

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Lambeth Council Protecting Vulnerable Victims of Anti-Social Behaviour



PROBLEM :

In early 2010, Lambeth Council and Lambeth Police were beginning to recognise that their response to potentially high risk and vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour required a significant review following a case that had been highlighted by the borough's newly appointed Victims' Champion.



SOLUTION :

In the context of the serious case review into the tragic death of Fiona Pilkington and the subsequent recommendations, the timing and impetus were ripe to develop something innovative. In the months that followed, Lambeth Community Safety Service, together with the police, and colleagues in housing and adult social care, developed and implemented a dynamic three stage model to protect and support vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour. The project was coordinated by a newly created Victims' Safeguarding Analyst, whose role it was to pull pre-existing data and knowledge into one place, so that a multi-agency risk assessment case conference could instigate appropriate actions and hold a case manager to account.

BACKGROUND :

Lambeth already had a Victims' Advocate, based within Victim Support but funded via the council as part of the Neighbourhood Crime and Justice programme that the borough first became a part of in 2009. By early 2010, the Victims' Advocate was receiving referrals from a range of sources and one case in particular was a cause for concern.

Overall, there was a distinct lack of collaborative working. Each agency involved appeared to understand that

this family were suffering, yet this was allowed to continue for months. There wasn't a lead agency taking ownership to gain a resolution and each agency was waiting on another to enable the case to move forward. Once this case was escalated to a senior police officer, disclosures and support were given and the family's case was eventually put forward for an emergency housing transfer - this happened within three days of the intervention, yet had been a battle for months previously.

Clearly this was a major area for concern and neither the council nor the police were immune to the risks they faced as organisations. A risk assessment matrix was developed and agreed, which was a fairly unusual way of managing ASB risk at the time.

The critical turning point came when senior officers in the police and council (and critically within adult social care) offered their support and resources to developing a way to ensure better outcomes for cases such as this.

ACTIONS :

A three stage process was put in place to manage cases:

Stage One: Identification

A risk assessment matrix, which scored cases on the basis of history, vulnerability and support, was put in place to identify and assess vulnerable victims. Any agency (police, housing, adult social care, community safety etc) can refer cases.

High risk cases continue to the panel. Those scoring low and medium risk are referred back to partner agencies for action. These cases are then monitored and reviewed by the panel chair and analyst outside the formal process.

Stage Two: Multi agency information sharing

A case profile for high risk cases is prepared using information from community safety, victim support, the police, adult and children's social services, mental health, adult safeguarding, housing, registered social landlords, London Fire Brigade, and Transport for London.

The case profile includes a timeline of events/incidents/actions and relevant information about the case. By collating information in this way the Panel can bring together a holistic understanding of the case, and identify where any gaps lie.

Stage Three: The panel and case management

Cases are presented at a monthly panel attended by all relevant agencies to discuss key issues and agree a support and protection plan for the victim. The meeting is chaired by a senior council officer, with the support of the analyst.

One of the unique features of the panel is that individual case managers are appointed to each case and are charged with driving forward partnership action. Case managers are given the moral authority to co-ordinate agencies outside their own service in order to achieve positive outcomes for the victims.

Cases remain on the panel until they are resolved, or the risk is considered to have significantly reduced.

Keys to success:

- It is critical that the analyst is able to build rapport and trust in order to ensure that information is provided and profiled prior to the monthly panel.
- Individual case managers are appointed. Their job is to make the actions happen and they are the 'accountable lead'.

- Ensuring appropriate joint action is taken against the offender - the impact on victims has been used in court for ASBO hearings and possession action.

Replicating the Lambeth model

The VVASB Panel is sustainable and simple to roll-out to other councils. This can be achieved through the appointment of credible chair, and the recruitment of a Victims Safeguarding Analyst and a Victims' Advocate.

In addition to co-ordinating and collating information, the analyst will provide training to partnership agencies and will deliver presentations to relevant managers. These actions encouraging buy-in and help create a shared understanding.

The training programme is designed to be cyclical to ensure that the focus is never lost.

OUTCOMES : From July 2011 to July 2012

- 84 cases were identified and referred to the panel by partner agencies.
- 32 of those cases were assessed as high risk, and 73 per cent of them had been ongoing for over 12 months. However as soon as they entered the process they were resolved, on average, within three months.
- Significant mental health and social service interventions were initiated or increased in 17 of the 32 high risk cases. In at least four high risk cases the panel stopped serious harm to the victim, and in one case a suicide was prevented. In three cases, emergency housing status was granted for victims.
- Improved communication and a coordinated approach with victims is an important aspect of the work, and a number of victims have directly commented that the process has changed their lives for the better.
- Closer working between community safety/housing and mental health professionals. Decisions began to be made which took into account the impact of anti-social behaviour and not simply the mental health assessment of either a victim or perpetrator.
- Every case referred is offered the support of the dedicated Victims' Advocate. More than 70 per cent of victims accepted the support offered and felt that this contributed towards resolving the issues.

FUNDING :

Core funding of the Victims' Analyst position to sustain and further develop this work is considered to be critical in Lambeth. While it is possible to coordinate the process model from within existing resources, ensuring that you have the dedicated capacity to support the process, backed up by the Victims' Advocate, ensures we are able to provide the fullest service possible. Costs (including on-costs) are approx. £80,000 a year. A cost benefit analysis is due to be completed and more information as to the value for money this scheme represents will soon be available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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