

Cover Report

Bereaved Families Framework

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Background to the Bereaved Families Framework

In the summer 2018 Camden lost five of its young people to serious violence. The trauma experienced by families, bereaved in this way, was brought into sharp focus as the organisation responded to their needs. We recognised that we could go further to support these families in a more coherent and consistent way.

The Chief Executive held regular meetings with key officers from early help, youth services, housing, and community safety to provide direct updates on the various needs and asks of the families as well as identifying and unblocking any obstacles to finding solutions to support the families.

It was clear from these meetings that Camden had a varied approach to supporting families and elements of siloed working were still in place. To combat this, it was agreed that a bereaved families framework be developed to provide officers with a common approach that they could work to when supporting families experiencing the loss of a young family member as a result of serious violence.

The framework has been designed to support families of children and young people who have died in circumstances where the family has suffered bereavement through violent crime. There is recognition that there may be circumstances, where families suffer loss of close family members through violent crime and the loss is not that of a young person. In these circumstances, we may choose to act. We will, therefore, review and adapt the framework so we are clear in our response in these cases.

Purpose of the Bereaved Families Framework

When a family loses someone as result of violence, we know that the trauma they experience may be heightened and the distress felt more acutely as fear of reprisals, feelings of being unsafe in your own home and media intrusion can all interfere with the process of grieving.

The Bereaved Families Framework (Appendix A) aims to provide council officers with a framework to “hold” these families from the time of the incident until a point where they feel comfortable enough not to need our services. We recognise that for each individual circumstances the period that this will represent will be different and as such this framework makes suggestions for actions required by certain points but acknowledges that experience and needs will not be universal. As such the framework must be viewed flexibly and with the family’s needs at its heart.

The Bereaved Families Statement of how we work (Appendix B) outlines the core principles and expectation of the organisation, and how we will work with families who have been bereaved as a result of violent events in Camden.

We know that when a person dies as a result of violence, families are suddenly brought into contact with various statutory bodies of which they may have little or no experience. As a council we can play a key role in supporting these families along this journey, acknowledging that whilst they may need to interact with multiple statutory bodies (for example the police, the coroner, and the CPS) they should only need to interact with one single point of contact in the council. Lessening the interactions will help alleviate stress, avoid duplication, and provide the family with a consistent link into the organisation and the various council services they may require.

The framework sets out the minimum standard of service to bereaved families. Officers and teams should not feel constrained from doing more if it is necessary to do so or adapting practices to fit with the needs of a specific family.

It is important that the bereavement framework is a live document which can be adapted and updated as we continue to learn about the different approaches we can take to supporting these families while we work within a common framework.

Supporting staff to support bereaved families

We provide a range of professional support and training for staff, particularly those working in emotionally challenging situations. In Landlord services there is an embedded Clinical Psychologist, who has helped teams and individuals to talk about and reflect on their response to traumatic events. The Community Safety and Emergency Management service has also had access to Clinical Psychology support and found this beneficial for their own reflections, as well as deepening their understanding of how colleagues and residents are responding to traumatic and emotive events. In other areas of the Council, including Integrated Youth Services, support is provided to staff through the Educational Psychology Service.

We continue to work towards sharing best practice across the organisation, so that all staff have access to support when traumatic events occur and remain committed to ensuring staff are supported with their ongoing wellbeing. This is important, as we recognise the potential long term impact for staff working with trauma at an individual, family and community level.

Learning from the approach taken

Early help - How is the way we work now different?

Early help is one of the services who may become the nominated lead to coordinate the network of support for a bereaved family (for example if the family is already open to an early help family support service). Early help or children's social work may also become involved if a contact is sent to the Children and Families Contact Service (for example from the police, who may notify the local authority if there were any concerns regarding the children's welfare or ongoing risk to their safety).

In the event that the family is already open to family early help or children's social work, or if the family were allocated to an early help family worker or children's social worker via the Children and Families Contact Service, the first job would be to identify who else is in the family's 'scaffolding network'. In the case of sudden bereavement, this may include the Police Family Liaison officer, and other professionals who know the family (for example the children's school or college, health professionals, youth services, Landlord Services neighbourhood officers etc).

The family worker or social worker would identify with the family who they wished their point of contact to be. For example, the family may ask that offers of support and communication is channelled through a particular family member, or that communication to the family should come through a particular trusted professional or person already in their circle of support.

The worker would then coordinate all the identified professionals in the scaffolding network to sequence the help offered, working through the people identified by the family themselves and in accordance with the family's wishes. The worker would add additional professionals to the network in accordance with the family's wishes, for example bereavement support for the children if requested, or housing support if the family wished to be re-located.

This way of working is not necessarily different as a result of the bereavement protocol but provides a model for others who may become the nominated lead for a bereaved family (for example community safety, neighbourhood officer etc).

Early Help is a consent-based service, and so not all families will want or need a service from Early Help at the time of their bereavement. However, it is possible for any service to use this model of a 'scaffolding network around a family' and channelling support through a family's chosen professional or person, as a principle for bereavement support, regardless of which Camden service is the nominated lead.

Community Safety – How is the way we work now different?

In the wake of a murder, many things need to happen in a short amount of time - based on an incomplete picture of what has happened. As a result of the protocol, Community Safety have a coordinating role ensuring there is a shared and factual understanding of the emerging circumstances and risks, as well as clarity on who is doing what. The protocol is a helpful prompt for what needs to be considered and done, and stakeholders to be brought in for them to play their part. This includes communications member involvement, landlords and the wider community.

Community Safety hold the relationship with the police, and act as the conduit for information sharing between the two organisations as the circumstances become clear. It is important as an investigation is underway that Council actions do not interfere, and as such Community Safety hold the oversight of what can be said publicly, whilst also piecing together what the council may know about the households involved.

Community Safety Officers (CSOs) are one of a few teams that might play a role supporting the bereaved family. They are most likely to take the lead with the family if the victim is an adult and not a tenant - or if we already have an established relationship with the household. Nevertheless, CSOs are an important part of the response, supporting colleagues, coordinating with the police family liaison officers, and holding a risk assessment to ensure the council holds a complete picture of need.

Housing – How is the way we will work with these families different?

During the meetings with the Chief Executive, it became clear that rehousing was one of the more difficult areas to resolve. Whilst it is challenging at the best of times for residents needing to move, in the aftermath of a traumatic bereavement the systems can be too complex, with multiple teams and services involved which can be daunting to navigate at such a time. Whilst there has been some progress, as of March 2021 six families/individuals have been rehoused and one is currently in the process of moving into a permanent property.

There are in some cases extended families needing rehousing and there are eight other individuals/families who have requested to be moved and have not yet been rehoused¹. The complexity of this situation is highlighted by the fact that of the outstanding individuals three are currently in custody so could not currently be rehoused.

To ensure our bereaved families have a single point of contact and support for temporary and permanent rehousing a new, pilot position was created known as the Bereaved Families Rehousing Liaison Officer. The post started January 2020 and is matrix supervised by the Head of Housing Needs and the Service Manager for the Transformation Team. This provides the postholder with experts in rehousing and work with traumatised individuals in high profile (internally), sensitive and complex cases. In January 2021, the post was extended for 6 months based on the benefit of having a dedicated support to families.

The Bereaved Families Rehousing Liaison Officer provides our families with rapid and easier access to support and help of the highest quality available in regards rehousing options and ensures that rehousing is linked into and understood better by the wider network of internal and external statutory and non-statutory services and agencies. As an example, the postholder has worked closely with the Director of Equalities and Disproportionality to develop a stronger relationship with the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre leading to better joint working around some of our families and communities.

¹ It is worth noting three of these individuals are currently in custody and two are connected to an incident in February 2021

Up until this point all of our bereaved families have been Council tenants. We will need to consider what options are available should this not be the case in the event of further incidents.

Next steps

To ensure this is a living document and utilised by the organisation it will be important to “launch” the framework and for it to be easily accessible. It is suggested that the launch is accompanied by training sessions for frontline workers and those who have contact with the family.

Each family will have a nominated Executive Director and lead Director who will take responsibility for overseeing the family and unblocking any issues officers may face in supporting them. When presented with a family in need, the Director will convene the first meeting. This will be attended by the nominated Executive Director and officer team. The following senior officers have put themselves forward to take on this role:

- Jon Rowney, Executive Director of Corporate Services
- Martin Pratt, Executive Director of Supporting People
- Gillian Marston, Executive Director of Supporting Communities
- Carole Stewart, Director of Community Services
- Eve Stickler, Director of Early Intervention and Prevention
- Rhys Makinson, Director of Housing Support Services
- Mary McGowan, Director of Housing Management
- Hanad Mohamed, Director of Equalities and Disproportionality

These senior officers would be allocated a small number of families (either one or two) for whom they would maintain oversight and ensure the pace of our support offer is maintained, when appropriate.

The method used to ensure good communication channels between the senior lead and the single point of contact (SPOC) – who would be working closely with the multi-agency team identified - will be at their discretion and will depend on the individual situation (for example the level of urgency required). However, a pro-forma is being designed that will be used as the designated information share format. It will be completed every four to six weeks, by the SPOC, to include key updates and requests of the senior leader (acknowledging that urgent actions would need to be flagged outside of this process) to unblock barriers/broker opportunities to progressing good outcomes. This approach would ensure the nominated Director/Executive Director has clear oversight of the current needs of the family and where they can assist.

