each inquiry is supported by a detailed written evidence base. Each inquiry is expected to generate practical and tangible actions for Camden Council, public bodies, voluntary and community sector organisations, employers, businesses and residents to consider and work in partnership to implement. We held our first inquiry into women's economic participation and published its report in March 2020. The recommendations of the inquiry were passed onto council services and Camden Council's range of partners with outcomes including the Council launching a scheme to allow people coming to the UK with overseas qualifications to translate them to the UK equivalents.

Introduction to domestic violence and abuse inquiry

Camden Women's Forum launched an inquiry into domestic violence and abuse in November 2020. This focused on preventing and tackling domestic violence and abuse, as well as how violence affects children and young people now and in the future.

Domestic violence and abuse is a gendered crime. Women are both more likely to be victims of domestic violence and abuse and more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of domestic violence and abuse. Women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation and are much more likely to be seriously hurt or killed than male victims of domestic violence and abuse.⁵ Women are also more likely to experience higher levels of fear and are more likely to be subjected to controlling behaviours.⁶

This Camden Women's Forum inquiry has taken place during COVID-19. Domestic violence and abuse has been called the 'shadow pandemic'. Research by Women's Aid showed 61% of women surveyed in England and Wales living with their abuser during lockdown said their abuse had worsened during the period of the first lockdown between March 2020 and July 2020.⁷ Nationally, services have seen huge increases in demand. Members of CWF have also seen this increase in demand – both voluntary and community sector partners that are part of CWF and council services have noticed an increase in demand from residents for support relating to domestic violence and abuse, making our inquiry timely. For instance, there was a three-year high and peak in referrals from the police into the children's social care and early help during the school summer holidays in 2020.

The number of contacts where domestic violence and abuse was a presenting issue in Camden Council children's services increased from 1,129 in 2019 to 1,430 in 2020.

Engaging with survivors of domestic violence and abuse has been at the heart of our approach. Listening to, understanding and amplifying the stories of those with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse is crucial to creating change.

The inquiry has been structured into four main sessions around four key themes. The first was focused around introducing the inquiry and context of domestic violence and abuse nationally and in Camden. The second focused on the impact of domestic violence and abuse on children and young people, and the third on reporting, enforcement and work with perpetrators. The final session focused on the links between housing and domestic violence and abuse, including the Council's own housing stock and homelessness prevention. Each of these sessions included survivors of domestic violence and abuse sharing their experiences and suggestions for change with CWF members. Outside of the main sessions, a range of supplementary meetings took place to investigate themes in more depth. Importantly, this included in-depth discussions on each theme with the HOPE (Healing Our Past and Evolving) Survivors Group, which is run by Panoramic Counselling and funded by Camden Council. The survivors' anonymised experiences and quotes are featured within this report, as well as being central to these recommendations.

The recommendations that we propose are framed as survivor-based outcomes, based on what the experience of survivors should be like within Camden, with a series of practical next steps under each outlining how we think we can get there.

These survivor-based outcomes aim to create a change for survivors by shifting our collective focus across partners from our individual goals, to working together to improve the lives of survivors in Camden. Domestic violence and abuse is everyone's business and we want to work together around the shared endeavour of tackling domestic violence and abuse and supporting victims.

Preventing and tackling domestic violence and abuse is a huge ambition requires a huge and continual focus, as well as long-term and sustainable funding across local and national partners. Domestic violence and abuse needs a collective effort because of the range of ways it can impact a survivor's life. We also know that unfortunately domestic violence and abuse is under-reported in Camden and a survivor might only disclose to one family, so it's vital that the professional or organisation that they disclose to knows how to respond and offer support.

We need a collective effort and continued focus on domestic violence and abuse from partners across Camden to come together with Camden Council reduce, prevent and tackle domestic violence and abuse in the borough. These recommendations will help us to work collaboratively to an agreed long-term action plan and help us to change attitudes to and understanding of male violence.

From our work and engagement with survivors, we believe that these are the next steps to help us to achieve our goal of reducing, preventing and tackling domestic violence and abuse at all levels.

The recommendations should be read with this in mind – the report and recommendations represent short-term and, importantly, achievable actions that will help to improve the experiences of survivors of domestic violence and abuse.

⁵Walby, S. and Towers, J., 'Measuring violence to end violence: mainstreaming gender', *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, vol. 1, May 2017

⁶Dobash, R.P. and Dobash, R.E., 'Women's violence to men in intimate relationships. Working on a puzzle', *British Journal of Criminology*, 44(3), 2004, pp. 324–349

⁷Women's Aid, 'A perfect storm: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on domestic abuse survivors and the services supporting them', 2020 ([womensaid.org.uk/a-perfect-storm-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-domestic-abuse-survivors-and-the-services-supporting-them](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/a-perfect-storm-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-domestic-abuse-survivors-and-the-services-supporting-them))

Survivor outcomes and recommendations

	Survivor outcomes	Recommendations/next steps
1	As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I have clear information about how to report domestic violence and abuse. I understand the process to report and the steps involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updating Camden Safety Net website and targeted sponsored social media adverts pilot As well as continuing to promote Camden Safety Net, promoting national specialist services such as Galop, Hopscotch and Southall Black Sisters
2	As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I can access free legal advice even when experiencing financial abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding a commissioned legal service to offer universal free legal advice to domestic violence and abuse survivors Camden Council to campaign for national reforms to criminal justice system
3	As a child survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I can access support and programmes to help me recover from the domestic violence and abuse I've witnessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated specialist domestic violence and abuse programmes for children Ensuring that there is support for children who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse, their primary carer and their schools Increase healthy relationships education within schools – sharing best practice
4	As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I know that the council and other services are taking a co-ordinated approach focused on continuous improvement to domestic violence and abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Board established and co-chaired by somebody with lived experience A standing agenda item on disproportionality and intersectionality at VAWG Board Mandatory domestic violence and abuse training for Camden Council staff Support for voluntary and community sector services who provide support for domestic violence and abuse victims
5	As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I feel listened to, believed and supported by council services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation (dedicated resource for DAHA and VAWG Board) Further data on equalities and domestic violence and abuse and housing Camden Council using levers as a local authority – changes to the housing allocations policy around domestic violence and abuse and more temporary accommodation in borough Monitor the Council's Housing DVA Policy and Procedure. Improving data sharing between Camden Council, schools and the police
6	As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I only have to tell my story once and can access specialist support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police to improve awareness of Camden Safety Net for victims involved in criminal justice system Work with the police to improve understanding of VAWG and the need for culture change
7	As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I know that perpetrators of domestic abuse, including young perpetrators, have the opportunity to change their behaviour and tackle attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff training on dealing with perpetrators within organisation, and perpetrator expertise within Camden Council Commissioned behaviour change programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse Developing a new approach to tackle abuse, taking into account social media on young people Establish a campaign to promote men as champions of change Include conversations on tackling abuse and attitudes towards domestic abuse as part of the VAWG Board

Disproportionality, intersectionality and domestic violence and abuse

Disproportionality has been central to our inquiry. Many Camden residents face additional barriers in both disclosing and reporting domestic violence and abuse. Looking at domestic violence abuse through a lens of intersectionality is important – every victim of domestic violence and abuse will have their own unique experiences of both domestic violence and abuse and discrimination when seeking help, with race, sex, class, gender, gender identity, faith and sexuality all impacting on the experiences of survivors.

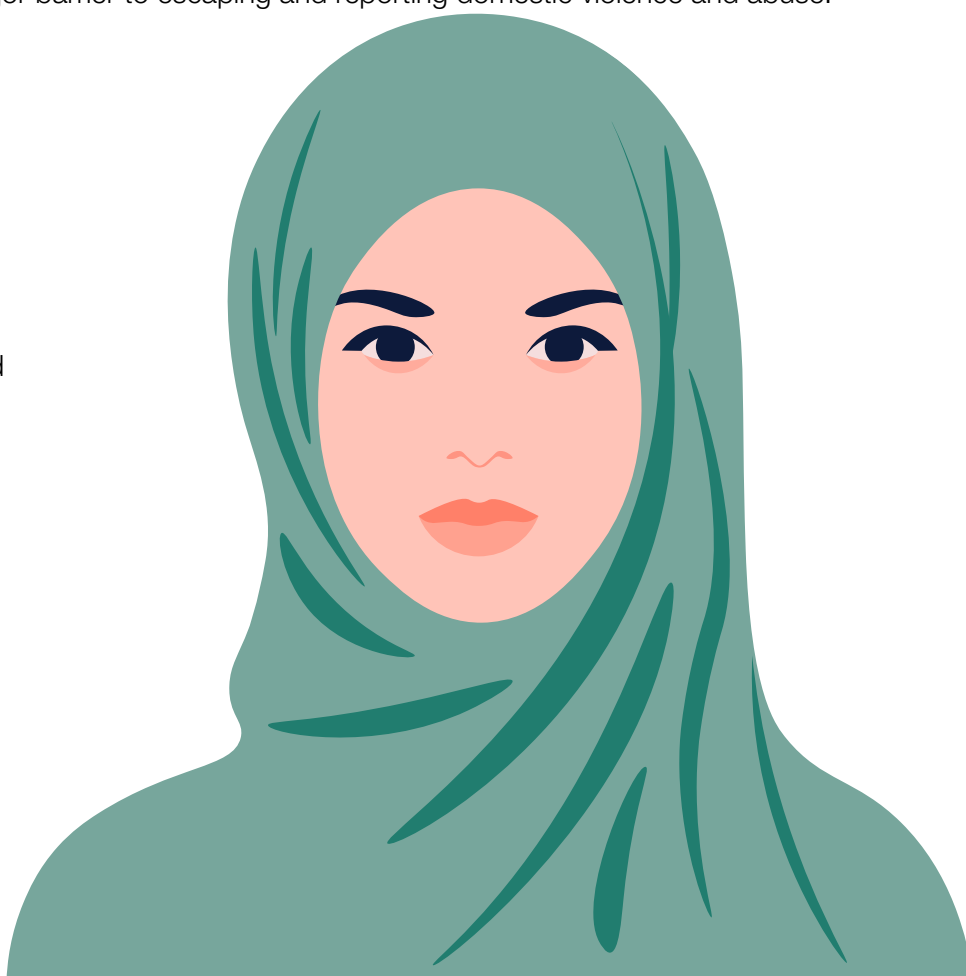
Research from Southall Black Sisters highlights that it takes women from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds an estimated average of 10 years before they leave a violent relationship, which is greater than the three-year average for all women. This highlights the disparity of experience for residents from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds.⁸

Data from Refuge, the UK's largest single provider of domestic violence and abuse services, highlights that between March 2020 and June 2021, Black women were 14% less likely than white women to be referred to Refuge by police.⁹

We heard from Hopscotch Women's Centre, who talked about the additional barriers that service users face in reporting domestic violence and abuse. Hopscotch is a registered charity in Camden working to create a society where all women are empowered, connected, well and safe so they can achieve their full potential. Hopscotch offer a series of services for women who are under the influences of inequalities and abuse, including domestic abuse.

Camden Women's Forum heard about how those from South Asian communities face additional barriers around cultural stigma of divorce, and previous negative experiences with, and distrust of the Police. Those with No Resource to Public Funds, who are not entitled to key welfare benefits and local authority housing as a consequence of their immigration status, are some of the most vulnerable victims. This can present a major barrier to escaping and reporting domestic violence and abuse.

It's also estimated that only 2.5% of all survivors accessing domestic abuse services in England and Wales are LGBTQ+, despite around 25% of LGBTQ+ people estimated to experience domestic abuse. LGBTQ+ victims have reported not feeling believed by police and services, and also face additional barriers where the abuser may threaten to 'out' the victim as a method of control.¹⁰ Galop provide specialist helplines for LGBTQ+ victims of abuse, and their families, and have decades of experience supporting LGBTQ+ victims.



Disabled victims of domestic violence and abuse often face additional barriers to reporting domestic violence and abuse and can be some of the most vulnerable victims of domestic abuse. Disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women. Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) data shows that nationally only 3.9% of referrals were for disabled victims, lower than the Safe Lives recommendation of 16% or higher, suggesting disabled victims are underrepresented in domestic abuse services.¹¹

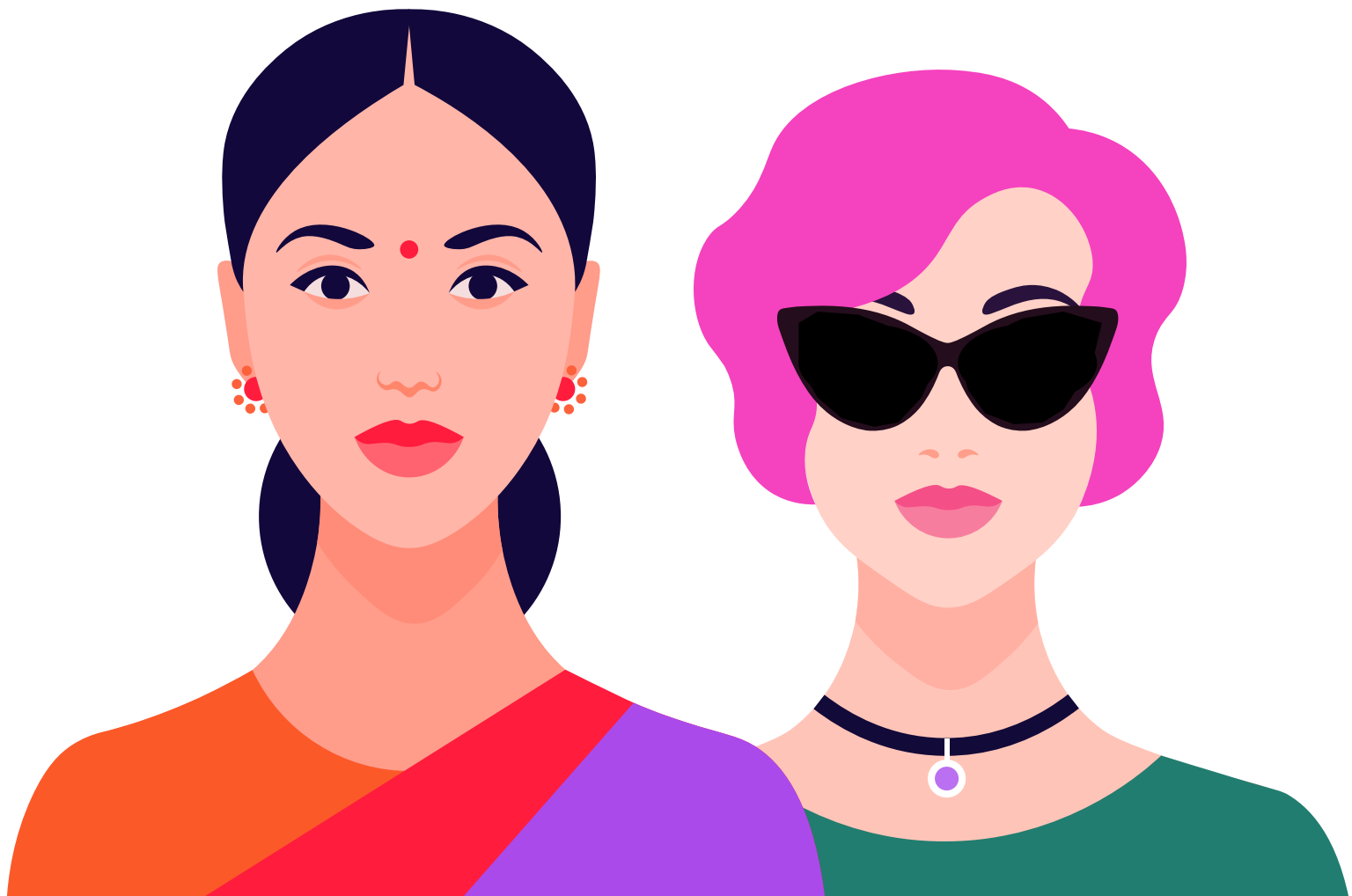
Moving forward, we recommend that disproportionality and intersectionality should be central to Camden Council's approach to domestic violence and abuse to ensure that all survivors get the support that they need. Specialist domestic abuse services and groups offer survivors tailored support, with in depth knowledge about the additional barriers faced for many survivors. The Council should further explore the network of dedicated specialist services for disabled survivors, those from Black, Asian and other ethnic groups, and LGBTQ+ survivors, which can be better placed to support to Camden survivors.

⁸ Women's Aid ([womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/the-nature-and-impact-of-domestic-abuse](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/the-nature-and-impact-of-domestic-abuse))

⁹ Refuge, 'Refuge data shows Black women experiencing domestic abuse less likely to be referred for specialist support for police', 2021 ([refuge.org.uk/refuge-better-protection-of-black-women-domestic-abuse](https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-better-protection-of-black-women-domestic-abuse))

¹⁰ Safe Lives, 'Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse', 2018 ([safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Free%20to%20be%20safe%20web.pdf](https://www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Free%20to%20be%20safe%20web.pdf))

¹¹ Safe Lives, 'Spotlight #2: Disabled people and domestic abuse' ([safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-2-disabled-people-and-domestic-abuse](https://www.safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-2-disabled-people-and-domestic-abuse))



1. As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I have clear information about how to report domestic violence and abuse. I understand the process and steps involved.

“When you experience domestic abuse, it’s not a linear process of when you realise you’re experiencing domestic abuse. You need more information on the process. There needs to be information upfront to ease nerves and reduce uncertainty. When there are so many unknowns, it’s easier to stick to the devil you know.”

Camden domestic violence and abuse survivor

Increasing awareness and visibility of domestic violence and abuse is crucial to tackling it. Despite wide-ranging successful communications campaigns within Camden to increase awareness of domestic abuse, domestic abuse is a hugely underreported crime both within Camden and nationally, and is associated with shame, stigma and victim blaming.

Camden Women’s Forum heard national evidence from the Crime Survey of England and Wales that 79% of domestic abuse is estimated to go unreported in England and Wales. The Crime Survey of England and Wales estimates

that 5.5% of adults experience domestic violence and abuse annually – this suggests that an estimated 13,000 residents in Camden experience domestic abuse each year.¹²

Encouraging victims to report is a vital first step in making sure that victims have the support that they need. We heard from local survivors of domestic abuse about how important it was to make the process for reporting domestic violence and abuse clear. Survivors told us that they “wanted to be aware of the dos and don’t.”, and that “there needs to be more clarity about what you [the survivor] achieve[s] and the process [of reporting] ... I had sleepless nights”.

Camden Council’s specialist domestic abuse service, Camden Safety Net, saw a 400% increase in website hits during the first period of the COVID-19 lockdown, with national domestic abuse websites reporting similar trends. For Camden Safety Net this has not been leading to an increase in cases for support. This highlights the importance of making sure that when a victim, or somebody supporting a victim, takes the step to look for information about domestic abuse support, that the information is as accessible as possible and encourages them to report. The importance of clarity in services is also expressed in ‘Good Services’,¹³ where Lou Downe describes a good service as one that makes the purpose of the service clear – evidence from service design shows that when users are aware of how a service works and know what to expect, this is when service users are the most satisfied with the service.

Survivors who were in contact with Camden Safety Net also talked about how the service had been key to their recovery. Survivors said that “Camden Safety Net were critical to guide me through the process” and that Camden Safety Net “were safe, they were there for me and wearing my shoes”. One survivor also said that they “think I would’ve killed myself without Camden Safety Net.” Camden

¹² ONS, Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview, November 2020 ([ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Crime%20Survey,last%20year%20\(Figure%201\).&text=Of%20these%2C%2041%25%20\(529%2C077,subsequently%20recorded%20as%20a%20crime\)](https://ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Crime%20Survey,last%20year%20(Figure%201).&text=Of%20these%2C%2041%25%20(529%2C077,subsequently%20recorded%20as%20a%20crime)))

¹³ Lou Downe, ‘Good services: Decoding the Mystery of What Makes a Good Services, 2020

Safety Net's vital work changes the lives of domestic violence and abuse victims– we should promote it more to ensure that it accessible to all Camden residents.

Camden Safety Net has also seen a reduction in referrals from partners, like police and health services. This suggests that those who are experiencing who are experiencing domestic abuse and in touch with the police or health services may not be getting specialist domestic abuse support from an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate. It's key to ensure that as many Camden residents as possible are aware of the life-changing support provided by Camden Safety Net.

The Council has a key role to play in Camden in increasing the visibility of domestic violence and abuse, and raising awareness of domestic violence and abuse. The Council has led a range of successful campaigns to increase awareness of domestic abuse. It is proposed that this is built on with some communications specifically from the lived experience of survivors.

Domestic abuse is often seen as a taboo subject, with victims experiencing guilt and shame, which makes it hard to disclose their abuse. Victim blaming is also common when it comes to domestic abuse and adds to stigma– with common responses around 'Why doesn't she just leave?' or 'I would never get myself in a relationship like that'. Camden Council undertaking high-profile work on domestic abuse, such as communications campaigns and work like Camden Women's Forum, is important to break down the barriers to talking about and reporting domestic abuse. This should be built on to include survivors' experiences. Survivors also talked about how a high-profile person or celebrity talking about the steps to reporting could help to encourage people to report.

Recommendations

We recommend a website update of the Camden Safety Net website, co-produced with the HOPE Survivors Group to include survivor testimonies. We recommend that the focus of the updated website is around the process of reporting to different services to help ease anxiety of reporting and including survivor testimonies about the support that Camden Safety Net has offered them. This will ensure that the website is based on the lived experience of survivors. Once this content is created, an updated website would provide partners, such as health services and police, with clear information to signpost victims to who might still be unsure about being referred into Camden Safety Net or seeking help.

We also recommend a test and learn pilot on social media sponsored advertising to promote a range of services, to test and iterate the best way to promote Camden Safety Net and encourage victims to seek support. This would help to inform a longer-term communications strategy, by providing key data and metrics on the impact of targeted social media promotion on different groups on referrals to Camden Safety Net.

We recommend promoting national specialist services such as Galop for LGBTQ+ victims and Southall Black Sisters to ensure that all survivors in Camden can access tailored support. As well as Camden Safety Net's local offer, there are a number of national specialist services that provide tailored support. Galop runs a national LGBTQ+ domestic abuse helpline with decades of experience supporting LGBTQ+ victims. Southall Black Sisters is a specialist service, designed to meet the needs of Black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women and support women with No Recourse to Public funds. More locally, Hopscotch has a wealth of experience supporting Asian and other ethnic women through domestic abuse in Camden. Camden Safety Net provides support to all survivors of domestic abuse, but it is important to recognise that some survivors may prefer to speak to specialist services.

2. As a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, I can access free legal advice even when experiencing financial abuse.

“On paper is not what the reality is. I was experiencing financial abuse so although I had assets on paper, I could not access them and I couldn’t access legal aid as a result.”

Camden domestic violence and abuse survivor

Survivors of domestic abuse going through the legal system told us that they feel both blamed and interrogated, whilst their perpetrator faces few or no consequences. As one survivor put it: “Victims are left exposed by the police. The justice system is more likely to protect the perpetrators than the victim.” Survivors feel let down by the criminal justice system, finding it impenetrable. They are disempowered by both the quality and frequency of legal advice that they

are given, which meant they have to repeat their story to multiple agencies. Survivors told us their experience with the legal service even meant they regretted their decision and bravery in speaking out and reporting to the police. The current criminal justice system works to support perpetrators of domestic abuse, whilst offering little justice to domestic violence and abuse survivors. We must act to change this.

The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act in 2012 led to significant reductions in legal aid eligibility and resulted in £160 million of budget cuts at family law legal aid services. Research from the Rights of Women in 2016 highlighted that 40% of victims of domestic abuse were unable to access a legal aid solicitor to represent them following this reduction in funding.¹⁴ Additionally, of those still eligible to access legal aid, the service they receive through the National Centre for Domestic Violence is often not local to Camden and not provided by legal firms with a specialism in domestic abuse cases. This creates additional barriers for victims in Camden getting appropriate legal support with domestic abuse.

Survivors of domestic abuse also told us that they were ineligible for legal aid, because they jointly owned a property with their partner, despite having no access to funds as a consequence of financial abuse where their partner controlled their finances. Survivors told us about the challenges with the criminal justice system and how “all of these perpetrators know the system”. One survivor asked: “When does the onus stop being on us to prove we weren’t doing anything wrong?”

A report published in September 2021 by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) called for ‘fundamental cross-system change’ after identifying failings in how the police deal with violence against women and girls. The report found that 75% of domestic abuse cases are closed early without the suspect being charged. The report called for violence against women and girls to be treated on an equal footing to counter-terrorism.¹⁵ The report also found that nearly 13,000 cases were dropped in England and Wales over five years after the time

¹⁴ Rights of Women, ‘Evidencing domestic abuse: nearly 3 years on’, 2014 (rightsofwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Evidencing-domestic-violence-V.pdf)

¹⁵ HMICFRS, ‘Tackling violence against women and girls’, 2021 (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publication-html/police-response-to-violence-against-women-and-girls-final-inspection-report)

limit of six months was reached. Three quarters of all domestic abuse cases are closed early without the suspect being charged. It is key that we change the response survivors receive from the criminal justice system.

Professionals working directly with victims, including those in voluntary and community sector organisations, Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advisors (IDSVAs) and social workers acknowledged a lack of legal aid for victims, which limits their ability to pursue criminal justice routes, and expressed beliefs that the criminal justice and court system doesn't support victims.

We also heard evidence about the low prosecution rates for domestic abuse within the criminal justice. Only 65.8% of domestic abuse allegations in London were prosecuted after being handed to the Crown Prosecution Service.¹⁶ There are a range of factors at play in local prosecution rates, but this makes the need for adequate legal support for victims in navigating a criminal justice, which is failing victims, even more important.

Recommendations

We recommend improving the local legal system through partners across Camden Women's Forum funding a commissioned service, offering victims in Camden access to a free solicitor for support with domestic abuse. This would enable local domestic abuse victims and Camden Safety Net to have access to legal aid, which can help them to navigate a complex and often hostile criminal justice system and achieve justice. It is also suggested that this legal resource could offer advice to the Council's housing teams around perpetrators of domestic abuse – there is currently a gap in advice, which means that enforcement action against perpetrators within housing stock doesn't take place to the extent it should do.

We also recommend that Camden Council continues to campaign at a national level for criminal justice system reform, so that victims of domestic abuse get the justice that they deserve. We heard from survivors results in perpetrators seemingly getting away with their behaviour, whilst victims are placed under increased scrutiny. There was a 22% fall in domestic abuse-related prosecutions in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020, compared to 2019, and an 89% increase in Crown Court jury trial backlogs since the pandemic began – making reform to the criminal justice system even more pressing. Camden Council councillors have been lobbying for misogyny to become a hate crime, which we believe would be a good step for progress.

We also recommend that the judicial system has a clear, written set of guidelines for survivors of domestic abuse and proper training on domestic abuse. Survivors told us about their experiences of the court, and felt that there was a lack of understanding around domestic abuse. Survivors noted that perpetrators often were great actors who knew how to play the game. Increased training to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood is key.

¹⁶ Evening Standard, 'London prosecution rate for domestic violence worst in UK', 18 March 2021 ([standard.co.uk/news/crime/london-prosecution-rate-domestic-violence-worst-uk-cps-b924635.html](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/london-prosecution-rate-domestic-violence-worst-uk-cps-b924635.html))

¹⁷ The Guardian, 'Covid leading to four-year waits for England and Wales court trials', 10 January 2021 ([theguardian.com/law/2021/jan/10/covid-leading-to-four-year-waits-for-england-and-wales-court-trials](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/jan/10/covid-leading-to-four-year-waits-for-england-and-wales-court-trials))

3. As a child victim or/survivor of domestic abuse, I can access support and programmes to help me recover from my experience.

“It cannot be underestimated how a cycle of abuse can become normalised for children who live those lives every day. No one around them would talk about domestic violence and there was an absence of male voices in this space. Their experiences affected how they approach relationships, money and work, and as a family they were never on a list or had any support.”

Survivor of domestic abuse

We heard about the impact of domestic abuse on child survivors of domestic abuse, and the long-lasting impact that domestic can have on children who witness it in the home. Nationally, an estimated 14.2% of children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic abuse at some point in their childhood.⁴ The impacts of domestic abuse can last well into their adult lives. We learnt from both survivors and those working with children in schools and other settings how children carry a real sense of shame and guilt through their childhoods and the corrosive effect that this has on their ability to have positive relationships.

We heard how there was a real reluctance for children and young people to talk about their experiences and how isolating this could be. We learnt how important it is for children and young people to have opportunities to open up in settings like schools, which give children a sense of voice and agency. We also heard about the importance of role models for child survivors of domestic abuse – this is key to making sure that victims of all backgrounds and genders are encouraged to come forward to talk about their experiences and access the support they need to process and overcome the trauma of their abuse. Often, there is a lack of male voices talking about domestic abuse, which can present additional barriers for young male child survivors to talk about their experiences.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 entrenches into law that children and young people who witness domestic abuse in the home are listed in their own right as survivors of domestic abuse.¹⁸ Survivors told us about the importance of “raising awareness and acknowledging domestic violence and abuse amongst young people”, and how important it was to “give children a sense of voice, agency and control of their support whilst encouraging kids from all backgrounds and genders to come forward”. We heard from schools about the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people that they see directly. One school said: “Often children who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse display anxieties through not being able to manage their relationships, getting angry, not sleeping or eating as usual, [and having] low concentration and increased absence.” Voluntary sector organisations also talked about the referrals received from children and young people but that they “face [their] own difficulties, such as lack of sustainable funding and have found it difficult doing this work during the pandemic and having to work differently.” Given the great work that is already taking place within schools, it’s important that schools have the opportunity to share learning and best practice with other schools.

¹⁸ Law Society, ‘Domestic Abuse Act 2021’, 2 June 2021 (lawsociety.org.uk/en/topics/family-and-children/domestic-abuse-act-2021)

We heard of best practice at Solace Women's Aid for children's programmes run independently from the Council in other local authorities, which ensure that child survivors of domestic abuse can access support, even if they are not in touch with social care services.

We heard that in working with children and young people, it is important to make sure that three aspects are considered together: the support for the child, the support for the parent and the support for the school.

Recommendations

We recommend universal and dedicated support programmes for child victims of domestic violence and abuse, including those who witness domestic violence and abuse in the home.

Currently, the programmes that are on offer are for children who are in touch with social care, rather than a universal offer so that all children who witness domestic abuse can get the support they need. These would ensure that child survivors have the right resources to process their experiences. The independent Healing Together programme helps children and young people who have lived experience of domestic abuse recover from their abuse through therapeutic sessions that help them to better understand and respond to emotions, as well as creating coping mechanisms. Currently, this is being rolled out to some schools – we also recommend that this is rolled out to all primary and secondary schools in Camden.

We recommend that children who witness domestic abuse get support. Child survivors of domestic abuse, including children and young people who have witnessed domestic violence and abuse in the home, need support for themselves to help them recover from their experiences. Their primary carer(s) need(s) support to enable them to best support their child, and their school need support to best support them. This could be through coffee mornings and informal meetings at schools to ensure that parents are supported.

We recommend that healthy relationships and tackling misogyny is prioritised in schools, with schools sharing best practice amongst each other to ensure that all children in Camden learn about healthy relationships and domestic abuse in an age-appropriate way.

As well as targeted work for children and young people with lived experience of domestic abuse, raising awareness generally of domestic abuse, promoting healthy relationships and tackling misogynist attitudes is needed. There is a growing recognition of the importance of relationship education at an early age and more consistently delivered to address the underlying issues that lead to abusive behaviour and the normalisation of abuse. PSHE (Personal, social, health and economic) education within schools provides the opportunity to both raise awareness of domestic abuse and tackle misogyny. Work is already taking place around this within Camden schools, but it is key that best practice is shared amongst schools.

4. As a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, I know that Camden Council and other services are taking a coordinated approach to domestic violence and abuse, which has lived experience at the heart.

“You need to get survivors to sit down with the key people, we need change. People need the change to happen and need to hear from those who are going through the system.”

Camden domestic abuse survivor

Survivors of domestic abuse who had reported their abuse, told Camden Women’s Forum that getting the right support was hard. Survivors had variable experiences of accessing support. One survivor talked about how she found herself to be “bouncing like a ball” from one service and department to another. She was in touch with multiple organisations, such as Camden Council’s early help, social services and housing teams,

and Hopscotch, and the process was long and painful. She said services lacked “human touch and empathy” and “it felt like you were being undressed, they don’t feel any empathy”, and described the pain of repeating her story.

Other survivors told us that they felt that they were dealing with a bureaucratic process set by rules and regulations, but there was no sense that they were treated as a human being. Survivors did describe positive examples of Camden Safety Net, with one survivor describing “I don’t think I would’ve got through my experience without my worker”. Another spoke about how Camden Safety Net “had empathy and were my greatest companion”. Another survivor talked about how when she “first moved here, [she] was found by [her] ex. Camden Council added a panic lock to make me feel much safer. They really supported me.”

The survivors of domestic abuse that we spoke to were keen to play a role in the work moving forward, and to share their experiences to help create a change for others. One survivor said: “I am here for those murdered and those who are unable to speak due to confidence. I am here to implore you to make important change now.” Survivors were also clear that training of professionals across Camden Council and partner services was key. Survivors wanted to ensure that training was wide-ranging and needing to reach staff including caretakers. Survivors also were clear that training needs to have a heavy focus on the dynamics of psychological and emotional abuse. One survivor explained: “Training needs to be improved – only now, I’m being asked the right questions.”

Many Camden Women’s Forum members feel that currently work around domestic abuse is not coordinated and a whole-system approach does not take place across Camden Council and its partners. We heard of best practice from other boroughs around establishing a local Violence Against Women and Girls Board (VAWGB), which is responsible for bringing together both operational and strategic work around domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls. It is also proposed that the board is co-chaired by someone with lived experience. The board would allow domestic abuse to have the prominence that it needs. It would allow for a strategic focus on violence against women and girls – it would provide the opportunity to build a strong understanding of data and violence against women and girls in Camden, and to have oversight on what is working.

As outlined when introducing these recommendations, preventing and tackling domestic violence and abuse will require a long-term focus and commitment from the Council and partners. We propose

that establishing a VAWG Board is a key way to hold services and partners to account on prioritising domestic violence and abuse. As outlined in the introduction, this report is only the beginning of a short-term set of actions needed to start tackling domestic abuse in Camden. Establishing a VAWG Board to oversee strategic work across Camden and bringing together key stakeholders will be vital to look at the continuum of violence. A co-ordinated approach on all forms of violence against women and girls, from work on street harassment to domestic violence and abuse and domestic homicide will ensure that we are tackling these issues at their root – with misogyny in mind. This will help us to give VAWG the prominence it needs and look to change attitudes towards and understanding of male violence. The murder of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa, as well the shootings in Plymouth with Jake Davison's links to the 'incel' movements, have brought to the forefront of our attention the urgency with which we need to tackle violence against women and girls. The board should be working with others in the field, for instance linking up work about women's public safety, with wider work in schools around healthy relationships and equality.

A VAWG Board would also be well placed to offer strategic support to operational work, and provide a place to update on what has and has not worked. We also recommend that in order to ensure that disproportionality and intersectionality are at the core of our approach to violence against women and girls in Camden that this becomes a standing agenda item at the VAWG Board.

Camden Women's Forum also heard from voluntary and community sector partners about the key work that they do, day in and day out, to support residents who are experiencing domestic abuse on the frontline. CWF heard how underfunded work on domestic abuse is, with services providing vital lifelines to the community over-stretched and under-resourced. CWF also heard that voluntary and community sector partners are well placed to support survivors. Past experiences of public services, in particular for survivors from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds and LGBTQ+ victims who face additional barriers to report domestic violence and abuse, mean that the Council is often not best placed to provide support. Voluntary and community sector partners play an important role in supporting domestic abuse victims and preventing victims from needing statutory services.

Recommendations

We propose the establishment of a Violence Against Girls and Women Board and dedicated work on developing a local evidence base around domestic abuse, and a standing item on disproportionality and intersectionality.

We recommend that Camden Council supports voluntary and community sector services that provide support for domestic violence and abuse victims. The Council has a key role to play in exploring and supporting the resilience and capacity of the system.

Looking at domestic abuse through an intersectional lens, it's important to remember that not all domestic abuse victims will want to disclose their domestic abuse to the Council. Many victims will prefer to reach out to specialist organisations that are both trusted and visible in their communities, and have specialist understanding of the cultural barriers faced in disclosing and reporting domestic violence and abuse. For example, if domestic abuse victims from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds distrust the police as a consequence of previous negative experiences, local specialist organisations are best placed to offer tailored and specialist support that can best support victims.

5. As a victim/survivor, I feel listened to, believed and supported by services.

“Even when they see a domestic abuse survivor, they don’t care for us as human beings... you are treated as a burden on society.”

Camden domestic abuse survivor

Survivors of domestic abuse told us about the need for “human touch and more understanding” from public services, with experiences of not feeling believed or supported. Survivors wanted to understand more clearly how to complain if the response they receive is not satisfactory.

Survivors of domestic abuse told us that housing was the biggest barrier that they faced. Survivors

in all types of accommodation – refuges, temporary accommodation, social housing or private rented and owner-occupied housing – talked about the challenges they experienced. One survivor explained that “in a refuge... you are treated as a burden on society”, whilst another explained “there isn’t a proper category if you’re in a refuge – you’re not a priority if you’re not living with an abuser”. One survivor in temporary accommodation said: “I do four hours commuting everyday – my son does two hours commuting every day. He is sleeping on the bus, this is really overwhelming.”

When speaking to the HOPE Survivors Group on housing, there was also a disparity of experience in the group. People in the group had a different experience of housing as a victim or survivor depending on their race. Currently, the data available on housing and domestic abuse is limited, and doesn’t provide an analysis of different housing pathways available to domestic abuse victims broken down by equalities. Our inquiry has brought together some data on domestic abuse and housing, for instance highlighting that 4% of homelessness applications in Camden are due to domestic abuse, and that those in council-owned social housing were overrepresented at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) compared to other housing groups, but it will be key to explore this further in more detail.

Survivors also told us about the importance of specialist domestic violence and abuse counselling and therapeutic services to help them overcome their abuse.

Recommendations

We recommend specialist domestic violence and abuse therapeutic services to help survivors recover from their abuse.

We recommend a detailed piece of data, insight and lived experience work looking at housing and domestic abuse, and broken down by the nine protected characteristics. This would allow for a detailed understanding of the experiences of Camden’s domestic abuse victims.

We heard about the work that the Council has done on publishing a Housing Domestic Violence and Abuse policy and procedure. The procedure is a major step report and provides guidance to staff to help ensure that when a survivor living in a council home contacts the Council, they feel supported and receive a joined-up, seamless service. The policy and procedure is accompanied by additional bespoke training for housing staff – this will standardise the approach that domestic abuse survivors receive from housing services and better equip staff to deal with this complex issue.

The Council's Domestic Violence and Abuse Action Plan published in March 2021 also outlines an action to undertake Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation (DAHA), but this has not happened at the time of writing this report in October 2021. We heard from a representative from DAHA who outlined how to take part in the accreditation. DAHA is a national partnership between three agencies – Peabody, Gentoo and Standing Together Against Domestic Violence, and aim to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through an established set of standards and an accreditation process.

We heard a disparity between the experiences of survivors of domestic abuse, and the policy and work that the Council is doing. An accreditation process would allow some of these issues to be explored in more detail, ensure that Camden residents are receiving a good service, and allowing the good work which Camden is doing in this space to be recognised. This gives the opportunity for the Council to ensure that survivors are at the heart of its approach as a local authority to domestic violence and abuse. This will be a learning and development exercise and an opportunity to ensure that services and processes are fit for purpose. It would provide assurance to members, survivors and the wider community about consistent standards and services that victims of domestic abuse can expect within Camden.

We recommend that Camden Council undertakes the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation and funds a dedicated post to take this work forward to ensure that it is embedded across the organisation.

It is vital that when a domestic abuse victim discloses their abuse to a professional that they receive the right response, so they can get the support they need. National evidence shows that 85% of victims sought help on average five times from professionals in the year before they got effective help.¹⁹ As part of the Council's DVA Action Plan, there is a commitment to training staff around domestic abuse. This has been taking place with Camden Safety Net staff delivering training sessions to staff across the organisation and an online e-learning module, however at the time of the report, take up has been relatively low across the board. This is why mandatory training on domestic abuse is important.

CWF members also reflected that when thinking about domestic abuse and housing "refuge is not the solution". This acknowledges that a response to housing and domestic abuse needs a wide variety of housing solutions.

The Council has also launched a staff domestic abuse policy, which outlines support for staff who experience domestic abuse., but this should go further by introducing training for all staff. Domestic abuse training to increase awareness of domestic abuse is also important from a staff perspective so that managers and colleagues can spot the signs of domestic abuse and offer the right support to colleagues.

¹⁹ Safe Lives, 'Getting it right first time', 2015 (safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Getting%20it%20right%20first%20time%20-%20complete%20report.pdf)

We recommend that this training should go further, and the e-learning on domestic abuse mandatory for all Camden Council staff to ensure that staff at all levels and parts of the organisation are able to identify and respond to domestic abuse.

We also heard from Solace Women's Aid about innovative approaches to domestic abuse and housing happening in other boroughs. Housing First was one example of this, where domestic abuse victims were given housing along with wider interventions and support to help them recover and thrive from their abuse.

Within Camden, empty council housing properties were used during the pandemic as temporary accommodation for domestic abuse victims. Furnishing housing voids and utilising them as temporary accommodation was more cost-effective for the local authority and received positive feedback from domestic abuse victims who utilised the scheme. We recommend exploring this in more detail.

There was a strong sense from the survivors of domestic abuse that housing was the biggest barrier they faced, and that the Council had the ability to change when it came to its own housing stock. We heard how the Council's Housing Allocations policy currently uses language around fleeing severe domestic abuse, which acts as a barrier for many domestic abuse victims seeking help. We also heard that there are many cases where a domestic abuse victim leaves their abusive relationship to stay with friends or family, and then are not considered homeless because they have been sofa surfing. Leaving an abusive relationship is when the victim is at highest risk and victims will have different stories, journeys and interactions through public services. It is key that the Council's core policies and services allow for this variety in experience.

We recommend more in-borough temporary accommodation for domestic abuse victims and a commitment to change Camden Council's housing allocation policy to make sure that all victims of domestic abuse, both those currently living with their abusive partner and those who are sofa surfing are supported.



6. As a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, I only have to tell my story once and can access specialist support.

“You’re telling your story every time. They bring out the same questions – it’s exhausting to do then just to be left alone.”

Camden domestic abuse survivor

Survivors of domestic abuse told us about the huge positive impact that Camden Safety Net had on their recovery. Comments included, “Camden Safety Net were critical to guide me through the process” and that Camden Safety Net “were safe, they were there for me and wearing my shoes”. One survivor also said: “I think I would’ve killed myself without Camden Safety Net.”

Survivors also talked about the role which schools played in offering them support. One said: “My son’s school have been a huge support.”

We also heard from police colleagues about the challenges with survivors of domestic abuse who were going through a traumatic time feeling like they were receiving too many phone calls. We heard from schools about how they deal with survivors of domestic violence and abuse on a daily basis. One school talked about a particular case where they were not aware that a mother and a child were staying in a refuge until they saw their address was a PO Box. Schools have good relationships with parents and are well placed to offer support to domestic abuse victims.

We recommend working with schools to improve both data sharing around domestic abuse victims, and schools’ knowledge of specialist domestic abuse support, in order to improve the response received by domestic abuse survivors.

Operation Encompass takes place within the police – schools receive notifications that a child (under 18) has been exposed to, or involved in any domestic abuse incident, normally within the next school day.

There is an ongoing issue with police and referrals to Camden Safety Net. This is no longer possible. Prior to GDPR legislation coming in, all police referrals were automatically referred into Camden Safety Net for specialist support. Despite discussions on this for a number of years, no progress has been made and police referrals to Camden Safety Net remain low.

The work Camden Council has undertaken on setting up a multi-disciplinary team to deal with domestic abuse cases within council housing stock is a key example of working in a way that brings services together so survivors don’t have to repeat their stories.

Survivors told us that they wanted to only tell their story once. Survivors expressed some scepticism about data sharing, and the need to do this with complete sensitivity.

We recommend improving data sharing across partners, in particular with police, Camden Council and schools to ensure that domestic abuse victims receive the support that they need and only have to tell their story once to be referred into support. This will require multi-agency working.

7. As a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, I know that perpetrators, including young perpetrators, of domestic abuse have the opportunity to change their behaviour.

“You need to get survivors to sit down with the key people, we need change. People need the change to happen and need to hear from those who are going through the system.”

Camden domestic abuse survivor

Survivors have told us that their perpetrators are often offered services that are not appropriate to address their domestic abuse. For example, one survivor talked about how her perpetrator was given “anger management courses by his GP” and how this wasn’t appropriate for domestic abuse because it did not acknowledge his abusive behaviour.

We also heard that Camden Council’s approach

to perpetrators of domestic abuse is currently underdeveloped. There is a lack of overall co-ordinated strategy or a specialist perpetrator programme that helps perpetrators of domestic abuse to change their behaviour. Although there are examples of programmes that do work with perpetrators, for instance Caring Dads within Children’s Social Care, these are not behaviour change programmes that offer perpetrators the opportunity to change their behaviour. There is also data that suggests over a quarter of domestic abuse perpetrators heard at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) are serial perpetrators. This highlights how important it is to track down and work with perpetrators to change their behaviours.

Crucially, national evidence from the Mirabal report, a multi-site evaluation of Domestic Violence and abuse perpetrator programmes found that the majority of perpetrators not only reduced but ended physical and sexual violence towards women. This highlights the value that perpetrator programmes can have in reducing abuse.

Camden Council’s frontline specialist domestic abuse service, Camden Safety Net, and services in neighbouring boroughs, have seen an increase in adolescent on parent violence. There also is a lack of support services available for this cohort. Working with young perpetrators of provides the opportunity to break the cycle of domestic abuse and prevent domestic abuse in the longer term. Work with perpetrators around domestic abuse is an area that Camden Council are new to and do not have a strong understanding of. Our inquiry has identified perpetrator work as a gap, but it has not identified clear solutions of how we need to address this. The first step in this work needs to be ensuring that we are clear on our ambition, and how to build up expertise in the organisation so that staff on the frontline feel able to both recognise and respond to perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Recommendations

We recommend that Camden develops an approach to, and commissions services for perpetrators that includes dedicated provision for young perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is part of a wider culture of violence against women and girls that is linked to misogyny. Tackling misogyny and violence against women and girls early is crucial, especially in young perpetrators of domestic abuse, to stop further violence.

²⁰ Mirabal Project (projectmirabal.co.uk)

We recommend that Camden develops an approach to tackle abuse and attitudes, which takes into account the modern pressures of harmful social media on young people, and establish a campaign to promote men as champions of change (Bold text)

Violence against women and girls has existed for millennium, however we have heard from practitioners that the new pressures of social media can heavily influence and pressurise young boys to conform to a hyper masculine images and stereotypes and for young girls to conform to hypersexualised stereotypes also. This is made worse by easy access to pornography which distorts perceptions towards health relationship and sex.

Many children also carry around the trauma of the abuse they have seen and experienced at first hand in their own homes. This can impact negatively on their behaviour in schools and educational outcomes. It can also affect their longer-term attitudes.

We recommend that Camden develops a new approach to tackling this cycle, taking into account the modern pressures of harmful social media on young people. It is recommended that tackling attitudes and behaviours in young boys is discussed as part of the VAWG Board”

The case for investment in tackling domestic violence and abuse

Survivors of domestic abuse have told us that they want to be part of an inquiry that makes a change – they have reported that they have already been involved in reviews that have not changed things. They want to ensure that things are different in the future for survivors of domestic abuse within Camden.

Domestic violence and abuse also have a huge cost implication for Camden Council and partner services, such as health and police colleagues. The economic and social costs of domestic abuse are £66 billion per year in England and Wales.²¹

The cost of domestic abuse to local authorities across the country is huge. Research by the Local Government Association and Safer Portsmouth Partnership on the direct cost to council services of domestic abuse found that for a population of 209,100, the cost of domestic abuse is £2,506,288 per year. Camden, with a population of over 262,000, meaning the cost is likely to be higher. The costs in the Portsmouth research include:²²

- Fiscal cost to housing - £555,830 per year
- Fiscal cost to children’s social care - £975,229 per year
- Fiscal cost to adult social care - £975,229 p/a £2,506,288 per year

This means that the total estimated cost of domestic abuse over a five-year period is £12,531,440. Research by Women’s Aid, as part of their Change that Lasts approach, has shown that the potential journey of a survivor where intervention takes place at a late stage can be as much as £5 million for one family, compared to £78,235 when early intervention happens.²³

²¹ Home Office, ‘The economic and social costs of domestic abuse’, 2019 (assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf)

²² Safer Portsmouth Partnership and Local Government Association (lga.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s10965/LGA%20Costs%20of%20Domestic%20Abuse%20ANON.pdf)

²³ Women’s Aid, ‘Change That Lasts’ (womensaid.org.uk/our-approach-change-that-lasts)

²⁴ ONS, Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview, November 2020 ([ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Crime%20Survey,last%20year%20\(Figure%201\).&text=Of%20these%2C%2041%25%20\(529%2C077,subsequently%20recorded%20as%20a%20crime\)](https://ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Crime%20Survey,last%20year%20(Figure%201).&text=Of%20these%2C%2041%25%20(529%2C077,subsequently%20recorded%20as%20a%20crime)))

Financial implications

As the national research demonstrates, domestic abuse has significant costs for Camden. The Crime Survey of England and Wales estimates that 5.5% of adults experience domestic abuse annually – this suggests that an estimated 13,000 residents in Camden experience domestic abuse each year.²⁴ Although we do not have exact data on the prevalence of domestic abuse within Camden, we know that it affects a large number of Camden residents, with wide-ranging impacts for the victim, and consequently will have a huge financial impact on public services within Camden.

There is more work to be done to understand how much domestic abuse costs the system in Camden. Some of these costs are direct service provision, such as the Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence service provided by Camden Safety Net, and some of this is indirect such as domestic abuse victims approaching housing and homelessness services. Within police, health, social care, housing, community safety and wider community and voluntary services, domestic abuse has costs for frontline services every day.

Domestic abuse is also hidden – it may be a presenting factor when residents approach services, but in as many cases it will not be. Those who approach Camden Council's housing or homelessness teams for instance may disclose their domestic abuse, but they may not. Those who speak to council tax debt teams may disclose their financial abuse and wider domestic abuse, but they may not. This is key for us to bear in mind – it will be hard for us to fully capture the costs of domestic violence and abuse to the Council because of its unreported nature.

We know that domestic abuse is a significantly underfunded area nationally, with specialist domestic abuse services across the country struggling to cope with increases in demands and cuts to funding. We know that we need to invest to create change, and we know that given the costs of domestic abuse, additional investment will pay for itself.

Our early estimate of the costs of the recommendations to strengthen our approach to domestic violence and abuse is roughly £400,000 of additional investment per year. There is more work to be needed around what further investment may be required based on data, insight and learning from current and proposed interventions.

Recommendations summary

The framing of our recommendations as survivor outcomes is important to ensure that our collective focus around the system is around supporting survivors of domestic abuse.

Camden Council resource implication (staff time):

- Including survivor stories on the Camden Safety Net website
- Targeted sponsored social media adverts pilot to increase reporting of domestic abuse
- Establishment of a Violence Against Women and Girls Board co-chaired by somebody with lived experience
- Mandatory domestic abuse e-learning training for Camden Council staff
- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation
- Further data on equalities and domestic abuse + Housing
- Changes to housing allocations policy around domestic abuse
- More temporary accommodation in borough for domestic abuse victims
- Improved data sharing with schools and police

- Ensuring children are at the centre for any response to domestic abuse (enabling support for child, support for primary carer to support the child and support for schools to support child)

Resource implication (direct funding) for Camden Council:

- Funding a commissioned legal offer to offer free legal advice to domestic abuse victims
- Dedicated specialist domestic abuse programmes for children
- Dedicated resource for Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Violence Against Women and Girls Board
- Commissioned programmes for perpetrators of domestic abuse
- Financial support for voluntary sector partners providing support to domestic violence and abuse victims

Wider:

- Camden Council to campaign for national reforms to criminal justice system

Monitoring the recommendations

A clear governance process is essential around Camden Council's decision to implement these recommendations and that the Council is accountable to survivors of domestic abuse. It is also crucial that the implementation is followed up by an assessment of impact, which will be based on both lived experience and data and evidence, collected and analysed by the Council.

It is suggested that the Council's newly established Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) Directors' Group has oversight of the process around these recommendations. This includes both which recommendations the Council takes on board and when, and also oversight for those recommendations that are implemented. As Camden Women's Forum is a partnership forum, and a response to domestic abuse requires a partnership approach. The Violence Against Women and Girls Board that Camden Women's Forum recommends establishing should also play a key role in measuring impact and providing oversight of these recommendations to make sure that partners are an important part of the response.

It is proposed that a 'One Year On' report should be published during the 16 days of activism annually between 2022 and 2024 – this would provide a space for reflection on what has changed, and what the barriers are for creating further change around domestic violence and abuse and ensure there is momentum across Camden Women's Forum, Camden Council, Forum and partners to tackle domestic violence and abuse.

