

25<sup>th</sup> February: Full BANES council meeting  
VOICES

Dear Council members,

I sit here before you as one of 8 trustees of Voices, a small Bath based, grassroots charity that provides domestic abuse survivors prevention and recovery support.

Voices was established in 2014 by 4 survivors of domestic violence who believed, after having gone through the existing services in BANES, that the system did not cater effectively to them – their experience was never heard, valued or used to better services.

For the past 11 years this small organisation has had a huge impact on the lives of survivors and has provided trauma informed services to hundreds of survivors of domestic abuse. Testimonies by survivors themselves detail the change Voices has made to their outlook and future. Voices has been successful in creating a platform where lived experience informs and improves service provision.

Having worked in the area of human rights and GBV policy and legislation for many years with the UN, I feel I can say with some degree of confidence that Voices's approach of centring the survivor is unique and fundamental to bring about change. In addition to providing services to survivors, it has also made some very effective interventions such as being a member of **the** CAFCASS learning and improvement board and working with UCL and Bristol university on GBV related research projects that aim to feed into future govt policy.

Voices is now in a funding crisis. Because of this - we are foreseeing potential cuts in our service provision or even closure of SOME of our services.

BANES relies on charities, including on VOICES, to pick up on their core work. Are you, respected Councillors, prepared to see a charity close that provides essential services that the local authority itself relies on and refers clients to?

1 in 4 women suffer domestic abuse in the UK<sup>1</sup> and the figures are only rising, with domestic abuse making up 18% of all recorded crime in England and Wales<sup>2</sup>. Violence Against Women and Girls is now considered a national epidemic and the UK rightly has international obligations to proactively take steps to prevent, respond and support survivors. All political parties also have made some form of commitment towards addressing GBV. Why then are there no funds when there are promises?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://refuge.org.uk/what-is-domestic-abuse/the-facts/#:~:text=Fact%3A%20The%20police%20receive%20a,domestic%20abuse%20in%20her%20lifetime.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npcc.police.uk/our-work/violence-against-women-and-girls/>

According to Women's Aid there is a £321 million gap in domestic abuse services<sup>3</sup>. Yet funders are closing and Councils are cutting down on funding – it is the perfect storm.

Voices representatives come before you tonight to seek your support: Will the council meet us to discuss long term CORE funding support and a free or subsidized safe space to continue our vital work?

Without this, many survivors of abuse - the most vulnerable amongst us, often where children are also involved - will be left without the support they need to recover and move forward.

Thank you for your time.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-publish-price-of-safety-report-exposing-cost-of-fleeing-domestic-abuse/>