




Victims' Voice Panel:
Empowering Survivors, Creating Change

Manchester City Council wants to know the untold stories and real experiences of survivors! Welcome to CAHN's Victims' Voice Panel, where survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse, along with dedicated professionals, come together each month to transform the support system for victims/survivors in our city.

Engaging in Powerful Conversations
A Safe Haven for Dialogue
Networking with individuals and organisations of diverse backgrounds

Visit our website: www.cahn.org.uk
Confidential helpline: 07710 022382 email: dvs@cahn.org.uk

#VictimsVoicePanel #CAHNdvs

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VICTIMS' VOICE PANEL MANCHESTER

Project Delivery Report

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Caribbean and African Health Network**

VICTIMS' VOICE PANEL MANCHESTER

Project Delivery Report

Contents	Page
1. Introduction	2
2. Contextual background	4
3. Methodology and Demographics A. Launch event B. International Women's Day C. Recruitment phase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Challenges faced during the recruitment process b) Recruitment outcomes 	5
4. The panel's monthly engagements	12
5. Thematic Feedback A. The Housing/Homelessness Provision B. The Police provision C. Children Services	14
6. Manchester City Council's response A. Homelessness Team B. GMP team C. Children Safeguarding team	20

7. Recommendations and next steps	25
8. Summary	27
9. Conclusion	27
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List of Abbreviations

CAHN	Caribbean and African Health Network
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DA	Domestic Abuse
DVSA	Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse
DCI	Detective Chief Inspector
LA	Local Authority
MCC	Manchester City Council
GMP	Greater Manchester Police
CSEW	Crime Survey for England and Wales
DVSA	Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

1. INTRODUCTION

“Domestic abuse is a serious issue, both nationally and here in Manchester. It has catastrophic and far-reaching consequences for the safety, health and wider life chances of victims, children, and families, and drives wider crises such as homelessness, mental ill health, and financial exclusion.

For too long, domestic abuse has been a hidden crime, surrounded by stigma, shame and guilt. Domestic abuse should be everyone’s business. In Manchester we continually strive to open up dialogue on the issue and respond to domestic abuse in a way which reflects our City’s values.

Throughout the past four years our Delivering Differently Strategy has shaped the response to domestic abuse in Manchester. We have embarked on the culture change required to influence the behaviours of organisations and future generations. Our interventions have become increasingly trauma informed, collaborative and co-designed.

Culture change is organic, however, and whilst good progress is being made on many fronts, we recognise that there is still more to do and much more to learn in our efforts to reduce the risk, harm and enduring effects of domestic abuse.

Our vision for this multi-agency strategy is to build further as a city-wide partnership on the work we began under Delivering Differently. First and foremost, we want to help and support victims, in crisis and into recovery. We also, however, need to challenge and change the behaviour of those who inflict abuse, hold them to account and focus on their behaviour, to help break the cycle and reduce the likelihood of further incidents.”

Councillor Joanna Midgley,

Manchester Community Safety Partnership Domestic Abuse Strategy (updated 2021)

https://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/5643/domestic_violence_strategy

In January 2023, CAHN was commissioned by Manchester City Council to run a Victims’ Voice panel with people with lived experience. This report presents the feedback from monthly sessions held with panellists as well as engaging discussions with Manchester City Council service provision officials.

The aim of the project is as follows:

- **Engage** with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse from different backgrounds to understand the gaps within the current service provision and gather feedback to help improve Manchester City council's services.
- **Collate** information to help inform future decision making and create an inclusive and user-friendly service at Manchester City Council.
- Gather **feedback** on how the Council tackles violence against women and girls across the partnership.

Following a thorough and successful panel recruitment process, we started with an initial brainstorming session with the aim of setting key priorities for upcoming discussions on current service provisions. The opportunity to let participants make that decision was key in reassuring them that their voices really do matter.

The data collected would be shared with MCC, in the hope of improving the quality of services provided to victims of domestic abuse in the City of Manchester.

Panel meetings were held monthly over Zoom. Most participants were with people with lived experiences or representing the victims they work with; other meetings included officials from the local authority.

Guest speakers:

Cllr Joanna Midgley	Deputy Leader Labour Councillor for Chorlton Park Ward, Executive Members Office, Manchester City Council
Delia Edwards (CMgr MCMI)	Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager, Community Safety Team, Manchester City Council
Candida Turner	Policy Specialist, Community Safety Team, Manchester City Council
Katie Parker	Project Manager in Commissioning, Homelessness Directorate, Manchester City Council
Damian Simpson	Detective Chief Inspector, Greater Manchester Police
Richard Struttman	Inspector, West Didsbury Police Station, Greater Manchester Police
Milli Meaghan-Smith	Service Lead, South Locality Service and Emergency Duty Service, Directorate Children and Families
Nicola Armstrong	Service Lead – North Duty and Assessment/ Advice and Guidance, Children and Families Directorate
Gemma Crook	Service Lead Central Duty and Assessment/Advice and Guidance Service, Directorate Children and Families
Vivienne Feeney	Team Manager, Housing Solutions Service, Manchester City Council

These key stakeholders were instrumental in answering questions previously raised during group discussions. Positive conversations were held around what works well and what needs improving within the current service provision, and consequently what would enhance the experience of victims of domestic abuse living in Manchester.

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Disclosure of personal experiences can sometimes be re-traumatising. Nevertheless, understanding a victim’s experience is key in designing the best support service. We are grateful to panel members who volunteered their time on this project.

A government publication states the following:

“The Domestic Abuse Act and wider action plan will help to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experience, safe in the knowledge that the justice system and other agencies will do everything they can both to protect and support them and their children and pursue their abuser.”

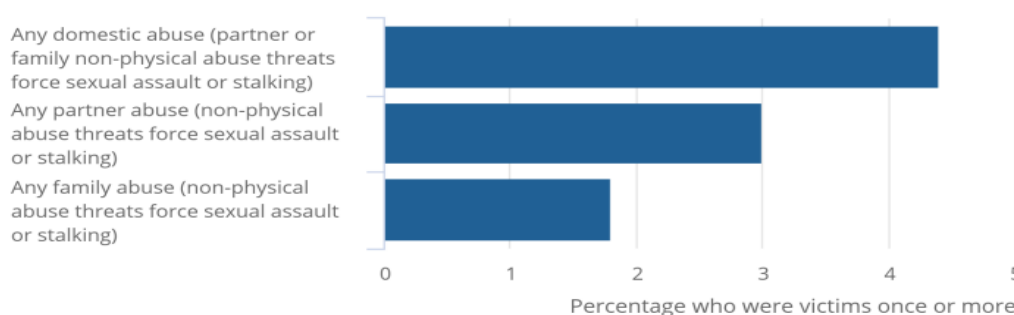
[Statutory definition of domestic abuse factsheet - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

The Manchester City Council Domestic Abuse Team is working relentlessly to ensure safe spaces are created for victims of Domestic Abuse.

Unlike many crimes, domestic abuse is often hidden, and consequently, not always reported to the police, making it difficult to highlight the real picture of such crimes. The COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately, did not help in bringing this data up to date. According to The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), there are approximately 2.1 million people between the age of 16 and over, who experienced some form of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023.

Figure 1: Approximately one in 25 people experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year, for people aged 16 years and over, by perpetrator-relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

Source: Article Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2023
This data from the CSEW includes everyone, regardless of the background and ethnicity.

3. Methodology

While working towards achieving significant outcomes for this project, we focused on:

- Reaching out to and engaging with victims from other backgrounds
- Setting up a Victims' Voice panel for people with lived experience
- Amplifying the voices of service users
- Collating information to help improve current service provisions and inform future decision making
- Contributing to the domestic abuse partnership board with either written or verbal updates
- Contributing to partnership engagements within the City of Manchester

Different activities were planned to raise awareness about his new project.

A. Launch event



The flyer features logos for Manchester City Council, Manchester Community Safety, and CAHN. The main title is "Victims' Voice" with the tagline "Love does not hurt! Valentine's Day Launch Event". It invites people to join in celebration of Love This Valentine's Day and provides details about the event, including the date (Tuesday, 14th February 2023), time (4-7pm), and a registration link. It also includes contact information and social media handles.

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL **Manchester Community Safety** **CAHN**
Caribbean & African Health Network

Victims' Voice

Love does not hurt!
Valentine's Day Launch Event

JOIN US IN CELEBRATION OF LOVE THIS VALENTINE'S DAY!

Do you want to help improve the domestic abuse services available in Manchester?
CAHN is working in collaboration with Manchester City Council to bring forward the voice of survivors from all communities.
Come and hear about our enhanced Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service that aims to be a beacon of light and establish healthy love.
Together let us empower survivors of Domestic Violence & Sexual Abuse!

What to expect: Keynote speakers | Testimonials | Food and more.

Date: Tuesday, 14th February 2023
Time: 4- 7pm
Location: Please scan the QR code or use the link below to register your interest and the location will be released.
<https://portal.cahn.org.uk/VictimsVoice>

Call us on 07909 167035
Email us for more information at: dvs@cahn.org.uk
www.cahn.org.uk #WeCAHNhelp

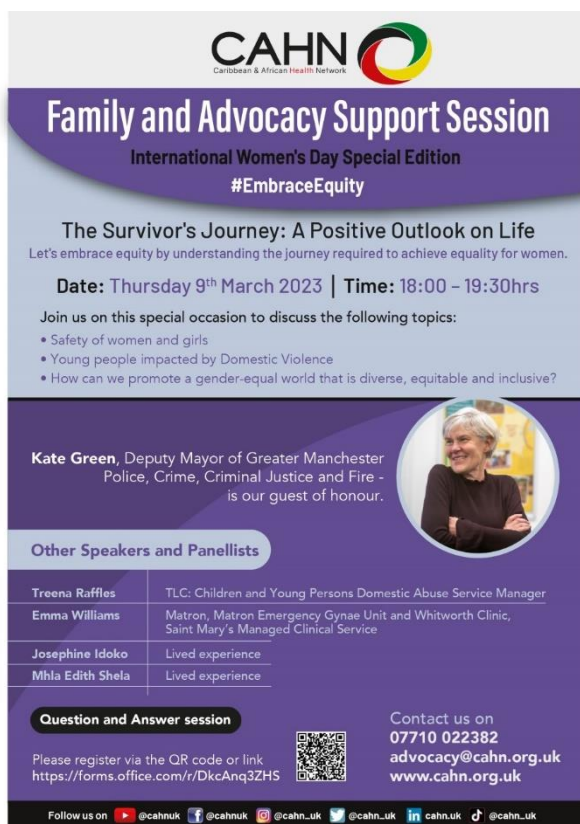
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On the 14th February 2023, an event was organised to launch the beginning of the Victims' Voice project. This was an in-person event with over 55 people attending: community members, Manchester City Council's representatives as well as Commissioners.

The event was an opportunity to share the "why" of this project and what the expected outcomes were. A communication strategy was developed to raise the project's profile via various social media streams.

Following a press release, with quotes from the CAHN's CEO Charles Kwaku-Odoi and Karina carter (Former Commissioner Manager at MCC), flyers were distributed at various locations and shared on various social media platforms in the hope of attracting the interest of potential panel members from diverse backgrounds.

B. International Women’s Day



CAHN
Caribbean & African Health Network

Family and Advocacy Support Session

International Women's Day Special Edition
#EmbraceEquity

The Survivor's Journey: A Positive Outlook on Life
Let's embrace equity by understanding the journey required to achieve equality for women.

Date: Thursday 9th March 2023 | **Time:** 18:00 – 19:30hrs

Join us on this special occasion to discuss the following topics:

- Safety of women and girls
- Young people impacted by Domestic Violence
- How can we promote a gender-equal world that is diverse, equitable and inclusive?

Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester Police, Crime, Criminal Justice and Fire - is our guest of honour.


Other Speakers and Panellists

Treena Raffles	TLC: Children and Young Persons Domestic Abuse Service Manager
Emma Williams	Matron, Matron Emergency Gynae Unit and Whitworth Clinic, Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service
Josephine Idoko	Lived experience
Mhla Edith Shela	Lived experience

Question and Answer session

Please register via the QR code or link
<https://forms.office.com/r/DkcAnq3ZHS>

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www.cahn.org.uk

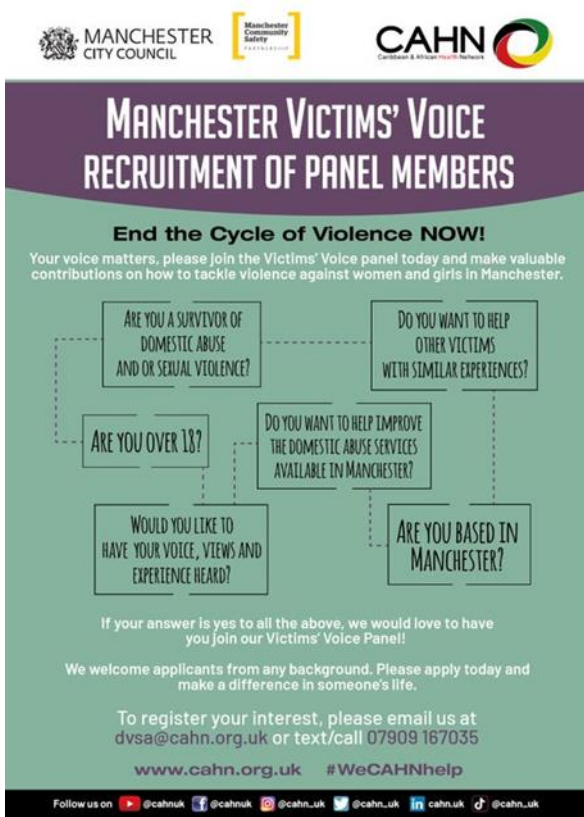
Follow us on 

On the 9th March 2023, as part of International Women’s Day, we organised a special event to discuss the safety of women and girls in Manchester. We were honoured to have, as keynote speaker, **Kate Green**, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester Police, Crime, Criminal Justice, and Fire, who shared the work being done by her team to make sure that women and girls are safe in Manchester

“The Survivor’s Journey: A Positive Outlook on Life,
Let’s embrace equity by understanding the journey required to achieve equality for women and girls.”

We also had a panel of speakers from the **Emergency Gynaecology Unit (Wythenshawe)**, **Talk Listen, Change** and a young survivor of sexual abuse.

C. Recruitment phase









MANCHESTER VICTIMS' VOICE
RECRUITMENT OF PANEL MEMBERS

End the Cycle of Violence NOW!
 Your voice matters, please join the Victims' Voice panel today and make valuable contributions on how to tackle violence against women and girls in Manchester.

ARE YOU A SURVIVOR OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE?
 DO YOU WANT TO HELP OTHER VICTIMS WITH SIMILAR EXPERIENCES?
 ARE YOU OVER 18?
 DO YOU WANT TO HELP IMPROVE THE DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES AVAILABLE IN MANCHESTER?
 WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE YOUR VOICE, VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE HEARD?
 ARE YOU BASED IN MANCHESTER?

If your answer is yes to all the above, we would love to have you join our Victims' Voice Panel!
 We welcome applicants from any background. Please apply today and make a difference in someone's life.

To register your interest, please email us at dvsa@cahn.org.uk or text/call 07909 167035
www.cahn.org.uk #WeCAHNhelp

Follow us on  @cahnuk  @cahnuk  @cahn_uk  @cahn_uk  cahn.uk  @cahn_uk

The launch event was a great way to gain people's attention in anticipation of our recruitment campaign. Our objective was to recruit 12 panel members from different backgrounds to engage on monthly discussions via zoom or face to face. As part of this campaign, we did the following:

- Developed a targeted advert in various communities
- Conducted desktop research
- Utilised strategic partners
- Followed up on key leads
- Received support from Manchester City Council in reaching other groups with protected characteristics

a) Challenges faced during the recruitment process

- Some survivors where slightly uncomfortable discussing such a sensitive topic openly
- Difficulty for victims to step out of their comfort zones
- Language barriers

- Slow responses from potential members or leads
- Survivors were concerned this may be another tick box exercise for the local authority
- Recruitment process took longer than expected, given the challenges mentioned above

b) Recruitment outcomes

We successfully received interest from 14 people (female and male) from different backgrounds:

- Chinese community
- LGBTQ community
- Black African community
- Asian Community
- Young people
- Polish community
- Black Caribbean community and
- Caucasian community
- Elderly person

D. Communication and social media engagement

Social media has become an increasingly vital tool for offering a cost-effective way to reach a wider audience, foster engagement, and achieve goals.

Throughout this project, we engaged with the panel's network effectively by creating impactful social media and sharing through the appropriate channels on key dates.

Thanks to this process, we were able to build a strong a strong social media presence that resonates with the residents of Manchester.

Target audience profile

Demographic: Residents of Manchester, UK

Age range: 18-65+

Other specifics: All genders, sexual orientations, and ethnicities – as anyone can be a victim of DVSA.

Psychographic:

- Individuals who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual assault, or who know someone who has.
- Those who are interested in social justice issues and supporting organisations.

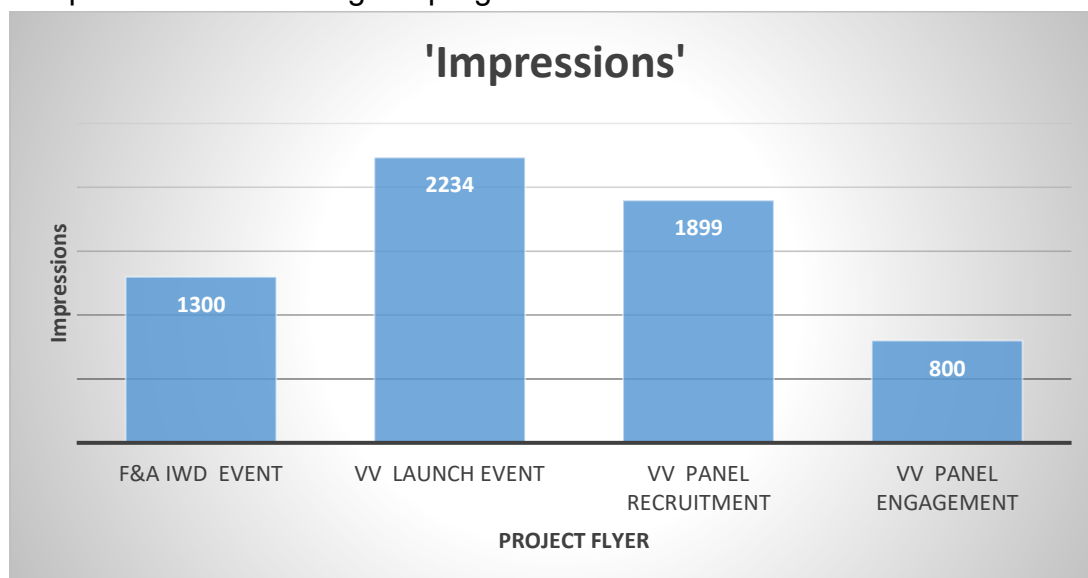
Behavioural:

- Individuals who are interested in attending community events.
- Individuals who are interested in understanding the Manchester City Council's initiatives.
- People who are willing to share their personal experiences and opinions in focus group discussions or online surveys.
- Individuals who are interested in contributing to positive change in their community.

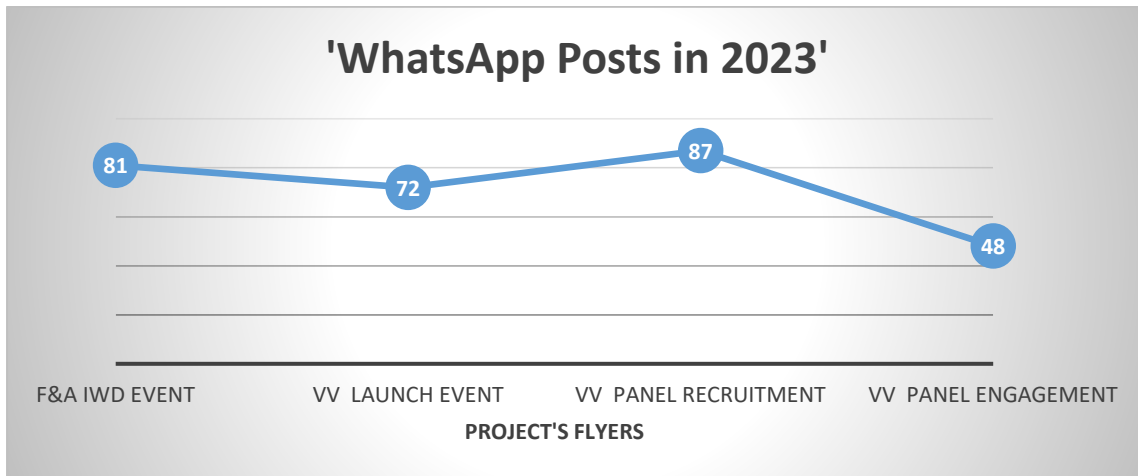
By understanding this target audience profile, we can tailor its messaging and outreach efforts to better connect with the people who are most likely to be interested in and benefit from its services. This can lead to increased engagement and participation, and ultimately, a greater impact on the community.

PROJECT FLYER	Impressions	Engagement rate	Repost	WhatsApp Posts in 2023
F&A IWD Special Event	1300	25	8	81
VV Launch Event	2234	133	25	72
VV Panel Recruitment	1899	279	17	87
VV Panel Engagement	800	129	12	48

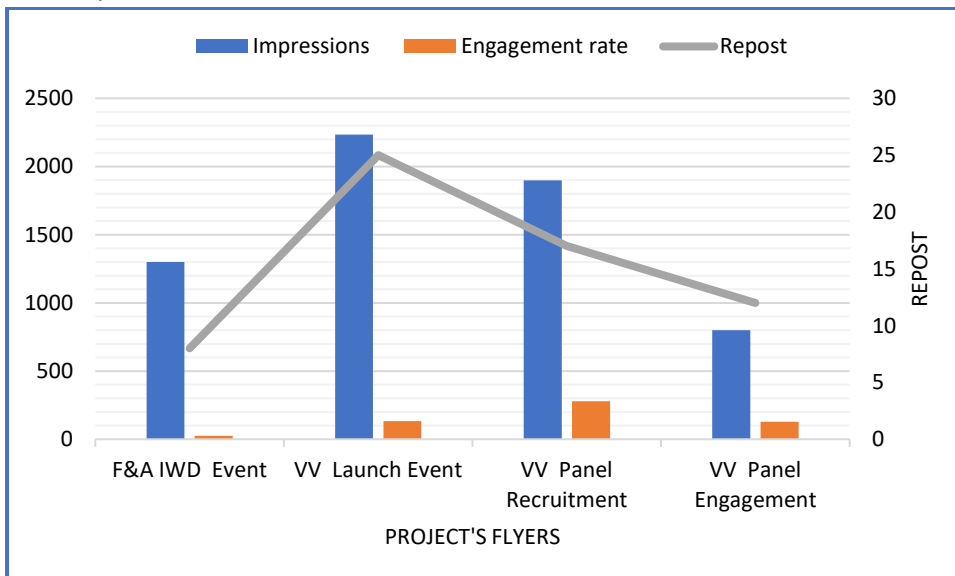
Social media analytics shows how the project captured people's attention at the inception while launching the programme.



CAHN runs over 15 community WhatsApp groups with a good engagement rate. Members in those group vary between 25 to 120 people per group.



The graph below shows that Impressions and Reposts are at their peak with people engaging with these flyers



4. THE PANEL'S MONTHLY ENGAGEMENTS



At the very first panel meeting, the Chair, Sandy Koujou, welcomed all panellists and thanked everyone for their time; she also acknowledged the project being commissioned by Manchester City Council to hear the voices of victims of domestic abuse and collect data which would then contribute to improving the current MCC service provisions.

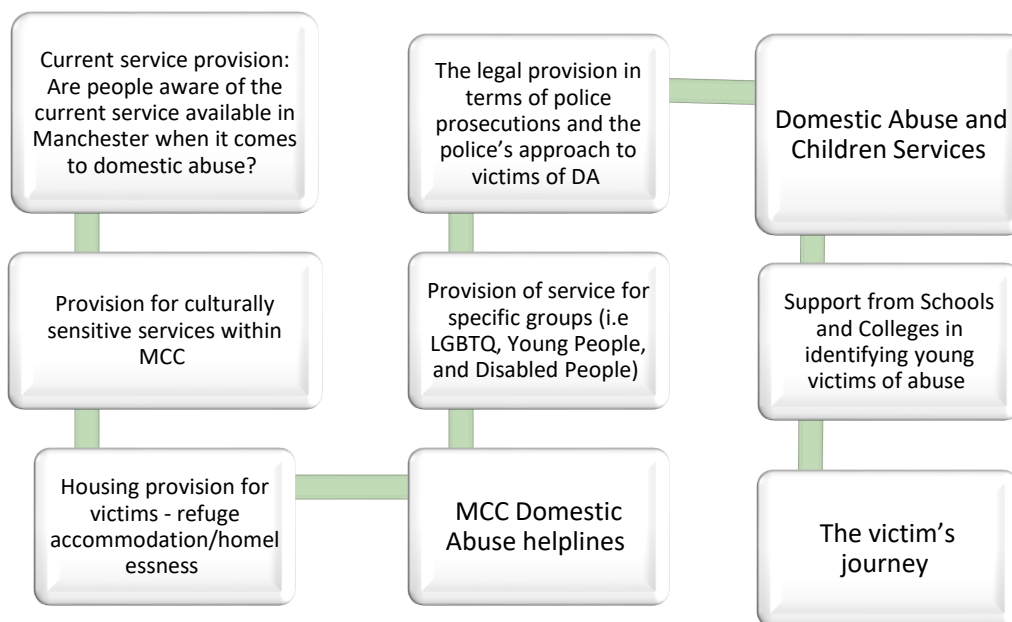
At this initial meeting all panellists introduced themselves, some were part of an organisation supporting victims of abuse as well as being victims themselves. They also shared why they were keen to take part in this project and were looking forward to engaging in these conversations.

This was a co-designed brainstorming session for participants to choose the priorities to be discussed. In addition to introducing themselves, CAHN, the hosting organisation, advised participants that the CAHN Counselling Service was available to all at no cost, given the sensitive nature of this engagement.

The Chair highlighted that the voice of victims was not often heard enough, and this platform was more than needed to share experiences from members of diverse communities. She mentioned the importance of listening to people and was delighted that Manchester City Council was taken a step forward in engaging with victims in the hope of shaping services and making contributions towards enhancing people's experiences in effectively accessing the services they needed the most.

From the programme’s inception, panellists were keen not to make this opportunity a ‘talking shop’, nor a tick box activity for the local authority. Manchester City Council reassured panel members of their commitments on this project and provided speakers from key services to engage with panellists throughout.

Key topics emerging from the brainstorming exercise:



Some feedback received at the early stage of engagement:

“That was a great first panel meeting well done and thank you for organising it. We’re looking forward to being there and represent the voice of our service users who are suffering from domestic abuse”

“I just wanted to thank you for inviting me to the meeting, I was nervous to do this but I’m so glad I did. Everyone is so kind and understanding and I’m looking forward to seeing what we can do together as a group”

5. THEMATIC FEEDBACK

A. Housing/Homelessness provision

What works well

- Knowing that support is available
- A safe place to go when in need
- Refuges or temporary accommodations are places where further support is available such as food parcels, clothes, other donations
- Great support received from caseworkers who understand the need of service users
- The provision available via Women's Aid where a different approach means rapport is built with Victims' provision of self-contained flat is also available
- Refuges/temporary accommodations aren't always as bad – many victims fear these environments because they know little of these spaces.

What needs improving

- Victims are often asked to relocate away from family and support network
- Co-owning a house with the perpetrator
 - Perpetrators with their names on the tenancy agreement have better chances of staying in the property while the victim moves out
 - Victims owning a property do not get enough housing support
- Understand rights related to property
 - Victims who are property owners or co-owners know very little about their rights
- Need for consistency in service provision
- Creating a training programme for first responders for victims of DVSA (how could help victims navigate the system)
- Effective signposting to other statutory and community trusted organisations (organisations within the VCS)
- A need to work collaboratively with specialist services
 - Specialist services dealing with people whose first language is not English
 - Specialist services dealing with various demographics: LGBTQ, Chinese, young people, Black and ethnic minorities people, Disable people, etc
- Unscrupulous private landlords – Effective regulation in the private housing sector
 - claiming more money for houses in poor conditions, (sometimes requesting more money from tenants)
- Temporary accommodations are not always a place of refuge

- No cooking facility – challenging for families with children
- Unsafe (drug use, not much security, etc)
- Unsafe and intimidating for young people
- Length of time is uncertain
- Little knowledge of what to expect in temporary accommodations or refuges
 - Victims' concerns seem not to matter much – it's usually the best option available and not an option of choice.
 - A need for professionals to thoroughly give an overview of the support available/not available
 - Victims usually have little knowledge of the benefits they are entitled to, especially if support is provided directly via private landlords.
- Lack of refuges for men and mental health challenges
 - Limited temporary accommodations available for men
 - High level of mental health cases in temporary accommodations - homeless people have little chances of accessing mental health services when in temporary accommodation.
- No recourse to Public Funds – this group of people are exposed to more vulnerabilities with little to no help available to them.

B. POLICE PROVISION

The police's response to domestic abuse victims was a topic of high interest given that most, if not all panellists have had dealings with the Police as part of their personal DA experience or while supporting a victim of DA. GMP representatives, DCI Damian Simpson, and Rick Struttman attended the engagement session held online.

What works well

- The Police Force is currently training staff members to handle DA cases effectively
- Some localities are well equipped to handle domestic abuse situations. A suggestion was made to learn good practices from other localities.
- A panellist shared about an immediate police response and adequate reassurance after being attended to. She mentioned:
 - *“My last experience with the police was impressively good; when my ex-husband incorrectly accused me, and called the police to relate our challenges in a way that portrayed me as the perpetrator, I eventually found the courage and an opportunity to walk into a police station to relay my own version of the facts. I asked to speak to an officer (a lady) who has had prior involvement in my case. I was well attended to by the police lady, and I was able to unburden for the first time after several years of abuse. She then explained what the next point of action would be; that was a reassuring experience for me”.*
- **Threat-to-life warning notice** – another participant mentioned that the police can issue a treat-to-life warning to keep the victim safe. This warning

is reassuring, especially for clients who fear any harm or repercussion from the perpetrator.

- Despite not seeing much change since being a victim over 40 years ago, an elderly participant stated that although the same issues are still prevalent, *she is “glad to see the police engagement with victims as the start of a change to come”*.
- Participants are delighted to have an opportunity to engage with the police and wish to see the great initiative carried over a long-term period. Engaging with service providers as issues are being discussed is an effective approach to improving the current service provision.

What could be improved

- **Lack of a unified and robust support system**
 - People with DA issues receive varying degrees of empathy from the police. Suggestions were made for the police to have a robust system, and a structure that was unified throughout the UK. The perception is that the support received depends on the individual police officer dealing with the case; as if individual officers have the ultimate power.
 - Processes not being well explained to victims by first responders or by the call centre triage team,
 - Several participants shared their personal experiences of domestic abuse and expressed their dissatisfaction about the police handling their cases. The concern was raised that victims are often left in a state of limbo and unaware of the support available to them during the period of the arrest of the perpetrator.
 - A panel member also brought up two recent cases involving domestic abuse and stalking, highlighting issues with police responses and procedures. In the first case, the victim was not updated on the progress of her case, and the officer handling the case before going on leave was not available to provide information, neither was any of her colleague.
 - Another elderly participant who experienced DA over 40 years ago, was disappointed to see that not much has changed in terms of effective support to victims, especially victims of minoritised communities, she called for a mindset change within the Force.
 - A case was shared where multiple officers were involved, leading to a lack of coordination and no holistic overview of the ongoing harassment. The participant also mentioned problems with communication and a breach of bail conditions that were not properly addressed by the police. The concerns raised indicated the need for better processes, officer accountability, enhanced evidence gathering process in harassment cases.

- **Cultural barriers**
 - Victims with language barriers receive a lesser empathy from the Force, especially when this weakness is used by the perpetrator to overturn the situation in their favour.
 - Participants also highlighted the cultural barriers and fear associated with reporting abuse, particularly for individuals from minoritized backgrounds.
 - The lack of trust and confidence from minoritised communities makes it difficult to report crimes linked to DA. People feel the due care and consideration may not be given to their cases.

- **Training**

Support officers to understand victims better regardless of their background.

- **Young people**
 - The perception of the police by young people reporting sexual abuse is that they are not taken seriously.
 - Poor responses when reporting sexual offences, hence creating a feeling of hopelessness, feeling isolated and unheard.
 - The importance of providing support alongside the investigation process for young victims, as well as the need for better communication.

- **Limitations with current statistics**
 - Panel members raised some concerns around the limitations of statistics on ethnic minority groups, emphasising that ethnicity alone does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the communities they work with. The Polish community for example, is not adequately represented in statistics due to the absence of separate categories for nationality. The invisibility of their community in statistics despite being one of the largest minority groups in the UK and Greater Manchester is a significant concern.
 - Statistics could be broken down to better understand different communities and groups (Sexual orientation, gender, female/male, etc).

- **Having possession of an adult's passport without their authorisation**

Some British citizens from minoritized communities, experiencing domestic abuse, may be encouraged by the perpetrator to travel to a known place (usually their country of origine), and then, left stranded abroad without their UK passport and against their will, with no idea of their return to the UK.

C. CHILDRENS SERVICES

What works well

- Social workers wield so much power when working with families and handle diverse cases with various complexities, which is commendable.
- Cultural competency is also important for non-British citizen who could learn about what is acceptable or not acceptable in the UK when it comes to parenting for example. Social workers do their very best to understand families from diverse backgrounds
- The local authority sometimes goes the extra mile to support vulnerable families
- Children are safeguarded and protected above all
- Efforts to Involve perpetrators in addressing and changing their attitudes and behaviours: the organisation "**Talk Listen Change**" runs programmes aimed at engaging perpetrators in behaviour change.

What needs improving

- **Challenges in Reporting and Response:**
 - Fear of children being removed by authorities following a DA incident
 - Shift of focus on children (only) when dealing with domestic violence cases.
- **Inadequate Support for Victims:**
 - Lack of emotional and mental support for victims dealing with the aftermath of domestic violence.
 - Insufficient communication and explanation from social services on the process
 - Absence of immediate safety measures or plans for victims, leaving them vulnerable.
- **Secondary Victimization:**
 - Systemic issues with victimising people further through processes that prioritise child safety without due consideration for the victim's well-being.
 - Concerns about social workers prioritising child safety at the expense of adult victims' needs.
- **Need for Transparent Procedures**
 - Participants seeking a more transparent process that adequately addresses both adult victims and child safety concerns.
 - Calls for improved communication from authorities to victims about their actions and plans.

- Separation from children: participants sharing instances where they felt forced to separate from their children due to circumstances related to domestic violence.
- Participants highlighting the importance of understanding legal processes and policies, so they are able to advocate for their rights.
- Discussion of systemic flaws that exacerbate trauma for victims and their families.
- **Communication, Cultural Dynamics, and Community Norms**
 - A less favourable immigration status means one might hesitate in reporting any abuse due to fears on how the incident may impact on their status and their children.
 - Cultural norms and community dynamics can impact on how abuse is perceived and reported.
 - Cultural norms and community acceptance may sometimes perpetuate abusive behaviour.
 - Cultural sensitivity and competency - the need for culturally sensitive approaches within support services to acknowledge diverse cultural backgrounds
 - Linguistic and cultural differences may create a lack of understanding, leading to misinterpretations and inappropriate actions being taken
 - Language barrier – limiting victims to express their thoughts effectively, even when an interpreter is used.
 - Assumptions based on cultural stereotypes
- **Perpetrator Involvement and Support**
 - Interventions and support programs aimed at changing perpetrators' behaviours.
 - Compulsory courses for perpetrators – increase their accountabilities with a Court Order
 - Highlighting initiatives like a men's social club to provide a supportive space for discussions and behaviour change.
- **Importance of Independent Support**
 - The need for an independent party or support structure for victims, separate from LA agencies – this is where organisations within the VCSE could make valuable contributions.
- **Mental Health Support**
 - Mental health needs of victims and the lack of language-specific therapeutic support available to address trauma and related issues.
- **Collaboration and Multi-Agency Approach**
 - Improved collaboration and communication among different agencies involved in handling cases of domestic violence.
 - Challenges arising from agencies closing cases without ongoing cross-agency coordination and learning.

- A collaborative approach means gaps in understanding groups with specific characteristics are covered – a comprehensive approach to safeguarding.
- Need for information sharing and collaboration
- The need for effective and safe information sharing between key agencies (i.e police, children services, adult safeguarding, homelessness, etc)
- Advocating for a central hub where data is shared, enabling agencies to track cases more effectively and enhance communication.
- **Community Organisations' Role:**
 - Community organisations play a crucial role in bridging the communication gap between different agencies and are key when liaising with victims who struggle to trust mainstream services.

6. Manchester City Council's response

These key points were discussed during an engagement session with the Local Authority.

These are the responses to some of the concerns raised above.

A. GMP Team

- The GMP representatives acknowledged the shortcomings in the past and emphasized the steps taken to improve the handling of domestic abuse cases. They mentioned the introduction of policies prioritising domestic abuse incidents and the allocation of resources to dedicated teams.
- They stated their commitment to treating all reports seriously and ensuring that victims are provided with support and information about the progress of their cases.
- There was an emphasis on the importance of cultural sensitivity and diversity within the Force to better understand and address the needs of victims from different backgrounds.
- They also acknowledged the significance of verbal abuse and its potential to cause severe emotional distress and mental health issues. GMP representatives mentioned new legislation addressing coercive and controlling behaviour and harassment as tools to prosecute such cases. They encouraged participants to provide specific cases for further examination, highlighting the importance of building a comprehensive picture of ongoing abuse to pursue appropriate legal actions.

- The police representatives acknowledged the challenges of prioritising cases due to the volume of crimes and emphasised on the need for uniform officers to prioritise cases of immediate risk. However, they acknowledged that victims often fall through the cracks and are not updated as frequently as desired. They mentioned the importance of better communication and explained the process of involving dedicated domestic abuse teams and districts tasking teams. They highlighted the need for Victims' assessments and regular updates to ensure effective support and protection. They mentioned the existence of domestic abuse policies and offered to provide them to panel members.
- They mentioned the difficulty faced by victims in cases where they are abandoned abroad by their perpetrators without a passport and mentioned that the involvement of immigration services at the airport could be of a great help. They offered to provide support and connect the participant with relevant resources to address this issue.
- Training challenges: They confirmed that frontline officers receive mandated domestic abuse training and mentioned ongoing efforts to improve awareness and culture within the Force. They also confirmed the existence of dedicated domestic abuse teams and the implementation of the SafeLives model to ensure better outcomes for victims.
- Support for children and young people affected by domestic abuse: The police representatives addressed the question, highlighting the recording of children as victims under the recent Domestic Abuse Act. They explained the operational complexed process, which involves obtaining the voice of the child and sharing information with schools and social care services. They also mentioned the existence of specialised child abuse investigation units to handle cases involving children.
- They cited ongoing efforts to improve the response and support for victims of sexual violence, with dedicated teams established across Police Forces. Apologies were offered for any negative experiences, and the police representatives emphasised the nationwide commitment to enhancing the support and investigation of sexual offences.
- GMP representatives confirmed the **Victims' Right Review (VRR)** is in place to support victims.
- GMP representatives also talked about the national project "**Operation Soteria Bluestone**" with a purpose of "**transforming the Investigation of Rape**" – *Operation Soteria Bluestone | College of Policing*.
- They also confirmed an increase of 44% in the securing of domestic abuse orders.

Evidence of a successful engagement with the panel

On the back of this engagement, the GMP representatives were presented with a current case where support was urgently needed. They immediately intervened which resulted in the victim receiving the appropriate support. This shows how a multi-agency collaboration, especially with community organisations, can be beneficial for victims of domestic abuse

B. Children's Safeguarding Team

- The LA expressed how this platform was a great opportunity to hear from service users.
- As much as they want to work with victims and survivors to create safety, they stated that prioritising children's safety was key for their service, which means that working well with parents and families leads to better safeguard children.
- The LA was disappointed to hear some concerns they thought were solved years ago.
- One of the LA officials, with a lived experience of Domestic Abuse, assured panellists that the current model looked at the support of DA victims and safety of children as a priority.
- There is now a change in language and more appropriate means of communication by social workers with families.
- Most social workers are passionate about their job and overall, work successfully with families and survivors to support them whenever possible
- The system has improved compared to previous methods of addressing DV issues, although there were also challenges with responses from criminal justice system, which adversely affect their work.
- However, from the victims' perspective, they agreed that there was still a lot of work to be done and was happy to understand how they could partner better with victims/survivors.
- Dealing with perpetrators has been proven to be more effective than the Court approach, the perpetrators were made to take sessions where they reflected on their behaviour and how they made their ex-partner and children feel, which have proven to be more effective than a restraining order.
- When asked about engaging more with service users, the Team responded that they were more than happy to attend any community meeting in the area to educate and correct the myth of social workers taking children away. They also noticed that unless their family or friends have had positive experiences, people sometimes have an incorrect perception of social workers' role.

- They also added that services/organisations represented on the Victims' Voice panel could do a great work in the community by raising awareness and support families to understand how the current safeguarding process work.
- They also commented on the awareness of cultural diversity in Manchester and MCC's efforts in recruiting social workers from different ethnicities, cultures, backgrounds, hence widening their understanding of cultural differences. They stated that it would be great to be more visible in different communities and were more than happy to be invited at engagement sessions (such as PCSO).
- The team agreed that language barrier was a key challenge; nevertheless, safety plans were written in different languages to ensure proper understanding and increase the family's confidence in the processes they are involved in. This was achieved by having translations from various agencies. However, they would take onboard the language issues mentioned and how the interpretation of processes to families are done.
- The MCC team emphasised on the need to be careful with information sharing, and not to share if consent had not been given. As such, due process must be followed to obtain consent from the victim/survivor to be sure they have agreed for their information to be shared.
- VCSE organisations are valuable in terms of a multi-agency approach towards tackling domestic abuse, addressing issues around cultural competences and other concerns. Working in a highly diverse city with over 200 languages, MCC, as an organisation, would not effectively deliver in all this variety of languages.
- Children Services are willing to talk to various communities to build trust, especially with victims/survivors' organisations. The use of professional languages/legal jargon should be reduced not just for translation requirements but for better understanding and adequate support for victims. The whole family approach is key to handling issues, especially within Children's Services, the priority would be the child.
- Children Services are looking at having trainings/workshops for social workers, apprentices, and students in Manchester, where guest speakers and the voluntary sector working with families would come in to have discussions about DA. In addition, they were keen to see if panellists were happy to meet with social workers on some of the in-person workshops or send in an audio recording or use graphics for confidentiality and security reasons. They are also looking into providing an up-to-date list of services in each area in Manchester, to raise awareness and build better relationships in the communities, and even offer job opportunities where necessary to include all valuable expertise.

- Prevention of all these issues is a key part of what the Council would like to achieve as part of the DA Strategy.
- Raising awareness through education is vital for children and young people
- Data and performance around what and how services are delivered were constantly reviewed. There is a gap in terms of service provision for children and young people around healthy relationships and work is still ongoing to address this area.

C. Homelessness Team

- The local authority acknowledges that when the victim is a homeowner or co-owner, there are some challenges in terms of temporary accommodation.
- Although options are limited, the Council is doing everything in its power to make sure that the victim is safe ,
- They're also looking at measures to put in place to help victims remain in the property, so they don't have to leave all their support system behind as well as relocating their children.
- A Sanctuary Scheme is being developed to make the property safer for the victim helping them to remain in the property following a DA incident.
- It is important to understand the legal framework - equipping caseworkers to have that information at hand and share it whenever possible is key
- Local authority staff do have good knowledge around these housing options, but unfortunately with the rising cost of living challenges with accommodation is an issue they take seriously and working towards a solution.
- Support to young victims: the local authority confirmed that they are working very hard to support people with specific characteristics and when it comes to domestic abuse, they're looking at how to support engage and promote services that are by people and for people;
- Specialist provisions for different characteristics is one of Manchester City Council's priority – They are looking at how the youth can access services and receive support and advice from a tailored specialist provision for young people;
- The local authority acknowledged that the Victims' Voice panel was a great platform to receive direct feedback from victims of abuse hence helping them to understand how they can tell their services.

Recommendations and next steps

Engaging with survivors and those supporting survivors was a great experience for all involved.

As the facilitating organisation, CAHN, on behalf of the Victims' Voice Panel, is making the following recommendations:

The panel of victims would like to ensure that the local authority takes meaningful action to address domestic abuse and support those affected by it in Manchester.

1. The Panel's continuity: Commissioning CAHN to set up the Victims' Voice Panel is beneficial because the authentic voices of victims are heard, and the true needs and demands, including the gaps in services available within the City are effectively communicated. Panel members hope this initiative will continue.
2. Data Collection and Analysis: Advocate for better data collection and analysis on domestic abuse cases to inform policy decisions. This would also help in ensuring that services are effectively meeting the needs of victims, and necessary steps taken to address gaps.
3. Specialised Training: Tailored training for law enforcement officers, healthcare professionals, social workers, teachers, and other relevant personnel to better identify and respond to cases of domestic abuse by:
 - i. Incorporate the testimonies of survivors into trainings or workshops (audio/video recording or in-person), to either share a lived experience of DA or showcase how survivors have moved on thanks to the support provided by the LA.
 - ii. Utilising parenting courses as a pathway to supporting families – promoting safe behaviours or healthy relationships.
4. Improved Access to Services: Increase the visibility of easily accessible drop-in centres or helplines where victims can seek immediate support and information about their options.
 - i. Services are available but usually not known by many people in ethnic minority communities. A widely distributed list of services in accessible format across the City would be useful. These resources be distributed via the VCSE sector and other stakeholders (statutory and private) working with the Local Authority.
 - ii. Explore engagement opportunities – it is important to note that engagements approaches may be different from one group to another, as one approach may not be fit for purpose to all demographics. Engaging with various communities would also build trust.
 - iii. Adequacy of interpreting and translation services offered by agencies: the fundamental need for a good interpreting provision may sometimes

be overlooked. Inadequate interpreting provision or a lack of it is often seen as a system failure in the domestic homicide reviews involving Polish nationals. Victims from other minority groups may experience similar challenges.

5. Housing Support: Increased access to safe and affordable housing options for victims leaving abusive situations, including priority housing status and financial assistance for those in need. Offer better support for victims who are homeowners and like to stay in their homes, rather than being relocated elsewhere.
6. Support for Children and Young People: Providing specialised support services for children who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse (counselling and educational programs). Provide a robust support system for young people in Education (CPD for teachers around domestic and sexual abuse). Provide the necessary support to children without annihilating the parent victim who may be going through challenging time (avoid victimising the victim further).
7. Cultural Sensitivity: Support services to be culturally sensitive and inclusive, acknowledging the diverse needs of victims from different backgrounds and communities. A cultural training or CPD to be provided to professionals within the LA.
8. Awareness Campaigns & Increased Funding: The LA to develop public awareness campaigns to educate the community about domestic abuse, its signs, and how to seek help.
 1. Collaboration with the VCSE sector and statutory organisations is key in pushing out awareness campaign – allocate funding to make this action possible.
 2. Increased efforts on educating young people about domestic abuse – preventative approach
9. Multi-agencies Collaboration: The local authority to improve coordination between different agencies such as police, social services, and housing authorities to ensure victims' safety. Also, enhance the collaboration with organisations and community groups that specialize in supporting victims of domestic abuse to leverage their expertise and resources.
10. Legal Support: Call for improved access to legal support and advice for victims navigating the legal system, including assistance with obtaining restraining orders and pursuing legal action against abusers.
11. Support for perpetrators: Set up a legal framework for perpetrators to abide by and access support on the following areas:
 - Education and Awareness,
 - Accountability and Monitoring,
 - Mandatory Intervention Programs,
 - Counselling and Therapy, Trauma-Informed Approach
 - Support for Behaviour Change - Intersectional Approach

- Collaboration with Probation Services

Summary

The MCC partnership with CAHN to set up a Victim's Voice Panel has proven to be very beneficial because the authentic voices of victims are heard, and the true needs and demands, including the gaps in services available within the city are identified and correctly communicated.

Delia Edwards, the Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager gave an introductory speech stating, "the importance and effects of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan on how services are commissioned and improved on".

Following a thorough methodology to recruit the suitable panel members, we proceeded to a monthly panel engagement with a focus on key service provisions within Manchester.

Other engagement sessions took place with key stakeholders from the local authority answering questions raised by panel members.

Throughout the year, events were also held to raise the profile of this panel as well as gaining interest from potential participants.

The data gathered were around:

- Service gaps
- Service awareness and utilisation
- Survivors' feedback

Conclusion

Addressing domestic abuse requires a multifaceted approach that involves a multi-agency collaboration, proactive outreach, and tailored support services that also take into account groups with protected characteristics.

By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, there would be improvement in service provision, enhancing victim support, and ultimately, preventing and reducing instances of domestic abuse within City of Manchester as per their stated commitment below in the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/5643/domestic_violence_strategy

“Preventing abuse and promoting healthy relationships:

We will:

- *Work to raise awareness and change attitudes through communication and engagement with communities, so that people better understand about positive and healthy relationships, about abuse and its different forms (in particular coercive and controlling behaviours), and what help is available.*
- *Measure the effectiveness of these engagements and campaigns, such as understanding and changing attitudes, through use of surveys and opinion polls.*
- *Target community engagement with groups currently under-represented in services such as Black, Asian, and racially minoritized people and*
- *groups, LGBTQ+ communities, men, disabled people, and older people.*
- *Continue to work with communities and services to ensure that support and advice responds to their individual needs. We are aware of the*
- *additional barriers that these groups face, particularly women within them.*
- *Continue to widen community engagement and public awareness of particular aspects of domestic abuse, including forced marriage, FGM*
- *and honour-based violence and abuse, by encouraging a community-led approach and building on our existing work with communities and*
- *voluntary organisations.*
- *Work in partnership with schools, colleges, and universities both to (i) educate young people on positive and healthy relationships, and on*
- *gender-based violence; (ii) better equip young people to reject unacceptable attitudes, including the objectification of women.*
- *Ensure that, through our approach to training and development amongst staff across all our agencies, that we promote a culture of continued*
- *improvement in our response to domestic abuse, with the aim of reducing the level of risk and harm it causes across the city”.*

Sources

1. [Statutory definition of domestic abuse factsheet - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672222/Statutory_definition_of_domestic_abuse_factsheet.pdf)
2. https://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/5643/domestic_violence_strategy
3. Article Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2023, CSEW

EVENT PICTURES

Launch Event 2023



Celebratory Event 2024



