

Tackling hate crime & discrimination in Bristol's homelessness services

Case study

With thanks to
Bristol City Council

Acknowledgment

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Introduction

In January 2020, Bristol City Council identified a need for a consistent approach to tackling hate crime and hate incidents that occurred within the city's commissioned homelessness prevention accommodation pathways. In partnership with the local hate crime and discrimination support organisations, the council developed an approach for responding to hate crime and discrimination incidents.

What they did:

The partnership aims were to:

- ensure all hate crime is effectively responded to,
- reduce harm to staff and residents due to hate crime,
- ensure victims and witnesses of hate crime or hate incidents are supported across all the city's supported accommodation pathways.

To achieve this, the partnership created a protocol for responding to hate incidents that can be used across the sector and set up a multi-agency working group.

The protocol

Partners undertook work to develop an easy to access, best practice protocol, which can be adopted by any organisation within the sector, to respond effectively to hate crime. (See appendix A). It outlines clear steps that providers should take in response to any such incidents and offers examples of best practices to follow.

What worked:

- The protocol provides a shared framework that is in use across the city. Organisations are working in the same way to achieve the same goal and can refer back to a shared document.
- Consistency in challenging perpetrators of hate incidents as soon as possible.
- Any victims and witnesses are always provided the same support offer, and external organisations are involved in the support where wanted/needed.
- Expertise from partner agencies, who provide a range of support and safety interventions.
- The protocol was built using trauma-informed support principles.

The working group

Partners set-up the High Support Services Tackling Hate Crime and Discrimination Working Group, a multi-agency group that meets on a quarterly basis. The group provides a space for practitioners and managers to discuss complex cases, agree action plans to best support victims and perpetrators, and liaise with concerned agencies, for example, Avon & Somerset Police, Resolve West.

What worked:

- **A person-centred approach:** the group adopted a person-centred approach, recognising that both victims and perpetrators of hate crime have support needs that must be addressed. This has included developing a protocol for responding to perpetrators of hate crimes/hate incidents. This aligns with the psychologically informed environments and trauma-informed support approaches that have been adopted by all services.
- **Flexibility:** the group can be convened or contacted if staff have an urgent need for input sooner than the next scheduled quarterly meeting.
- **Collaboration:** the involvement of wider agencies including Avon & Somerset Police, Resolve West, and other relevant organisations, agencies, or departments within Bristol City Council.
- **Sharing learning** and expertise across agencies and creating space to challenge each other when they need to learn from when things haven't gone well. The working group have been active promoters of the protocol, which has supported it's reach across Bristol.

Outcomes

Individuals and organisations who have utilised the working group and protocol have reported:

- Dynamic and responsive approaches to prevent an eviction and avoid a return to rough sleeping for someone already in accommodation, through sourcing alternative accommodation for individuals.
- Situations have been de-escalated to prevent e.g., a hate incident, such as a negative comment regarding the protected characteristics of another person, becoming a hate crime. (See our [Hate crime briefing](#) for definitions)
- An increase in staff wellbeing; staff impacted by hate crime have been empowered to take time out to get the support they need and recover before coming back into work.
- Better management of the relationship between victim and perpetrator; the support and training offered by partner organisations has enabled perpetrators to understand the impact of their behaviour and reflect on why it is detrimental for both the victim and them.
- Stronger relationships with the police; adopting the Outcome 22 code that can be used when the police decide to defer prosecution until the accused person

has been given the opportunity to engage with an intervention activity, such as training or appropriate support from local homelessness services.

APPENDIX A

The protocol (summary version):

Staff within the city's homelessness services have prevented serious hate incidents from occurring or escalating by following the below protocol:

- Challenge the perpetrator as soon as is practically possible, doing so in a manner that diffuses the situation while making it clear their behaviour is unacceptable.
- Keep staff safe: deferring until a situation has calmed down or seeking help from others to respond appropriately is accepted as a best practice approach.
- Offer victims support following the incident, which may include safety planning or ongoing support from the Police or being referred to Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Services for ongoing support.
- Take victim and witnesses statements, ensuring the impact(s) of the incident are recorded.
- Agree an action plan that fully involves the victim(s) as per the guidance in the Protocol for dealing with perpetrators.
- Record what has happened and the nature of the abuse, who was involved, including any witnesses in an incident logbook.
- Report the incident to the Police using 101 if it is less serious, or 999 if there is an immediate threat to a person's safety and record the crime reference number in their logbook.
- Report the incident as per their internal IT system and the Council's Housing Support Register / CRM system.
- Complete and return a Serious Incident Report form to the Council's contracts & commissioning team as per the standard process for reporting incidents.
- Ensure any victim staff members are fully debriefed by the appropriate senior member of staff to support reflection on the incident, its immediate impact, and to explore support options for anyone who are victims in the incident.

In dealing with perpetrators, a best practice response will:

- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of hate crime or incidents and be victim-orientated.
- Be restorative wherever possible, adopting the principles of a Restorative Approach.
- Aim not to unduly criminalise vulnerable residents.
- Aim to achieve positive outcomes, such as the victim feels satisfied with the result and the perpetrator is deterred from future offending and learns more appropriate behaviours through a strength-based approach.
- Solve/manage the problem in the service rather than move the person on for someone else to deal with what could be seen or perceived as challenging behaviours.

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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**Let's End Homelessness
Together**

