

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Housing's response to domestic abuse: update on progress	
REPORT OF Director of Housing	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Housing Scrutiny Committee	DATE 22 nd February 2024
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>This report provides an update to Housing Scrutiny on the work to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation and work to embed a housing-led response to domestic abuse across Camden.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>The following documents have been used in the preparation of this report:</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Caroline Bialobrzycka, VAWG Principal Policy & Projects Officer 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG caroline.bialobrzycka@camden.gov.uk </p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS <p>That the Committee notes and comments on the issues set out in the report</p>	

Signed: 

Date: 13th February 2024

1. Purpose of Report (and Reason for Urgency)

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Housing Scrutiny Committee on work to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation and to embed a housing-led response to domestic abuse across Camden. Specifically, the report seeks oversight and scrutiny of the work to co-create a resident-facing Housing and domestic abuse policy and to deliver new domestic abuse procedures for Neighbourhoods and Homelessness services.

2. Strategic Context: the Council's commitment to tackling Violence Against Women and Girls

- 2.1 The Council has a longstanding commitment to preventing and tackling domestic violence and abuse in Camden. The Council continues to invest in a dedicated, in-house Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocate service, Camden Safety Net. Camden's Domestic Abuse Policy statement in January 2020 was developed in recognition of the need to go beyond this investment and to do more to ensure domestic abuse survivors are supported in a more co-ordinated and collaborative way when they have contact with the Council and its partners.
- 2.2 In December 2021, Cabinet approved an additional £400,000 per year of investment into Violence Against Women and Girls to implement the recommendations of Camden Women's Forum's Inquiry into Domestic Violence and Abuse. The additional investment includes undertaking Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and funding a dedicated post to take this work forward to ensure that it is embedded across the organisation. Investment also covers free legal service for survivors of domestic abuse, the creation of a Perpetrator Lead role to develop the Council's response in this area, the establishment of a partnership VAWG Board chaired by the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, with a dedicated post to manage the Board.
- 2.3 In March 2022, the Council published We Make Camden, the Council's community vision for the future of the Borough. This set out the key issues and challenges facing our residents and the work the Council intends to do to make Camden a fairer and more equal place. 'Safety at Home and in the Community' is one of the ten missions and challenges within this change agenda, with tackling Violence against Women and Girls a prioritised work area.
- 2.4 In January 2023, Cabinet endorsed Camden's Theory of Change approach and the pillars underpinning our work:
- Pillar 1 – **Raise awareness** and break the stigma across all parts of the community
 - Pillar 2 – **Identify** everyone affected by VAWG at the earliest opportunity
 - Pillar 3 – **Support** those affected by VAWG to access the help they need to be safe

- Pillar 4 – Seek to take action to **change and stop the behaviour of offenders** and the conditions that enable them to offend
- Pillar 5 – Women’s Safety in Public Realm and Partnerships

2.5 Cabinet also endorsed the Council’s overall vision statement: “Camden is a place where Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is unacceptable and not tolerated. We want to reduce levels of VAWG in Camden, to broaden, enrich and increase the levels of support to survivors of VAWG and their families, and to deal with perpetrators”.

3. Context and background: domestic abuse and housing

- 3.1 Domestic abuse is a high harm, high volume crime that remains largely hidden. It has a profoundly traumatic and disruptive impact on the lives of survivors, their families, and communities. While domestic abuse is not itself a specific criminal offence, criminal offences may be committed by perpetrators. Related offences could include but are not limited to controlling or coercive behaviour, harassment, stalking, criminal damage, physical assault, sexual assault, rape and murder.
- 3.2 Anyone can be affected by domestic abuse, regardless of age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief. However, national evidence shows that domestic abuse differentially and disproportionately impacts structurally marginalised communities, for example, disabled people experience disproportionately high rates of domestic abuse and experience domestic abuse that is more severe, more frequent and lasts for longer periods (Public Health England, 2015).
- 3.3 Domestic abuse is a highly gendered crime, which disproportionately affects women and people with minoritised gender-identities: the Crime Survey of England and Wales estimates that 1 in 5 women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Research from Stonewall has found that 80% of trans people in Scotland have experienced domestic abuse (Stonewall, 2018). The majority of domestic homicide victims are women.
- 3.4 Housing is a primary barrier for survivors attempting to leave abusive situations. According to figures by Safelives, over half of survivors need support to help them stay in their own home or move to new accommodation.
- 3.5 The links between domestic abuse and homelessness are clear: 1 in 5 women who have experienced violence become homeless, compared with just 1 percent of women who have not experienced violence (Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2021). 61% of homeless women and 16% of homeless men have experienced domestic abuse (APPG for Ending Homelessness, 2019), 52% of DA survivors need support to stay in their home or move to new accommodation (Safe Lives, 2019).
- 3.6 Concerningly, national and local evidence highlights that domestic abuse is not only a cause of homelessness, but also a consequence of homelessness. The University of York found that 51% of homeless women that they surveyed in Camden reported

that they had been subject to sexual violence or rape (University of York, 2021). This stark data underscores the necessity of a housing-led response to domestic abuse.

- 3.7 Not only is DVA a challenge that impacts the lives of many individuals, but domestic violence and abuse has huge cost implications for the Council and partner services, including police and health services. Research into the cost of domestic violence and abuse estimates that domestic abuse costs £66 billion per year in various emotional, economic and social costs (based on research on annual costs in 2017).
- 3.8 Additionally, research by Women's Aid, as part of their 'Change that Lasts' approach, has shown that the costs of 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 an average of £78k when early intervention happens.

4. Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and progress

- 4.1 Our vision at Camden is to deliver exemplary Housing and Repairs Services that are proactive, responsive, relational, and empathetic. To achieve this, we are undertaking an extensive transformation of our housing and repairs services, in line with preparations for the new regulations for Social Housing. We are resolute in our mission to deliver a housing-led domestic abuse response, which prevents the re-traumatisation and the harm associated with homelessness through a robust, tightly coordinated and survivor-led support offer. Our journey to achieving DAHA accreditation is central to the transformation of Housing services.
- 4.2 DAHA accreditation is a best-practice approach, endorsed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, for how local authorities can respond to domestic abuse. This involves work across housing and repairs to develop an enhanced domestic abuse response. The accreditation framework includes 8 priority areas that considers an organisation's operations and delivers safe and effective interventions in domestic abuse:
- Policies & procedures
 - Publicity & awareness raising
 - Partnership & collaboration
 - Safety-led case management
 - Survivor led support
 - Intersectional & anti-racist support
 - Perpetrator accountability
 - Staff development & support
- 4.3 The accreditation process will review Camden's housing services, including:
- Homelessness prevention (Housing Solutions)
 - Landlord Services (Neighbourhoods)
 - Housing Allocations
 - Caretaking and repairs

- 4.4 The Council is undertaking a programme of work in order to achieve DAHA accreditation. This is a long-term commitment to bring about system change and improve how we identify and respond to domestic abuse. We are at the start of the journey to bring about lasting change and the areas of work set out below form part of our medium-term plan to achieve this:
- 4.5 Co-creating a **Housing Domestic Abuse policy** over a series of six workshops with a small group of women with lived experience of domestic abuse and housing insecurity/homelessness. In preparation for this policy, we undertook over forty hours of interviews with people with lived experience of domestic abuse and homelessness, and with core strategic partners. The policy will clearly outline Camden's responsibilities, approach, and supportive offer. The policy will enable survivors to identify their rights and provide information on how support can be accessed.
- 4.6 **Revising and developing DVA procedures** so that survivors receive a consistent, trauma-informed response from Camden's Housing Solutions and Neighbourhoods teams and can rapidly access appropriate and tailored support. To support the development of these procedures, we undertook case reviews and audits of all live DVA cases open to our Neighbourhoods team and 46% open to the Homelessness prevention team in Q2 and 3 2023, whose main reason for making a homelessness approach was domestic abuse. This work was supported by comparative analysis with other core data sets, such as Allocations data and Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) data. The procedures will mean that officers have a clear framework for responding to DVA, managing risk with clear safeguarding, escalation, and case management processes. The procedures will ensure compliance with statute and policy, improve support to DVA survivors and as such create a reduction in complaints, delays, and unintended harm.
- 4.7 At end of January 2024, a **DVA "design sprint"** was held, bringing together subject matter experts and frontline officers from teams involved in the survivor's homelessness journey to make practical improvements to how we support DVA survivors making statutory homelessness approaches. We held workshops over a two-week period, for five full-working days in total. The "design sprint" formula provides a method for quickly understanding and addressing tricky or complex problems, with the goal to have one or more tangible solutions tested and ready to be embedded by the conclusion of the sprint.
- 4.8 Improvements include:
- the development of a DVA Universal Assessment Form, which integrates and collates the core information required by different Camden teams into one form, reducing the need for repeat assessment within a short period of time, which survivors report is traumatising and time consuming.
 - a DVA Housing Toolkit of resources for staff to enable them to provide survivors with comprehensive information about their rights and locally available support and
 - a dashboard to enable better monitoring of cases and risk management.

- 4.9 We are working with non-case holding staff such as caretaking and repairs, to develop a **Domestic Abuse 'Early Detector's' network**. This network will utilise the community expertise and unique access of these teams to improve identification and strengthen pathways into domestic abuse for residents. Having the network in place will mean that survivors can access support from officers who are closely embedded within communities and who are equipped with the skills to identify and respond to DVA in a safe and trauma-informed way.
- 4.10 Developing a **perpetrator intervention scheme and pathway** so that perpetrators of abuse are held to account for the abuse and harm with clear pathways into support and appropriate enforcement action taken. This approach aims to reduce risk and provide appropriate support to the survivor. It will mean that officers have access to specialist support and enforcement pathways and are able to seek specialist advice and input from qualified professionals. To support this, we are developing guidance for housing staff on working with perpetrators.
- 4.11 **Adapting and adopting case management systems that are DAHA compliant**, including capturing case histories, providing a chronology of interventions and events in order to reduce the need for survivors to repeat and revisit traumatic material. Officers will be able to access core risk and needs information. Case management systems will have functionality that clearly identifies, records, and flags essential DVA information to enable safe management of DVA cases. Survivors' data will be handled securely and safely with core risk information accessible to appropriate personnel, reducing the risk of non-compliant disclosures and near misses.
- 4.12 Case management systems will be supported by information-sharing protocols to ensure the survivor receives co-ordinated support from Camden and are not required to repeat re-traumatising information. Improved information sharing will enable effective multi-agency work.
- 4.13 **Embedding DVA expertise through an enhanced learning and development:** We are delivering specialist perpetrator training to 280 staff working across internal housing and social care teams and externally commissioned homelessness services. This includes all staff working within the Homelessness Prevention team, adult pathway, and rough sleeping pathways. The course, called 'Confidence in Complexity' covers effective identification of survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse within homelessness settings, understanding how to work with perpetrators without colluding or perpetuating harm and supporting the safety of the survivor.
- 4.14 We have also partnered with Solace Women's Aid Silver Project to deliver specialist domestic abuse training to all staff working within our Sheltered Housing teams, to increase their understanding of domestic abuse in women over 55 and enable them to identify abuse and secure the help and support they need.
- 4.15 In addition to this, we have strengthened practise-based learning opportunities. We have launched and embedded a weekly "Thinking Together" Domestic Abuse space for all Housing Solutions staff, for Officer's to bring live cases that they require assistance and advice around. Additionally, we have launched monthly bite-size

learning offers, covering themes including sessions on Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and DASH risk assessments, and safety-planning in the Christmas period. We have evaluated and adapted the Domestic Abuse Multi-disciplinary team: introducing a pre-screen offer to improve case preparation and have recruited a perpetrator specialist and specialist Navigator to our expert members who can be called upon to provide advice.

4.16 DVA points panel:

In Autumn 2023, we launched a 'domestic abuse points panel' for a three-month period on a test-and-learn basis, which comprises staff from our Housing Allocations and domestic abuse teams. The panel provides structure and due process and meets weekly to review applications made for 'Group D: Violence and Harassment' points under the Allocations Scheme 2018.

- 4.17 The panel was designed in response to a growing body of research that has found that assessments of abuse risks undertaken by professionals without DVA expertise, systematically results in an under-valuation of DVA risk factors, including the risk of domestic homicide. The panel responds to this risk by integrating domestic abuse expertise into the allocations process. To date, the panel has reviewed 51 cases and we are currently evaluating its effectiveness with a view to making improvements to the process.

5. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

- 5.1 As noted in section 2, in December 2021 the Council added £400,000 a year to its budgets to expand its work tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. The work described in this paper is either funded from this expanded budget or from existing service budgets elsewhere in the Council.

6. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 There are no legal comments

7. Environmental Implications

- 7.1 The proposals have no environmental impacts.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 There are no appendices to this report

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