

Scrutiny & Overview Committee – 26 March 2024

Feedback from Violence against Women & Girls themed Community meetings (2)

As part of its annual review of crime and disorder matters in Croydon, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee has chosen to include a deep dive on the work undertaken to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) across the borough. In order to inform this item, members of the Committee attended a VAWG themed community meeting held at Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) on 8 March. A meeting was held on 20 March to hear from community and voluntary organisations who are working to tackle violence against women and girls. The Committee will also be meeting with victims of violence on 25 March to learn from their own first hand experiences. This document summarises the feedback from those meetings.

Meeting with Victims and Survivors of Violence Against Women & Girls

On 25 March 2024, members of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee met with victims and survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls to hear their first hand experiences of the support received from statutory partners. The following is a summary of the feedback received.

One survivor described their experience of domestic abuse within a family setting and the lack of support provided. In particular, from schools either not picking up on the issues or maybe not feeling comfortable raising it. There was also a concern raised about healthcare professionals and whether there was enough cultural awareness to effectively support victims of domestic abuse. The Police had conducted a welfare check but had accepted the account of the perpetrator and it was never followed-up.

It was highlighted that there was an ongoing issue around the Winterborne Road entrance to Melfort Park in Thornton Heath, from large groups of men congregating and making it uncomfortable for women. This had been happening for over four years and had been report to the Police on approximately 80 occasions, but it had not yet been dealt with.

Another survivor described her experience of seeking temporary accomodation for her and her children when attempting to leave their ex-partner. At the time, as she had access to limited funds through a credit card, she was advised to book her own hotel accomodation and suggested that she try to work it out with her partner. This led to her returning home for two more years before finally leaving permanently.

Another survivor highlighted that the FJC had provided most of the support when leaving her ex-partner. However, there was a lack of support from social care who advised that it was her decision to leave marriage and insisted on giving the children to ex-partner, despite her being the primary care giver. Concern was raised about

the cultural perceptions of some staff working with social care and how this impacted upon the service provided.

There was a concern that professionals were relying on their personal opinions and background to inform their decision making, which meant that the level of support provided could vary from case to case. There was a need to ensure that all victims and survivors were provided with a consistent level of support and understood their rights.

Some of the survivors highlighted that they had been labelled as angry, often based on the word of the perpetrator. There was a concern that this had been based on preconceived cultural stereotypes and that the victims were not being listened to, particularly given the courage it took to reveal abuse. There needed to be a greater level of effort when investigating accounts given by perpetrators and not just accepting what was being said based on instinct.

There was a general view that authorities were not always as supportive of victims as would be expected, which may be deterring some victims from coming forward. Access to wider support, such as mental healthcare, was also a challenge which could prevent victims reporting abuse. It was agreed that a joined up approach to supporting victims and survivors was needed.