



Starting to Stop It:

A progress report on work on disability hate crime in Merton in the 4 years since Merton CIL's Make It Stop report

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1. Aims of this report	4
1.2 About Merton CIL	4
2. Disability hate crime statistics	5
2.1 Disability hate crime in 2016	5
2.2 Disability hate crime in 2020	7
2.3 National statistics for all hate crime	7
2.4 National disability hate crime statistics	9
2.5 National statistics on charges and summonses for disability hate crimes	9
2.6 Disability hate crime in Merton	10
2.7 2020 and the coronavirus crisis	11
3. Case studies	13
3.1 Mishal – physical and verbal abuse from her neighbours	13
3.2 Annie – disability hate crime in a domestic abuse situation	14
3.3 Harry experienced disability hate crime from Two neighbours	14
4. Merton CIL’s work	16
4.1 Disability hate crime advice and advocacy	17
4.2 Disability hate crime support group meetings	19
4.3 Awareness raising and involvement in hate crime initiatives	20
4.4 London-wide work	20
5. Work by all partners	21
5.1 Awareness raising and publicity	21
5.2 Advice	23
6. Work by Merton Council and partners	25
6.1 Strategic work plan	26

6.2 Central information hub	27
6.3 Merton Community Safety Strategy	27
6.4 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)	28
6.5 Review of adult safeguarding cases	28
6.6 Training for call centre and front-line staff	29
7. Work by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)	30
7.1 Working with the community in Merton	31
7.2 London-wide work and Hate Crime Engagement Officers	31
8. Work by social housing providers	32
8.1 Support from Clarion Housing	32
8.2 Disability hate crime and social housing	33
9. Conclusions	34
9.1 Reviewing recommendations	34
9.2 A new recommendation	36

1. Introduction

Merton CIL published the report Making It Stop – Tackling Hate Crime Against Disabled People in Merton in 2016. It was a call to action for us and for our partners in maintaining and improving the safety and wellbeing of Deaf and Disabled people in the borough including the Council, the Metropolitan Police Service, and social housing providers. ¹

The report was funded by Merton Council and was launched in December 2016 with an endorsement from the chair of the of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Peter Southgate. ² It was produced by Merton CIL and Stay Safe East, a user led organisation which focuses on issues around hate crime and domestic and sexual abuse against Deaf and Disabled people, in collaboration with a range of organisations in the borough.

Hate crime is key issue for Disabled people. The opening of the 2016 report said:

'Hate crime does not only affect the victim – because it is about 'who we are' and about perpetrators questioning a person's right to live in their home, work or study, travel on a bus or other public transport, or just be themselves in a community, a street, another public place. Hate crime impacts on the victim's family, friends and community, it affects their sense of security and makes them feel unwelcome.'

Like all Merton CIL's work, our work on disability hate crime came directly from the concerns of our members and service users. These concerns led us to commission Stay Safe East, a specialist organisation run by Disabled people working on these issues, to produce a report to explore disability hate crime in Merton and recommend actions for Merton CIL and its partners to address.

The report enabled Merton CIL to start addressing disability hate crime directly with a support service for victims and survivors. Full details of our work around disability hate crime can be read in the section on Merton CIL.

¹ Whenever we refer to Disabled people in the rest of this report, we are referring to Deaf and Disabled people, with Disabled people including people with all types of impairment including people with physical and sensory impairments, mental health service users and people with learning difficulties.

² <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/assets/documents/press-release-500-disabled-pe>

1.1 Aims of this report

Merton CIL's work on disability hate crime has been an enormous learning curve. In the four years between publishing the original report and launching our support service, we have learnt an enormous amount about this difficult topic. We developed from providing a local service to becoming recognised as a leading organisation in this area of work, advising London-wide initiatives on disability hate and running a project which supports other Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations in London to support victims and survivors and raise awareness

This report details the progress we have made and the lessons we have learned along with our partner organisations in Merton and beyond.

The first section gives an overview of the policy context relating to disability hate crime and the changes that have taken place since 2016 along with statistics about disability hate crime during this time.

The second section details Merton CIL's work around disability hate crime and raising awareness.

The final section gives an overview of the work carried out by other organisations in the borough. These sections are based around the recommendations made in the original report and consider whether the recommendations have been met, with new recommendations added where they appear to be needed.

It is the first time the recommendations have been reviewed since the original report was published. It has been produced quite quickly with some input from the Council and the Metropolitan Police Service. Unfortunately, we were not able to get input from social housing providers in the time available.

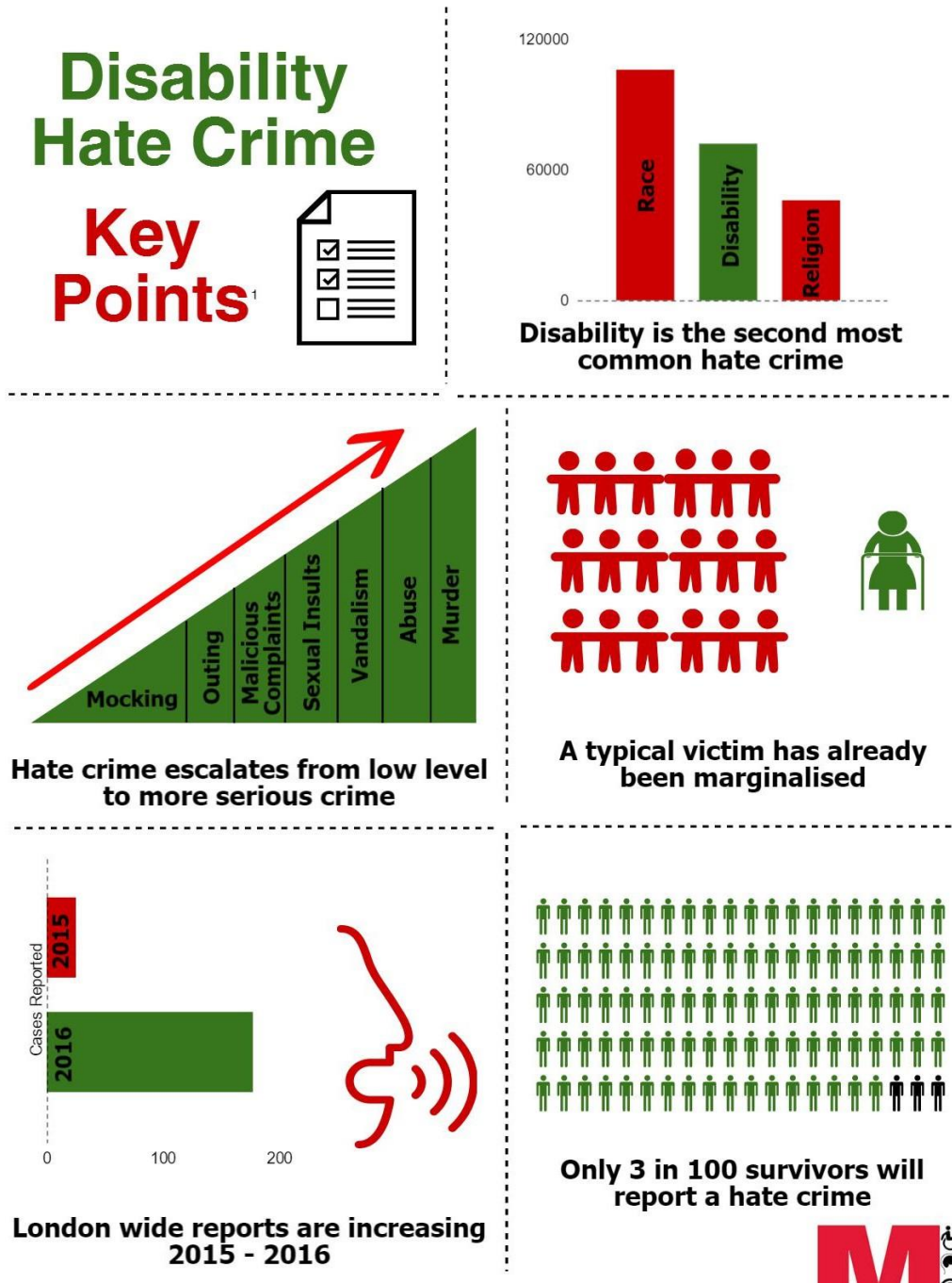
1.2 About Merton CIL

Merton CIL is a pan-Disability user-led Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation which has been supporting Deaf and Disabled People in the borough for over 10 years. We work with people with all types of impairment including physical impairments, sensory impairments, mental health service users, people with learning difficulties and people with chronic illness or long term ill-health. Many of our service users have more than one impairment, and many are also carers and/or parents. Deaf and Disabled People don't have to be members to use our services but we do have an ever-growing membership who shape our direction and focus as an organisation.

2. Disability hate crime statistics

2.1 Disability hate crime in 2016

This info-graphic shows the key facts and figures from the Merton CIL's report in 2016:



1. Based on research carried out by Stay Safe East for Merton CIL in 2016

Disability Hate Crime in Merton¹

500



Disabled people in Merton experience hate crime every year

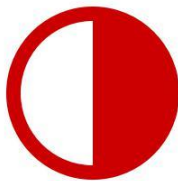


Only 12 reports of disability hate crime over 12 months in Merton



98%

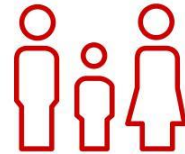
of disability hate crimes in Merton goes unreported or unrecognised



Half of those who responded to a questionnaire have been hurt or bullied in the last year



Nearly Half



of disability hate crime is carried out by people with a close relationship like family members, carers or PAs



3/4 of survivors of disability hate crime would tell the police if they had support

2 out of 3 survivors of hate crime feel negatively affected by the experience "terrified" "fearful" "isolated" "vulnerable" "let down" "scared" "angry" "unsafe"

1. Based on in depth desk research, round table, focus groups and a small scale questionnaire carried out in 2016 in Merton by Stay Safe East for Merton CIL



Important note: the figure of 500 Disabled people experiencing hate crime in Merton each year is an estimate based on the report's analysis of National Crime Survey and the government's life opportunities survey. The report estimates that 125 of these

would have been disability hate crime with the others being hate crimes around issues including ethnicity and sexuality.

2.2 Disability hate crime in 2020

Unfortunately, we have not had time to update these figures for this report, but the following discussion of the statistics that are available nationally, London-wide suggest there will have been little change in the situation.

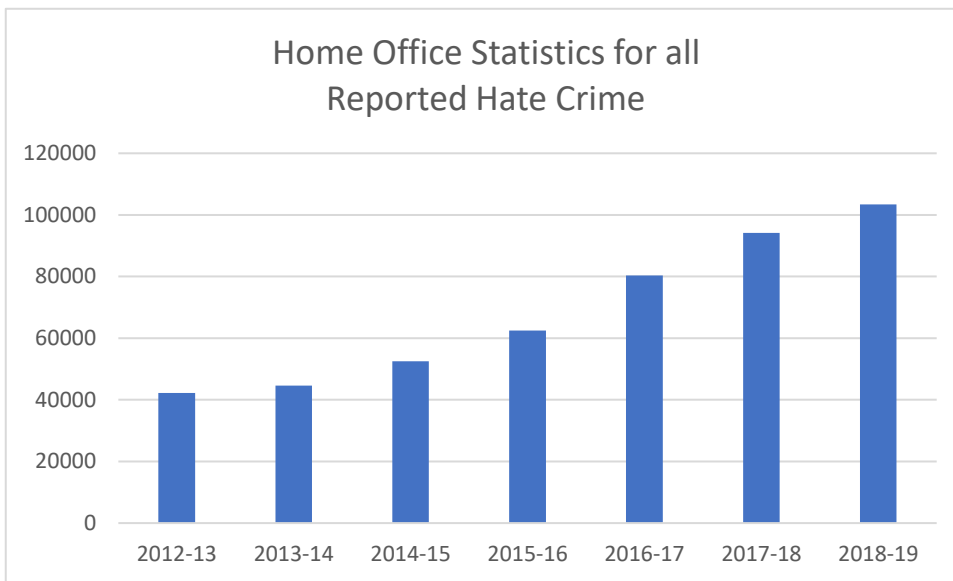
It is important to note that there are difficulties around statistics for most crime as there is generally a gap between the number of crimes reported to the police and the number of actual crimes. Official statistics include recorded crime which has been reported to the police and an estimate of numbers and trends in crime collected through the National Crime Survey for England and Wales. While the statistics produced from the survey are estimates, they are seen as a more accurate picture of crime than that given from figures for recorded crimes.

For hate crime it is recognised that there are particularly high numbers of incidents that are not reported.

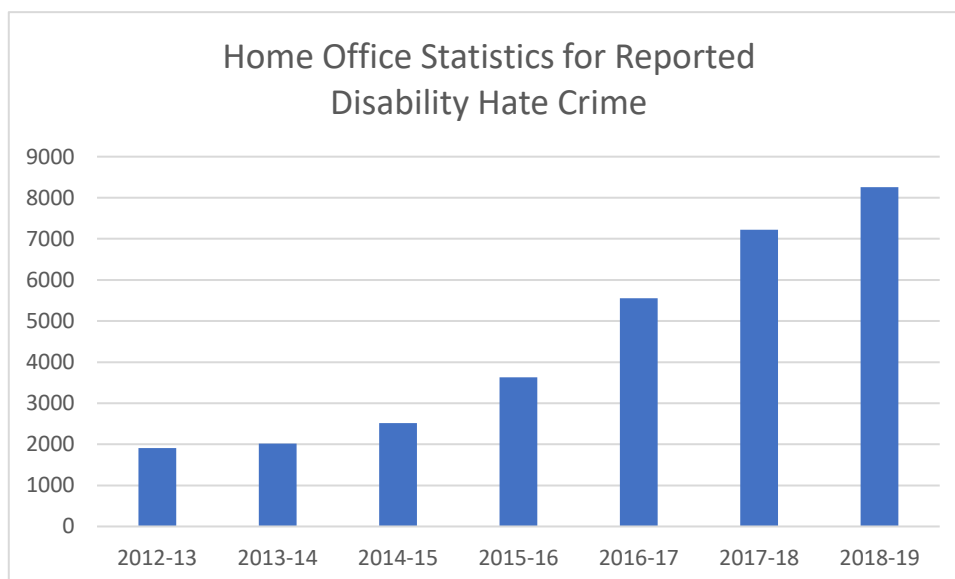
2.3 National statistics for all hate crime

Figures for all recorded hate crimes have been increasing since 2012. The most recent national Home Office statistics for 2018 – 2019 showed that recorded hate crime more than doubled from just over 42,000 in 2012 – 2013 to over 103,000 in 2018 – 2019, an increase of 145%.³

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/839172/hate-crime-1819-hosb2419.pdf



Graph: Recorded disability hate crime rose from 1,911 reports to 8,256 in this period, an increase of 332%.



Graph: In 2018 – 2019, 414 of the 8,256 recorded disability hate crimes were in London, 11 of which were in Merton (see below).

It is worth noting that much of the growth has been in the period since 2016 covered by this report.

The Home Office says that the rise is mainly because of better recording by the police. It points to the Crime Survey for England and Wales for 2017 – 2018 which showed a decrease in hate crimes over a longer- term. ⁴

2.4 National disability hate crime statistics

Each of the four years since the publication of Merton CIL's report has seen significant increases in disability hate crime reported to the police. This indicates that nationally there is growing awareness of disability hate crime amongst the police and other organisations involved in supporting Deaf and Disabled People.

While the Crime Survey for England and Wales has shown an overall decrease in hate crime, as noted above, but the picture it gives of disability hate crime is slightly different. Its survey produces a much higher estimate of the number of disability hate crimes putting the total at 52,000 a year based on its surveys in 2015 – 2016 and 2017 – 2018.

However, the survey suggests that this may be people responding to its survey with a misunderstand the definition of disability hate crime and crimes where a Disabled person is seen as being vulnerable.

Merton CIL's 2016 report recorded disability hate crime as the second most common form of hate crime next to race hate crimes, which accounted for three-quarters of hate crimes. However, the Home Office's 2018 – 2019 figures show that disability hate crime is now less common than homophobic hate crime. The change may be related to the closure of the Metropolitan Police Service's disability hate crime initiative which led to an increase in reporting in 2016 – 2017.

2.5 National statistics on charges and summonses for disability hate crimes

The Home Office statistics show substantial differences on the proportion of disability hate crime leading to charges or summonses for legal compared with hate crimes against some other groups and non-hate crimes.

For reported non-hate crimes against the person, 8% of reports lead to a charge or summons; where it is a race hate crime this rises to 12% but where it is a disability hate crime it is just 3%.

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748598/hate-crime-1718-hosb2018.pdf

For non-hate crimes involving criminal damage and arson, 5% of reports lead to a charge or summons; where it is a race hate crime factor this rises to 9% but where it is a disability hate crime it is just 2%.

This is reflected in the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) figures for 2018 – 2019.⁵ This showed a decrease in the number of disability hate crimes passed from the police to the CPS from 754 to 516 – a drop of 30%. This is almost double the decrease in overall hate crime prosecutions, which went down by 16.7%, suggesting that there may be specific issues around the prosecution of disability hate crime.

Analysis by the Disability News Service of the previous two years showed a decrease of 48%.⁶ It also pointed to a 25% fall in the number of disability hate crime prosecuted over these two years, with 752 in 2018 – 2019 compared with 1,009 the year before.

This is a worrying trend that may impact on Deaf and Disabled People's confidence in reporting disability hate crime.

2.6 Disability hate crime in Merton

Merton Council produces an annual Hate Crime Profile for the borough. Numbers of reported disability hate crime remain low:

2015 - 2016:	12
2016 – 2017:	11
2017 – 2018:	9
2018 – 2019:	9
2019 – 2020:	11

It does not appear to be possible to identify which of these cases were prosecuted.

The 2020 Profile also noted that the Metropolitan Police Service's Southwest Borough Command Unit, which covers Merton, Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth, dealt with 34 disability hate crime reports. This suggests that Merton had a higher rate of disability hate crime than the surrounding boroughs although it remains low in comparison other London boroughs.

⁵ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/CPS-Hate-Crime-Annual-Report-2018-2019.PDF>

⁶

2.7 2020 and the coronavirus crisis

The coronavirus crisis has affected all aspects of life in 2020. In many areas there have been positive stories of communities working together and neighbours supporting each other.

Sadly, it has also been the case that existing problems have been made worse during the crisis. It is well documented that the lockdown led to issues around domestic violence, with a report showing an 11% increase in calls the Metropolitan Police Service in the main lockdown period compared with the same time the previous year and victims reporting it was more difficult to leave abusive partners during lockdown.⁷

There have also been issues around hate crime and disability hate crime. Merton CIL received anecdotal evidence from several service users that the lockdown restrictions had heightened existing difficulties with neighbours.

Inclusion London, a partner organisation in the London DDPO Hate Crime Partnership which is led by Merton CIL, carried out regular surveys of local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations during the main lockdown and 62% said they were dealing with an increase in referrals about all types of disability hate crime including crimes by neighbours and online abuse.⁹ Getting priority in queues at shops and supermarkets also attracted hostility.

The introduction of compulsory wearing of face-coverings created a further trigger for abuse of Disabled people. Government guidance exempts many Disabled people from the requirement to wear face-coverings, but some members of the public, staff in shops and other facilities are either not aware of this or do not understand why. Some members of Merton CIL have reported being challenged aggressively about not wearing a face-covering even though they are exempt.

This situation has not been helped by comments such as those made by Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick who encouraged the public to shame people who do not wear face-coverings.¹⁰ An expert in disability hate crime called for official information about face-covering to include more information about the exemptions.

⁷ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2020/g-July-20/Big-rise-in-domestic-abuse-calls-during-lockdown>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/17/domestic-abuse-surged-in-lockdown-panorama-investigation-finds-coronavirus>

⁹ <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/facts-and-information/hate-crime/inclusion-london-briefing-disability-hate-crime/>

¹⁰ <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-fears-over-face-covering-hate-crime-as-new-laws-go-live/>

Merton CIL has attempted to address these issues locally by writing an open-letter to shops in the borough to remind them of the exemptions to wearing face-coverings for Deaf and Disabled People and encourage them to ensure their staff understand these exemptions. ¹¹

The coronavirus/COVID 19 situation is set to continue for some time and everyone involved in dealing with the issue needs to take account of the impact of the measures that need to be taken will have on Deaf and Disabled People.

¹¹ <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/news/an-open-letter-to-stores-in-me/>

3. Case studies

As part of the background to this report, this section gives 3 case studies based on examples for Merton CIL's casework with Deaf and Disabled people in the borough who have experienced disability hate crime.

These show the realities for the people involved and the complexities of the situations they have to deal with around disability hate crime.

The names and some other details that might make the people involved identifiable have been changed. We would like to thank the people involved for giving their permission to Merton CIL to share their stories.

3.1 Mishal – physical and verbal abuse from her neighbours

Mishal came to Merton CIL through the Hate Crime Advice Surgery. She has learning difficulties and mental health problems and had been experiencing disability hate crime from her neighbours including physical and verbal abuse, and abuse through social media. They would call her 'crazy' and 'mental'.

Many of the incidents were very small, but as they continued, they had more and more of an effect on Mishal. She became fearful of going out and unsafe in her flat.

Mishal was having difficulties getting the housing association where she lived and the police to take action about the incidents. Merton CIL started to support Mishal after she attended one of hate crime surgery sessions at the Civic Centre.

She had reported the incidents to the police and her housing association but received little assistance. Merton CIL helped Mishal to get the housing association to start talking to the neighbours and to get the police's Safer Neighbourhood's Team involved.

Mishal agreed to try working through a mediation service. This was difficult for Mishal and she felt uncomfortable with the way the mediator wanted to run the process. Merton CIL helped her to advocate how she would take part in the mediation but Mishal eventually decided she did not want to do it.

Merton CIL also supported Mishal to work with a solicitor to apply for a Harassment Injunction against the neighbours. This process was going to take some time and we helped Mishal to keep a record of the incidents to provide evidence for this process.

This had not been obtained when Merton CIL had to stop working with Mishal. At this point we had to arrange for Victim Support to take over from us.

3.2 Annie – disability hate crime in a domestic abuse situation

Annie experienced domestic violence and disability hate crime from her husband. She needs 24-hour support from carers, but her husband would isolate her by cancelling her carers and verbally abusing them when they were with her. He also tried to stop her accessing other health and social care services.

Annie had obtained a non-molestation order against her husband, but the court did not support her application for an Occupation Order to stop him going into their home.

When she came to Merton CIL for support, Annie to us she felt permanently terrified and felt that the only way escape from her situation was to move to a new home.

Merton CIL took her case to a Multi-Agency Review Assessment Conference and helped make the case that she had been made homeless by her situation. We also helped her get counselling and support from the Inner Strength Network to deal with the impact the abuse had had on her mental health.

Annie moved to temporary accommodation which helped resolve her situation temporarily. She may have needed further support finding permanent housing, but Merton CIL's disability hate crime had to close at this point.

3.3 Harry experienced disability hate crime from 2 neighbours

Harry asked Merton CIL for support after experience hate crime and anti-social behaviour from two sets of neighbours. The children in one flat mocked Harry's disability and their parents insulted him when he asked them to stop this. The other neighbour had physically assaulted him and made other threats. He also experienced ongoing noise problems from these and other neighbours.

Harry felt unable to report the problems to the police because he feared repercussions. He had approached his housing association, but they did not take any action. The continuing situation had affected Harry's mental health and he had to ask for support from mental health services.

Harry wanted to move because of his experiences of disability hate crime and because of a number of other issues with the accessibility of the flat including not having a shower that he could use. This meant he could only have a shower by going to a relative.

Getting a new flat through the Council and the housing association is a long process so needed a give Harry help with his immediate situation and the goal of moving.

We worked with Harry to help him make a second request for help to his housing association. This included helping him to keep a diary of his experiences and making a witness statement. We also had his case referred to a Community Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Community MARAC), but this proved to be of little help to his situation.

We also asked his housing association for an assessment from an occupational therapist but took over six months to organise. Eventually he applied to be treated as homeless. The mental health assessment team supported this and diagnosed his deteriorating mental health as being caused by his housing situation.

Six months after Merton CIL started to support him Harry was attacked again and needed hospital treatment. He knew his attackers and was still too concerned about reprisals to report this to report the attack to the police.

Some months after this, and another attack on him, the Council carried out a safeguarding investigation into Harry's situation. This led to recognition that he did need to be re-housed. When Merton CIL's disability hate crime service closed, Harry was in temporary accommodation and waiting for a permanent home.

4. Merton CIL's work

Merton CIL's 2016 disability hate crime report included a range of recommendations for Merton CIL itself. These were:

1. Develop an accessible and safe third-party reporting site for disabled people to report hate crime and harassment
2. Provide advocacy casework support to disabled victims of hate crime
3. Develop facilitated awareness raising groups or sessions for disabled people to talk about their experiences of hate crime and abuse.
4. Produce information leaflet and poster to promote the service and explain about hate crime
5. Develop a programme of engagement with disabled people in Merton
6. Develop support/awareness groups for victims and survivors
7. Hold workshops at events organised by other organisations
8. Raise the on-line profile of Merton CIL by intervening on local Facebook and Twitter sites, and challenging negative attitudes to disabled people
9. Develop briefings and training for Police officers and other agencies on Hate Crime and Disability, provided by experienced disabled trainers

Merton CIL's work on hate crime and Deaf and Disabled People began in the summer of 2016, shaped by the issues emerging from the report and the increasing recognition of disability hate crime as an issue at that time.

Funding from the Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime and the London Community Foundation meant Merton CIL was able to start to:

- Support Disabled people to report hate crime to the police.
- Visit Disabled people's groups and to raise awareness of people's right to be safe.
- Run a support group for people experiencing disability hate crime and disability hate crime survivors.
- Provide in depth advocacy support for 12 Disabled people.

The project team also started work with the police, housing associations, and the council to raise awareness of disability hate crime and Disabled people's experiences.

4.1 Disability hate crime advice and advocacy

Merton CIL's Advice & Advocacy service supported 44 Deaf and Disabled people between January 2016 and July 2020 with issues relating to disability hate crime. It was also recognised as a third-party reporting site, as recommended by the report, to support Disabled people to report hate crime and harassment.

Unfortunately, Merton CIL has temporarily closed to new disability hate crime cases and stopped working as a third-party reporting site due to funding and staffing issues. Merton CIL will continue to signpost victims to organisations that can support, share information, raise awareness and conduct social policy work around disability hate crime.

While this is a relatively small number of people, many of the cases involved were particularly complex and meant working with people in especially difficult circumstances.

Key points from this service include:

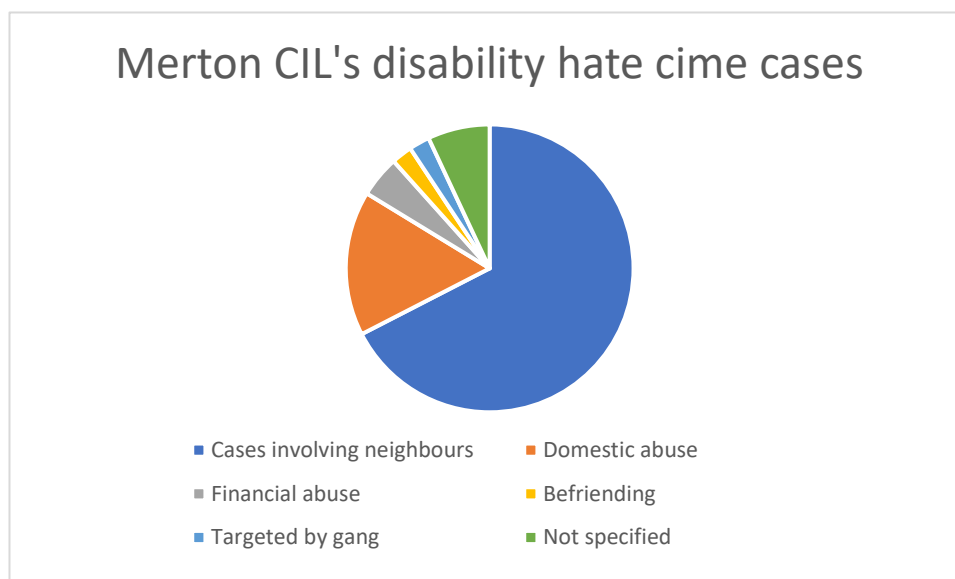
- Cases typically ran for around 1 year.¹²
- Cases involved an average of just under 17 hours of work – the most complicated cases required around 50 hours of work and the most difficult case took 77 hours over 21 months.
- 50% of people who used the service said they felt safe as a result of the support it provided.

By far the most common problem that service users needed support with was abuse and harassment from neighbours – this accounted for 29, two-thirds/66% of the total of cases 44. This most frequently involved verbal abuse and harassment but in the more extreme cases involved vandalism and/or assault.

The next most common problem was 7 cases where domestic abuse or violence which involved disability hate crime. Three involved the person's partner and the other 4 involved other family members.

The remaining were two cases financial abuse, a be-friending situation and being targeted by a gang. There were 3 cases where Merton CIL was unable to obtain details and contact was lost with the service users, and one which was referred to organisations dealing with race hate crime as this was the key issue in the case.

¹² Some of these would have continued longer if the service had not had close temporarily in July 2020.



Pie chart show Merton CIL's disability hate crime cases

Merton CIL's role in supporting people experiencing disability hate crime has largely been around giving advice about what options are available to them and then providing advocacy in dealing with the other organisations that may be involved, most frequently the police, the Council, and the person's landlord.

This last group is particularly important as just over half of the people Merton CIL has supported with disability hate crime related to neighbours – 18 of 29 - lived in accommodation provided by a housing association. The figure is likely to be higher than this as the service users' accommodation is not record in 6 of the other cases.

This seems to be a key issue that needs to be investigated further.

4.2 Disability hate crime support group meetings

M Merton Centre for Independent Living **CIL**

DISABILITY HATE CRIME SUPPORT GROUP

Have you been bullied, harassed, threatened or abused because of a disability?

Come along to our support group held on the first Monday of every month 1.30pm – 3.30pm.

To find out more or to report a Disability Hate Crime, please contact us on:

020 3397 3119 @MertonCIL
 07449 362 233 (SMS) Mertoncil
 info@mertoncil.org.uk Merton.cil
 www.mertoncil.org.uk

Funded By: MOPAC | The London Community Foundation

Merton CIL is a company limited by guarantee. Company Number 7645926
Registered Charity Number 1152825

We began by holding monthly support groups for people experiencing and survivors of disability hate crime, which people rated very highly in our evaluations. We then adapted them to suit people's needs and integrated them into our Craftivism and Chat groups with a focus on information sharing. As a result, people have become more comfortable about speaking about their issues and getting support.

Picture: Disability hate crime support group advert

4.3 Awareness raising and involvement in hate crime initiatives

Merton CIL has run an extensive range of activities to raise awareness of disability hate crime amongst Deaf and Disabled People and more broadly. We have had regular discussions about disability hate crime at our Craftivism and Chat meetings, which include marking Hate Crime Awareness Week every year. Merton CIL also plays a prominent part in many other events during each Hate Crime Awareness Week, see below.

Merton CIL has also been involved in a wide range of initiatives and activities to address hate crime issues and worked to raise awareness and understanding of hate crime and disability hate crime in these initiatives in borough and around London. These have included:

- The Independent Advisory Group for Metropolitan Police Service in Merton until it closed in October 2018.
- The Merton Hate Crime Strategy Group – chaired the group for a year.
- The Safer Neighbourhood Board – continued representation on the board.
- Attendance of Community Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (Community MARACs) for cases involving disability hate crime – see above.
- Attended meetings and City Hall with the Deputy Mayor for Policing and the Mayor of London's Office for Policing and Crime.
- Submitted written evidence to the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee report on hate crime in 2019.

- Attended the Victims Summit run by MOPAC in March 2019.
- Leading role in Hate Crime Awareness Week in Merton including membership of the planning group.
- Spoke at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting at Merton Council.
- Membership of an advisory group on Disabled Women and Domestic Violence.
- Participation in an advisory group working to influence the Domestic Violence Bill in 2020

Merton CIL has also been involved in providing training on disability hate crime for the police and Circle Housing (now Clarion Housing) in 2017, along with training for other voluntary organisations in the borough.

4.4 London-wide work

In the four years since Merton CIL published the first report and developing our local work, we have gained a profile and recognition for our expertise in this area.

Merton CIL is one of three key organisations in the Pan-London DDPO Disability Hate Crime Partnership. Working with the two other key organisations, Inclusion London and Stay Safe East, we secured funding for the partnership from the National Lottery, the Three Guineas Trust and Trust for London to launch the Partnership in late 2018.

There are now 19 DDPOs involved in the Partnership. It works to increase specialist support to survivors of disability hate crime, work to prevent disability hate crime by increasing awareness and improving the quality of support.

Merton CIL's work on the Partnership has included providing extensive support to four DDPOs with a seconded specialist advocate to support them to develop their services. The DDPOs are Real in Tower Hamlets, Ruils in Richmond, Action for Disability Kensington and Chelsea and Transport for All which works across London.

We have also provided specialist training for staff from 15 other organisations in the partnership and the development of evaluation tools and templates to support the work of DDPOs in disability hate crime.

5. Work by all partners

Merton CIL's disability hate crime report made the following recommendations for all organisations involved in work on hate crime in terms of a joint approach to the issues involved:

1. Publish a joint "No Place for Hate in Merton" statement, with reference to recent hate crimes across the world including those against disabled people
2. Work together to develop an awareness campaign on hate crime and harassment, and obtain funding for materials to be developed in partnership with disabled people and other communities
3. Publicise all local agencies where hate crime or harassment can be reported
4. Police outreach and confidence building sessions, jointly with Merton CIL and other voluntary sector groups, to increase confidence in reporting hate crime and harassment against disabled people and other groups

Looking at the work of all partners, the Council has been keen to develop partnership between the statutory and voluntary sector.

This has provided a clear and strong context for the development of partnership approaches to disability hate crime and all hate crime in the borough.

5.1 Awareness raising and publicity



Hate Crime Awareness Week in October 2016 marked the start of a growing range of action to address hate crime in Merton.

Merton CIL's disability hate crime had been published in the summer and Merton Council marked the week with a major campaign organised around a series of events (see below) and a social media campaign with the Twitter hashtag #Mertonstopshate

Picture: Merton Stops Hate logo

There has been a range of joint work between the different partners involved in work to address hate crime and to ensure that disability hate crime is included in all such initiatives.

Partners from the Hate Crime Strategy Group have worked with the Council and the police to develop a hate crime leaflet and wallet card. These have been circulated to our partners and police Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Partners from the strategy group and the wider voluntary sector took part in disability hate crime training run by Merton CIL and Stay Safe East in June 2019.



Picture: 5 fire officers with cards saying #Mertonstopshate standing by a fire engine

Since 2016 Hate Crime Awareness Week has gained an increasingly high profile in Merton and is well-supported by a wide range of partners including the police and the Council.

- 2017: Launch of new hate crime pages on the Council website and a range of other events and the police's Reassurance Bus touring the borough with Merton CIL and other local organisations on board.
- 2018: An event called Cake Not Hate at Merton Civic Centre with presentations from the Mayor and local organisations, stalls and cake. Other events at Mitcham town centre, Merton College Morden, the New Horizons Centre, Baitul Futuh Mosque and the Sainsburys Local branch in Central Road.
- 2019: An event for young people where a video called Protect Yourself from Hate, made in conjunction with Merton College, was launched to signpost young people to support services, this included a market place of information stalls from local agencies working with hate crime victims. There were also stalls around the borough

during the week including Pollards Hill library, Morden Leisure Centre, Polish Family Association, CMYK Bar in Wimbledon and Mitcham town centre.

The Council estimates that with partners it engaged with over 1,700 residents on a face to face basis during the 2019 Awareness Week.



Picture: staff from Merton CIL, the police and other organisations host a stall for Hate Crime Awareness Week in Centre Court in Wimbledon in 2016.

5.2 Advice

A monthly Hate Crime Advice Surgery was launched at Merton Civic Centre in February 2019. It is coordinated by Safer Merton with participation from Merton CIL and other organisations involved in tackling hate crime. This is publicised via the Merton Council events calendar and social media channels. ¹³

In March 2020 partners from the Hate Crime Strategy Group including the Council launched a Third-Party Reporting Scheme. These schemes are recognised as being able to support people who may find it difficult to deal with the police to report hate crimes. Information on the scheme and Third-Party Reporting Centres can be accessed through the hate crime page on the council website:

¹³ Note: at time of writing, the surgeries have been taking place over the phone due to coronavirus restrictions.

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/hate-crime>

It brings together full details about hate crime, how to report it through the 3rd party centres and the support and assistance available to hate crime victims and survivors.

6. Work by Merton Council and partners

Merton CIL's disability hate crime report made the following recommendations for the Council:

1. Revise information about hate crime generally, and hate crime against disabled people and other groups on the Merton Council and Merton Police websites, to include:
 - Plain English information about what hate crime is, how it affects people etc.
 - How to report hate crime
 - Links to local and other organisations supporting victims of hate crime, and to True Vision
 - A simple reporting form
 - An Easy-read version of the text with easy words and pictures
 - Phone, SMS text and e-mail contacts
 - Information about agencies which support victims of domestic or sexual violence
2. Draw up a new Community Safety Strategy, including hate crime and harassment, in consultation with voluntary and statutory partners.
3. Set up a Community Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Community MARAC) to deal with high risk and repeat ASB and hate crimes cases and other cases involving adults at risk; the Community MARAC should involve key statutory partners (Police, Adult Safeguarding, Mental Health Services, Social Landlords etc.) and key voluntary sector partners including Merton CIL.
4. Ensure that data about repeat and high risk cases is shared across statutory partners, and where relevant, voluntary sector partners – develop the necessary information sharing protocol
5. Work with Merton CIL to review adult safeguarding cases over a fixed time frame (eg three months) to identify any hate crimes that may have been missed

6. Provide training for front line call centre and other staff on how to recognise hate crime
7. Review how domestic violence is dealt with where the victim is a disabled person, and of the accessibility of local support agencies, as well as police responses

Hate crime and disability hate crime have an increasingly high profile in the borough supported through leadership from senior levels of the Council. Leaders of Merton Council issue statements speaking out against hate where appropriate, for example, when the UK left the European Union and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement following the death of George Floyd in the USA in the summer of 2020.

There is also regular messaging on Merton Council's social media channels that Merton does not tolerate hate in any form, with signposting to where residents can access local and national support.

6.1 Strategic work plan

The Council launched a four-year strategic work plan for hate crime in 2017.¹⁴ This drew on the Mayor's and Home Office Strategies and other policies around issues including safeguarding. It notes that Merton has a comparatively low crime rate and that that goal of the plan is that no one should be more exposed to crime than other people in the community, with a ultimate aim of being crime-free.

The strategic aims are to:

- Prevent hate crime.
- Protect victims and reduce experiences of repeated crime.
- Provide personalised support to victims of hate crime.
- Tackle perpetrators of disability hate crime.

It sets out a range of actions for each of the four years covered by the plan. These include working with the police to increase recording of hate crime, developing a one-stop-shop for support with hate crime, developing educational approaches to tackling hate crime, run awareness campaigns and work with third parties/community organisations to improve support and recording.

Disability hate crime is fully recognised in the strategy. There is also understanding that hate crime can be intersectional – such as a gay disabled person who could be a victim of disability hate crime and homophobic hate crime.

¹⁴ <https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Strategic%20Work%20Plan%202017-2021.pdf>

6.2 Central information hub

The Safer Merton pages of the Merton Council website now have a dedicated hate crime page which a central online information hub about all forms of hate crime.

It describes what a hate crime is and how to report it via the various channels, including national and local organisations and those taking part in our 3rd Party Reporting Scheme.

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/hate-crime>

A hate crime reporting form has been developed with those organisations taking part in our Hate Crime 3rd Party Reporting Scheme. There are online and hard copy versions which have been circulated to those taking part in the scheme.

Information is also available in print in a full size and wallet sized leaflet which were published in 2019.

There is also information about agencies which support victims of domestic or sexual violence are listed on the Domestic Violence and Abuse page:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/domestic-violence>

These represent important steps forward. An easy read version of the web page and leaflet are still needed. The web page would also benefit from British Sign Language interpreted video to make it accessible to Deaf people.

6.3 Merton Community Safety Strategy

Merton's Hate Crime Strategy Group was formed in 2016 and is made up of representatives from the Council, police and community groups. The group fed into the development of and drives the delivery of Merton's Hate Crime Strategy. The group meets on a quarterly basis and is independently chaired by a representative from one of the community groups. The first chair was Merton CIL's then chief executive, Lyla Anwan-Kamara, and in 2020 it was Maureen Bailey of the Inner Strength Network.

The Hate Crime Strategy runs from 2017-21 and progress is reviewed on a regular basis by the Hate Crime Strategy Group.

6.4 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

MARACs have been developing across the country since the first one was set up in Cardiff in 2003.¹⁵ There are two types of MARAC: Community MARACs (CMARACs) which deal with anti-social behaviour and hate crime, and domestic violence MARACs (DV MARACs) which deal with high risk domestic violence situations.

They bring together representatives from adult and children's social care services, health services, housing services and the police, along with voluntary services where involved, to resolve risks in these situations.

Merton's MARACs have been set up and has been running successfully since 2018. It meets monthly and is jointly chaired by the police's Neighbourhoods Inspector and the council's Head of Community Safety.

The MARACs also work to ensure that information about repeat and high risk cases between statutory partners and voluntary partners and develop partnership approaches, in line with the recommendations of Merton CIL's report.

Merton CIL has been involved in representing the cases of several service users at MARACs.

In 2018 a trial took place between the Council and Merton CIL, with Merton CIL's hate crime co-ordinator attending the domestic violence One Stop Shop. During the trial, this aided better partnership working between agencies, although however no hate crime cases were picked up during the 6 month trial period. The One Stop Shop has been operating virtually during 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. There is a suggestion for the future to resume conversations about partnership working when it can start working normally again.

6.5 Review of adult safeguarding cases

The Safeguarding and Deprivation of Liberty (DoLSs) Team Manager sits on the Hate Crime Strategy Group. The Council told us that while there is not a formal process in place to assure that disability hate crimes are always identified, audits of all safeguarding enquiries are regularly completed to ensure that the risk to vulnerable groups are reduced and removed. It added that front line staff receive regular safeguarding training to ensure that their literacy in safeguarding remains high and all areas of abuse continue to be recognised.

15

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmhaff/263/26314.htm#:~:text=The%20first%20MARACs%20were%20held%20in%20Cardiff%20in%202003,T%>

Merton CIL believes it would be worth working with us to ensure disability hate crimes are not being missed through a review or a pilot scheme.

The contact details for any safeguarding concerns are:

FIRST RESPONSE (9.30am– 1.30pm): 020 8545 4388

Email: ascfirstresponse@merton.gov.uk

FOR OUT OF HOURS: Telephone 0845 618 9762 (24/7)

FOR EMERGENCIES: CONTACT THE POLICE AND OTHER APPROPRIATE EMERGENCY SERVICES WITHOUT DELAY - BY DIALLING 999

6.6 Training for call centre and front-line staff

The recommended training for call centre and other front-line Council staff in recognising hate crime has not yet taken place.

This is dependent on Safer Merton having the resources and funding to be able to deliver the training. The recommendation will be incorporated into the Council's updated Hate Crime Strategy due in 2021, where it will be noted by the Hate Crime Strategy Group and scoped accordingly

7. Work by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

Merton CIL's disability hate crime report made the following recommendations for the police working in the borough:

1. Initiate a Police-Disability Liaison Group involving disabled individuals, user-led organisations and selected organisations working with disabled people and other groups, to focus on key issues around policing and crime, including hate crime. The Liaison Group will need a budget for access and other costs.
2. Appoint a Hate Crime Liaison officer for Merton Police, in line with Metropolitan Police policy
3. Encourage more police officers or PCSOs to volunteer as Disability Liaison officers
4. Develop briefings for front line staff, including liaison officers, delivered jointly by Merton CIL and the police – either on hate crime against disabled people only, or on all/some hate crime strands
5. Invite applications from disabled people to join the Merton Police Independent Advisory Group
6. Develop a scrutiny process jointly with Merton CIL to review a sample of crime reports involving disabled people as well as cases already flagged as hate crime, to identify good practice and possible improvements
7. Develop a joint outreach programme between Police, Merton CIL and other community organisations concerned about hate crime, including the LGBT and BAME Forums and Victim Support
8. Train Safer Schools officers to work with young people in schools to inform them about hate crime

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has certainly made progress in terms of awareness of disability hate crime. However, this has come at a time of funding cuts and reorganisation which has almost certainly limited this progress. It has to be noted that there does not appear to have been progress on recommendations 1, 3, 5, 6 and 8 above.

7.1 Working with the community in Merton

There is good communication between the local police and partners including Merton CIL and involvement in local initiatives such as the Safer Neighbourhoods Board. The MPS does have a Disability Independent Advisory Group to give in input of policing issues on a London-wide basis, but there is no specific liaison group for the borough or for Deaf and Disabled People in the borough as we recommended.

7.2 London-wide work and Hate Crime Engagement Officers

There had been a very effective London-wide programme called Disability Hate Crime Matters run in conjunction with Inclusion London which started in 2016. This included training for front-line staff and officers and call-handlers, along with a checklist to help with identification of hate crimes. It is credited with having raised recorded disability hate crime by 800%.¹⁶ This initiative was closed in a re-structure in 2018 and recorded disability hate crime dropped in London after this.

Prior to the Merton CIL in 2016 some boroughs had hate crime coordinators. In 2018 there was a re-structure which moved to regional groups called Basic Command Units (BCUs). Merton is part of the south-west unit which also covers Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth.

There is a Hate Crime Engagement Officer in each Basic Command Unit. They work with local people and organisations to increase awareness and reporting of hate crimes. However, there is concern that this regional structure mean Hate Crime Liaison Officers have to cover too big an area for them build up their local relationships and understand the specific issues of each borough.¹⁷

We understand that Safer Neighbourhood Teams and officers attached to schools do educational work around hate crime. However, the London Assembly recommended to the Mayor in September 2019 that the Mayor needed to speed up the MPS's school education service on hate crime.¹⁸

Merton CIL would welcome the opportunity to revisit the unimplemented recommendations with the MPS and other partners.

¹⁶ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/20190930_pcc_report_-_hate_crime_-_embargoed.pdf

¹⁷ As above

¹⁸ As above

8. Work by social housing providers

Merton CIL made the following recommendations for social housing providers/housing associations in the borough:

1. Update information on website to ensure that it is easy for tenants to find information about hate crime and how to report it
2. Include an article or information about hate crime and harassment against disabled people (and encouraging people to report incidents) in any newsletters sent to tenants and leaseholders – including contact for Merton CIL
3. Ensure that all reports of repeat anti-social behaviour against disabled people are scrutinised (where possible by a senior housing officer) in order to check if there is a disability hostility motivation.
4. Ensure repeat incidents are referred to the Community Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (Community MARACs)
5. Provide training for call centre staff, ASB officers and front line housing officers on identifying and understanding hate crime, and on supporting disabled victims

There are 19 social housing providers as working in Merton but the vast majority is run by Clarion Housing.¹⁹ Merton CIL's advice and advocacy service has worked with residents from several of these social housing providers but only had time to contact Clarion for this report.

8.1 Support from Clarion Housing

Clarion gives Clarion recognition to hate crime including disability hate crime in their anti-social behaviour policy and have page on their website on harassment and hate crime.²⁰²¹ This gives details of the support it provides to people experiencing harassment and hate crime, including how report issues to their local offices or by telephone or email.

Residents who experience harassment and/or hate crime can get support from Clarion through Neighbourhood Housing Officers and the Tenancy Specialist Team. Reports of

¹⁹ <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-tax-benefits-and-housing/getting-a-new-home/specialist-housing-associations-and-providers>

²⁰ https://www.myclarionhousing.com/-/media/61F241E8AC4D443E9ABA441C991666DA.pdf?la=en&sc_revision=b06595af0d984a2e9dc573877ed15fd2&hash=9857B46FA8F2B852D15FE8B8B65383FF4AA794B7&hash=9857B46FA8F2B852D15FE8B8B65383FF4AA794B7

²¹ <https://www.myclarionhousing.com/your-home/crime-and-antisocial-behaviour/harassment-and-hate-crime/>

hate crimes to Neighbourhood Housing Officers are referred as a high priority to the Tenancy Specialist. This team records hate crimes, reviews the person's situation and provides an action plan. The team also refers cases to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences.

The local officer for the borough is part of the Merton Hate Crime Strategy Group and the teams also feed into Clarion's national strategies on issues including training for staff.

Clarion no longer has local newsletters so would not be able to act on this recommendation. However, they have national newsletters which have covered hate crime issues.

8.2 Disability hate crime and social housing

While Clarion Housing appears to be a good structure for responding to hate crime, Merton CIL is concerned about the prevalence of cases involving disability hate crime and neighbours in social housing dealt with by our advice and advocacy service. It is important to note that these are from several of the social housing providers in the borough and we do not have enough evidence to draw firm conclusions about this.

A number of the people supported by Merton CIL have raised difficulties dealing with their housing officers and much of our work has involved liaison with these officers. Again, this is not about any one housing provider and we can only say it is an issue that appears to need further work.

Merton CIL would welcome the opportunity to work with social housing providers in the borough to develop the strategic approach to disability hate crime for their Disabled residents.

9. Conclusions

This is a short report that draws on the work of one small organisation in London on disability hate crime. Our work only covers the tip of the iceberg although we hope that it will make a difference to tackling hate crime against Deaf and Disabled People in Merton. It is positive to see the progress that has been made in terms of increasing awareness and understanding of disability hate crime in Merton. Merton CIL has also been in a position to make a contribution to work on this issue beyond the borough through our involvement in a pan-London disability hate crime project.

But this is far from a success story and it is important to recognise that there is little evidence to show that disability hate crime has decreased in any way. The key statistics from the original report – 500 hate crimes against Deaf and Disabled People in Merton every year, 98% of which are unreported and unrecognised – are almost certainly as applicable today as they were in 2016. There are also indications that the pandemic has led to an increase in hate crime – including disability hate crime.

9.1 Reviewing recommendations

Merton CIL does not want to make many new recommendations. We want to repeat and reinforce the recommendations of the original report based on its extensive research and evidence.

We would like to see other key stakeholders – the Council, the Metropolitan Police Service and social housing providers – review their progress on the recommendations from the original report and develop plans for building on this progress. We recognise the pandemic has made this a difficult time for all public services but increases hate crime and domestic violence during the pandemic suggests that these issues need to be considered in the response to the pandemic.

For Merton CIL:

Our key priority is to reopen our disability hate crime casework service to new cases. We will continue to raise awareness and conduct social policy work around hate crime, but we think it is important that we provide accessible advice and advocacy support around disability hate crime. but must be the obtain funding so we can re-open our advice and advocacy service to disability hate crime cases and to ensure that we can continue to work to raise awareness and understanding.

For the Council:

- Keep information under review and up-to-date and add easy read information and add other access formats such as BSL interpreted videos.
- Improve work with Merton CIL to review safeguarding cases that include a hate crime element.
- Provide training for call centre and other staff on how to recognise hate crime.

As noted in the section on Council work, the final point about training is being addressed in the Council's hate crime strategy review.

For the police:

The Metropolitan Police Service has gone through significant changes since the original report and many of the recommendations have not been implemented –

- Initiate a Police-Disability Liaison Group
- Encourage more police officers or PCSOs to volunteer as Disability Liaison officers
- Invite applications from Disabled people to join the Merton Police Independent Advisory Group
- Develop a scrutiny process jointly with Merton CIL to review a sample of crime reports involving Disabled people as well as cases already flagged as hate crime, to identify good practice and possible improvements
- Train Safer Schools officers to work with young people in schools to inform them about hate crime

We recommend that the service revisits the Disability Hate Crime Matters initiative to address these recommendations and how they can be addressed on a London-wide and borough level.

For social housing providers:

From the information provided by Merton's main social housing provider, Clarion Housing, it appears that they have covered all the recommendations in Merton CIL's 2016. Merton CIL will try to look into whether other social housing providers in the borough have addressed these issues.

However, there do appear to be significant issues around disability hate crime and social housing which are dealt with below.

9.2 A new recommendation

One new issue does seem to have emerged clearly enough in this report to warrant a further recommendation is for there to be investigation into the apparent link between disability hate crime and neighbour disputes in social housing. The analysis of Merton CIL's case work in the four years since the original disability hate crime report showed two-thirds/66% of cases dealt with this type of situation. While repeating the point that this does come from a very small amount of evidence, we believe it would be very useful to develop further research to establish whether this is reflected in other categories of hate crime.

This might also point to new approaches that may help to go further towards tackling and reducing disability hate crime. Work by Victim Support Scotland has already pointed to the potential for approaching hate crime as a public health issue.²² This would look at addressing the barriers to reporting hate crime and looking at what interventions might be possible to prevent hate crime from occurring.

This might be particularly relevant to disability hate crime involving neighbour disputes in social housing. Merton CIL will try to explore this within the borough as it seems to be something that could represent the start of new approaches to hate crime that could begin to go some way to reducing the crime and the impact it has on individuals and communities.

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²² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-41415692>