

Women’s Equality Party

Unit3, 2 Tunstall Rd

Brixton, London, SW9 8BN

To: Mayor Ibrahim Dogus, and Councillors Jacquie Dyer and Mohammed Seedat

London Borough of Lambeth

Councillors Jacquie Dyer and Mohammed Seedat

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Cabinet Members for Jobs, Skills and Community Safety

20th May 2020

Dear Mayor Ibrahim Dogus, and Councillors Jacquie Dyer and Mohammed Seedat,

The ​Lambeth branch of the Women’s Equality Party (WE Lambeth) acknowledges and thanks Lambeth Council for the steps it has taken to address domestic abuse during the difficult Covid-19 lockdown period.

Unfortunately, the home is not a safe place for everyone. As Lambeth Council is aware, domestic abuse (DA) has increased during the Covid-19 lockdown, with a 50% increase of DA reports to the police.[[1]](#endnote-1) Relationships and situations that were already abusive have escalated due to increased isolation and victims being trapped with no escape from their abusers.

DA figures are predicted to increase once lockdown ends and victims try to break away from their abusers. With increasing loss of control, abusers often increase their levels of abuse. The abusive situation is also predicted to increase with the forthcoming financial recession following Covid-19.[[2]](#endnote-2)

WE Lambeth is extremely concerned for victims of DA those affected by Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the branch. WE Lambeth has outlined solutions that we would like Lambeth Council to enact.

**WE Lambeth requests that Lambeth Council coordinate a meeting with the MET Police and Lambeth’s DA and Refuge organisations to discuss:**

* **a short-term emergency Covid-19 response**
* **a longer-term VAWG and DA response to reduce episodes of violence and abuse**
* **a coordinated and tailored approach that benefits multiple demographic groups**

1. **Tailored VAWG campaigns and awareness raising**

Lambeth Council has tweeted[[3]](#endnote-3) about the increase in DA in Lambeth. The Council has also updated its website in light of Covid-19, capturing VAWG related information for Lambeth residents and practitioners.

WE Lambeth recognises Lambeth Council has already taken more action than many other local authorities and this is very encouraging.

In addition to the steps Lambeth Council have already adopted, WE Lambeth recommends the following:

* WE Lambeth endorses the Home Affairs Select Committee’s recommendation[[4]](#endnote-4) of a pro-active approach, “*Local authorities, as part of their action plans on domestic abuse, should ensure that local services are pursuing proactive outreach during lockdown, visiting families and households where there have been domestic abuse incidents in the past or where there are vulnerable children.”*
* WE Lambeth requests the Council utilise all their communication channels with regular and frequent messaging, directed and tailored to various demographic groups, residents and practitioners, including more regular and frequent Tweets and updates on VAWG in Lambeth’s newsletters and e-newsletters.
* WE Lambeth suggests developing a physical advertising campaign, such as posters. The Metropolitan Police, as part of its ongoing efforts to reach out to victims, has developed a poster which has been distributed to supermarkets and other location points, and we advocate taking up this practice across the borough.
* WE Lambeth requests the Council provides more specific information directed at those who are concerned about victims, offering advice on what steps they can take when they suspect a case of DA. It is estimated 40% of notifications to the police come from neighbours.[[5]](#endnote-5)
* WE Lambeth would also like the Council to offer guidance and support to local service providers and community groups to help them identify and respond appropriately to victims of DA who report abuse to them. WE Lambeth requests they receive targeted guidance and training to help recognise the signs of abuse, as not all women will acknowledge or share the abuse they suffer.

Retailers, NHS volunteers, neighbours and employers have the potential to be “eyes and ears” in the community as they are “more likely to be interacting with families” during the crisis.[[6]](#endnote-6)

This would build on the Council’s implemented training[[7]](#endnote-7) and the government’s ‘safe spaces’ campaign targeting pharmacies.

* Lambeth has the highest proportion of BAME victims of domestic abuse in London, at 40%.[[8]](#endnote-8) WE Lambeth request Lambeth engage and consult local BAME women to obtain their views on how best to coordinate and deliver tailored support and campaigns.
* Delivering DA support to deaf and disabled women requires a considered approach. WE Lambeth requests the Council engage and consult local deaf and disabled women to ensure a tailored and targeted approach is applied.
* WE Lambeth requests Lambeth engage with WE Lambeth, local DA and Refuge organisations and the MET Police, to develop an extensive post-lock down campaign to keep women and children safe. WE Lambeth urges Lambeth to expend this into longer-term prevention and support response.

1. **Urgent financial support to refuge services**

Refuges were already overstretched before we faced this unprecedented crisis. The government recently announced a financial boost to DA prevention and support.

* Lambeth has recently received ring-fenced funding of £98,100 for refuges. WE Lambeth are asking the Council to urgently release the additional funding to enable key support to be given to the increasing number of victims.
* WE Lambeth requests part of this funding this is ring-fenced to BAME, deaf and disability refuges and DA services.
* WE Lambeth request the additional funding continues beyond the Covid-19 period, to enable sustainable and long-term ring-fenced support for VAWG and DA organisations.
* WE Lambeth requests Lambeth Council engage with WE Lambeth, local DA and Refuge organisations and the MET Police to develop and implement a comprehensive 2021 – 2025 VAWG strategy.

1. **Release and coordinate emergency accommodation to services that need them**

Years of underfunding mean many domestic abuse support services are overstretched. Last year nearly two thirds of women who sought refuge spaces were turned away. Demand has increased during lockdown.

Lambeth Council reported in March 2019, there are 30 hotels, seven B&Bs/guesthouses and five visitor accommodation hostels in Lambeth.[[9]](#endnote-9) Lambeth also has records of empty council-owned homes. These can provide temporary and emergency accommodation. During lockdown these properties remain empty. WE Lambeth urges Lambeth to utilise these empty properties to provide temporary and emergency accommodation.

* WE Lambeth ask the Council to coordinate the release additional accommodation urgently to refuge services to ensure that no woman is turned away during this crisis. Surrey Refuge, for example, has increased the number of beds available to DA victims for a three month period during Covid, in response to increased numbers.
* WE Lambeth ask the Council to coordinate the release of additional accommodation to abortion clinics for their clients who require overnight accommodation. The increase in unwanted pregnancies and the closure of hotels during this Covid-period has left local abortion clinics struggling to provide accommodation.
* WE Lambeth requests a discussion with the Council around coordination of removing violent perpetrators, and to liaise with the Met Police over Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs). Domestic abuse action plans include provision for alternative temporary accommodation for perpetrators and apply DVPOs to keep victims safe.

The Council has introduced an emergency and temporary accommodation plan, which prioritises the homeless and those released from prisons. WE Lambeth request women fleeing violence and those needing overnight accommodation for abortions are also included in the Council’s plans and are guaranteed a place to stay.

1. **Support to migrant women with no recourse to public funds**

Migrant women with no recourse to public funds will be particularly vulnerable during this crisis, especially if they are or become victims of DA or violence.

Women who have an insecure immigration status are particularly vulnerable. Immigration status is a potent weapon of coercive control in the hands of perpetrators, who exploit women’s fears of deportation, destitution and imprisonment, to continue their abuse and prevent women from exiting abuse.

In particular, women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status and migrant women with insecure immigration status are not entitled to state financial assistance or support.

* WE Lambeth request the Council to ensure there is support for migrant women, and those with children, to self-isolate in safe conditions.
* WE Lambeth seeks to explore with the Council if there is an option of acting outside of the legislative framework to provide accommodation to migrant women with no recourse to public funds, an approach taken by other London councils.

WE Lambeth applauds Lambeth Council’s quick and responsive efforts to date on developing an emergency Covid-19 plan, which addresses critical issues such as DA and VAWG. WE Lambeth look forward to working with Lambeth Council to augment Lambeth’s approach.

WE Lambeth also look forward to Lambeth Council’s timely response.

Yours sincerely,

Leila and Korina

Leila Fazal GLA list candidate

Korina Holmes Lambeth and Southwark GLA consistency candidate

1. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm#footnote-072>; <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm#footnote-071> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/domestic-abuse-violence-lockdown-recession-uk-economy-police-a9502806.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For example, <https://twitter.com/lambeth_council/status/1248915382100004864> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Outlined in the recent report *Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (Coronavirus): domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home* [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm#footnote-073> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm#footnote-069>; <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm#footnote-068>; <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm#footnote-067> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. [www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Lambeth%20Council%20VAWG%20Training%20Programme%20May%202020%20-%20July%202020\_0.pdf](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Lambeth%20Council%20VAWG%20Training%20Programme%20May%202020%20-%20July%202020_0.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lambeth-vawg-report.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pl-lambeth-local-plan-2015-web.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)