

# Creating a **Safer Redbridge** for Women and Girls



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Leader of the London Borough of Redbridge Council and London Councils' Executive Member for Crime and Community Safety and Violence Against Women and Girls, Cllr Jas Athwal, and Women's Safety Champion for Redbridge, Cllr Saima Ahmed



As local residents and champions of women's safety, we are committed to improving the safety of all women and girls in Redbridge. We all deserve to feel safe, wherever we live, and it is unacceptable that many women in our borough and across the world have experienced harassment, abuse and in some cases violence on the basis of their sex or gender.

Our community is still struggling with the shock, fear, and outrage from the violent murders of local residents Maria Rawlings and Zara Aleena who were killed in separate incidents whilst walking home.

Women and girls have the right to a life free of violence and their safety is everyone's responsibility. Violence against women and girls is not a problem for women and girls alone – this is a problem that affects and involves all of us, regardless of our sex or gender, and we must all recognise and acknowledge the underlying inequalities and attitudes that perpetuate it.

Our engagement with local women and girls has shone a light on how commonplace sexual harassment as part of their everyday experiences is in public spaces,

and sexual harassment has become alarmingly normalised. This has to stop.

We heard from women and girls who shared their experiences of what it is like to live, travel and spend time in Redbridge. Sadly, many of them had negative and upsetting experiences to share, which we have included throughout this mission statement to highlight the reality of many women and girls' experiences and make sure their voices are heard. These experiences, and those which go unheard or unreported, directly affect women and girls' wellbeing and have a negative impact on their participation in public life.

We want to make Redbridge a safer place for women and girls, whether that means tackling issues in public spaces, at school, at work, online or at home. We will continue to improve the quality and accessibility of services for women and girls, and our mission statement sets out how we will begin to achieve this.

We understand that talking about experiences of sexual harassment and violence can be really difficult, and we would like to take the opportunity to recognise and say a personal thank you to everyone that has shared their experiences for this evidence building initiative. We want to make a promise to all those who we have spoken to and to every other woman and girl that lives, works or learns in Redbridge that we will continue to work tirelessly with the police and our partners to improve women's safety in our borough and tackle violence against women and girls.



Lisa Butterfield, Neighbourhood Policing Lead for the East Area Metropolitan Police Service and Pervinder Sandhu, Acting Operational Director of Assurance and Monitoring Officer for Redbridge Council



Reducing crime and keeping Redbridge safe is a vital part of our roles. It is our mission to create a borough where everyone feels safe and happy to live, spend time and travel through.

Although we are aware of the inequality that exists throughout our society, it is still shocking and upsetting to see the statistics and hearing the first-hand accounts from women and girls who are disproportionately experiencing crimes such as sexual harassment and unwanted attention while in public. The multiple murders of women by men in public spaces since last year have highlighted nationally and locally that more needs to be done and we cannot continue as we are, while lives are being taken.

This is unacceptable and it is not solely the responsibility of women to consider and contribute to women's safety, it is for the community to come together and address the culture that allows this appalling behaviour to take place. We will do this through holding perpetrators to account, showing that we have robust processes to tackle abuse or harassment, educating the community (particularly boys and men) and doing more with younger generations to understand how to respect and treat each other. There is also a lot more we are doing to improve our public services and regain trust with residents.

We are committed and determined to bring together the council, police, our partners, and the community to make meaningful long-term change to improve the safety of women and girls.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Council, Police and our partners have a mission to work together with residents, businesses, workplaces and institutions to ensure public spaces feel safer and are safer for women and girls in Redbridge.

Although male violence towards women and girls is a widespread issue that has long existed in the UK and globally, the multiple shocking and tragic murders of women in our public spaces both locally and nationally have pushed the need to prioritise and improve women's safety.

In addition to murder, male violence in public spaces also includes harassment, assault, serious violence and comes under the term 'violence against women and girls or VAWG' which refers to acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls. Public spaces are areas open to members of the public and include streets, parks and public transport.

Improving women's safety involves plans and practices which aim to reduce violence against women and women's fear of crime. If our public spaces create fear for our communities, it can limit movement and comfort which is a form of social exclusion. In the same way, public spaces have the power to create a feeling of safety and comfort which helps to discourage violence. It is therefore important that planning and policy around safety should always involve and consider women and girls.

In Redbridge, we started by listening to the views and experiences of women and girls relating to their safety in the borough. We have learnt there is much more to be done to ensure everyone feels safe and welcome in all parts of our borough.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The key findings were:

- Women and girls generally do not feel safe on the streets in Redbridge, and Nationally
- Street harassment is sadly a common experience for many women and girls and is mainly perpetrated by men
- Many women and girls feel unable to or lack confidence in reporting these incidents
- Many women and girls are having to stop daily activities due to feeling unsafe or are having to change their behaviour, in an attempt, to avoid harassment
- Some women and girls spoke about the negative culture towards them and the deep-rooted issue of gender inequality in our society.

We asked women and girls for suggestions for making a positive change within the borough to improve their safety. Their suggestions fit into four key areas which will be our priorities:

1. **Enforcement** - improving our enforcement response for those who harass and abuse residents in our public spaces
2. **Environment** - making physical changes to our public spaces to increase safety and deter crime
3. **Engagement** - working together with our communities, businesses and other institutions to build capacity to meet the needs of women and girls
4. **Education** - educating men and boys about violence against women and girls and training public service colleagues to respond appropriately to sexual harassment



Focusing on these areas will help to achieve our vision for Redbridge to be a place where:

- Public spaces are safer and feel safer for women and girls
- Perpetrators are held to account for their actions to discourage and stop their behaviour
- Residents feel confident to report issues of safety and sexual harassment and know the appropriate places to go
- Men and boys understand the impact of sexual harassment and are part of the solution to change the culture
- There is a joint up approach with partners and the community to increase women and girl's safety

This is a shared vision and a priority for the Council, Police, and other partners such as local schools and businesses. Reclaiming public spaces for local women and girls, ensuring they feel safer and are safer in our borough will be at the heart of the work we do. Although women's safety is a gendered issue, men and boys can and are victims of these types of abuse and crimes discussed too. We understand that improving women's safety means a safer, healthier, and more prosperous community for everyone.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People we listened to and engaged with to arrive at the priority areas



## Women's Safety Priority areas

### Enforcement

improving our enforcement response for those who harass and abuse residents in our public spaces

### Environment

making physical changes to our public spaces to increase safety and deter crime

### Engagement

working together with our communities, businesses and other institutions to build capacity to meet the needs of women and girls

### Education

teaching men and boys about violence against women and girls and training public service colleagues to respond appropriately to sexual harassment

# EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ON SAFETY IN REDBRIDGE

The council listened to the views of women and girls in various ways getting a good reach into the community to ensure a range of voices were heard. The listening exercises consisted of surveys, focus groups, safety walks and workshops. We would like to give a special note of thanks to Amy Tully, the passionate resident who also created a survey to collect women's experiences of street harassment in Ilford. The findings shared with us were very informative and have been included below. In total, we were able to hear from over 2,500 individuals about the issue of safety for women and girls in the borough.

## OUR FINDINGS

### Women and girls generally do not feel safe on the streets in Redbridge, and Nationally

We sadly found that less than 1 in 5 women (19%) felt generally safe in Redbridge, with over half (63%) of respondents feeling vulnerable and exposed to risk when they are out on the streets. Often women and girls feel less safe when alone and when it gets dark, particularly when they are travelling through the borough or waiting for public transport.

The women's safety walks allowed women and girls to walk around the area they live or travel through and share their concerns to the council and Police. These walks identified that there are environmental concerns that add to the feeling of being unsafe such as insufficient street lighting, scaffolding, overgrown shrubbery and road works that affect pedestrian routes. These can cause dark spots and allow for spaces that enable people to potentially hide in.

In terms of locations, the majority (84%) of respondents felt unsafe in Ilford Town Centre, this was followed closely by the Seven Kings (80%) and Goodmayes (74%) high streets. Parks and open spaces across the borough were also highlighted as areas where improvements to safety can be made.

*"Parks are unfortunately places where women and girls are being harassed or attacked, I would not go to a park on my own and can't go for a run even during the day"*

These sessions have also revealed how many women feel intimidated in public spaces where there are groups of men or young people congregating, particularly if they are drunk or on drugs.

*"Sometimes they (groups of men) have not moved aside if they are walking together meaning I have to walk on the edge of the pavement. It's that message that they have power or are in control. This never happens when I'm with my other half"*



# EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ON SAFETY IN REDBRIDGE

## Street harassment is sadly a common experience for many women and girls and is mainly perpetrated by men

In the UK 71% of women of all ages have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public spaces.<sup>1</sup> It was found that 68% of respondents experience street harassment at least once a month in Ilford with only 3.4% having never experienced street harassment in Ilford.

*"Throughout my life living in Ilford, one of the biggest issues I have faced is experiencing street harassment on a regular basis...I've even had an occasion where as I stepped out of my front door a man walked past and commented on how I looked"*

The most common types of street harassment experienced by women and girls by males are:

- 98% Catcalling (e.g. unwanted flirtatious comments)
- 81% Sounds being made towards them (e.g. wolf-whistling)
- 62% being followed by someone
- 45% aggressive verbal harassment (being shouted at by someone)
- 26% being touched

*"Sadly, my experiences (persistent street harassment) have made me really dislike the area (Ilford) in which I live, a feeling which I know is shared by a lot of other women in my area."*



Worryingly most respondents estimated that they began experiencing harassment from around the age of 13-15 years old and that it is often when they are wearing school uniform walking to and from school.

*"A complete stranger slapped my bum in an alley way near my school. I felt extremely embarrassed and upset.... I was 15/16.... this event took place at 3:30 during the school rush, I wouldn't have travelled down that alley at any other time of day and have tried to avoid it ever since"*

Through our engagement with girls and young women, we found that as well as harassment on the street, there is also a big issue of sexual harassment by peers inside and outside of school. Sexual harassment in these other public spaces such as the workplace and educational settings need to also be addressed as it links to street harassment and how women and girls are treated by men and boys in our current culture.

*"The boys in my year have made up national holidays to harass girls and they call it banter"*

<sup>1</sup> Data from the 2021 UN Women UKYouGov survey

# EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ON SAFETY IN REDBRIDGE



## Many women and girls feel unable to or lack confidence in reporting these incidents

Our engagement sessions found that 90% of attendees had experienced street harassment in Redbridge but had not reported it. We recognise that underreporting of street harassment is a global issue but to better understand the local barriers, we asked why individuals had not reported the incident(s).

The reasons people gave for not reporting/ seeking support were:

- Lack of confidence in the police (27%)
- Fear of not being believed or blaming themselves (23%)
- Not knowing who to contact for help (21%)
- Fear of what the perpetrator might do (19%)

*"I was sexually assaulted in front of my 2-year-old and 9 months old baby boy, 1.5 months ago! Police didn't do nothing! I feel disgusting! I have had depression due to the incidence! I feel unclean! I blame myself!"*

From the responses and conversations, we saw that there is a lack of confidence among women and girls that anything will be done if they do report street harassment, some due to receiving a negative response when they have made reports in the past. The process of reporting can also be time consuming and there are sometimes cultural barriers that are hard to overcome.

*"At the entrance to Wanstead Park, often, large groups of people (nearly always young men) gather around cars, play loud music and take drugs. It has been difficult to get through to the non-urgent police number or get a response from the online reporting system"*

We asked residents if they were familiar with any of the current services aimed at helping women and girls who feel unsafe, over 70% said they knew nothing about these services showing a need for us to better communicate about these services to our residents.

In the sessions with young women and girls we found that some teachers and staff are also not seen to be taking an active role against harassment which discourages reporting in school settings.

*"Students are currently getting away with doing certain things and because of not receiving any consequences, they are then taking the same actions into society"*

# EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ON SAFETY IN REDBRIDGE

## Many women and girls are having to stop daily activities due to feeling unsafe or are having to change their behaviour in an attempt to avoid harassment

*"We have internalised this for so long, we aren't always aware of the adjustments we are constantly making"*

We found that women and girls experiences of street harassment are altering the way they behave, such as having to change their routes, wearing trainers so they can run if they need to whilst travelling, not going out alone etc. This impacts on women and girls' freedom and often brings stress and anxiety on a daily basis affecting their quality of life.

When asked if respondents' experiences of street harassment in Ilford affected their behaviour in public, the following was found:

- 69% have changed the route they take in Ilford
- 67% avoid public transport at night
- 64% avoid going out alone
- 44% have changed the way they dress
- 24% carry a rape alarm or other protective equipment

*"It's really frustrating, I always have to think about what I wear and how I look to try and not draw attention to myself, but it doesn't work. There's always a man that says something or looks at me in a creepy way. Makes me feel extremely vulnerable and unsafe"*



## Some women and girls spoke about the negative culture towards them and the deep-rooted issue of gender inequality in our society

We heard from women expressing that it is the deep-rooted issue of inequality in our society that allows street harassment to be a common occurrence. A cultural change is needed to stop objectifying women.

*"Within the Borough and wider, I have noticed the sexist and objectifying advertising on bus stops and at public transport. This is part of the problem and this attitude towards women must change"*

*"In primary school, teachers have said 'boys will be boys', so we are taught that it is ok, so it continues as we grow up. There should be sessions for adults and teachers that saying small things like this can have a big impact"*

# OUR VISION AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S SAFETY IN REDBRIDGE

We asked women and girls what would make them feel safer in Redbridge. They shared a range of ideas and suggestions to implement locally. These fit into four key priority areas for improvement- enforcement, environment, engagement, and education.

In 2021 the Council had also set up the Community Crime Commission to tackle crime and the fear of crime in the Borough. The Commission was an independent body made up of 16 commissioners (mainly residents), that investigated five of the borough's crime priorities, one of which was women and girl's safety. The findings of our engagement were shared with them and they gave recommendations to strengthen the response from public services, to work closely with the community to bring about practical change and to use good communications to change the culture. The Commission's recommendations were agreed by all partners and have been incorporated into the priorities.



## OUR WOMEN'S SAFETY VISION

With our knowledge and understanding of the current issues affecting women and girl's safety and the proposed solutions, we are aiming for Redbridge to be a place where:

- **Public spaces are safer and feel safer for women and girls**
- **Perpetrators are held to account for their actions to discourage and stop their behaviour**
- **Residents feel confident to report issues of safety and sexual harassment and know the appropriate places to go**
- **Men and boys understand the impact of sexual harassment and are part of the solution to change the culture**
- **There is a joint up approach with partners and the community to increase women and girl's safety**

# OUR WOMEN'S SAFETY PRIORITIES

To achieve our vision, the council will focus on four key priorities



## 1. ENFORCEMENT

this will involve:

- increasing enforcement and fines for harassment so perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and are made aware of the impact their behaviour is having
- Dispersing groups of men and young people who are intimidating members of the public
- improving the ease of reporting as well as feeding back to residents on the outcomes of their reports to build public confidence
- Ensuring educational institutions and workplaces are consistent in investigating and addressing sexual harassment or assault

*"Boys in school need to be challenged by boys and men as they don't listen to us girls"*



## 2. ENVIRONMENT

this will involve:

- increasing police/security presence
- having well-lit public spaces and monitored CCTV with signage pointing it out
- creating safe spaces by partnering with local businesses to provide them with information and tools to take measures that make women feel safer and lead by example making our council buildings safe spaces
- responding to the safety concerns raised by members of the public to improve the public realm

*"I love Valentine's park, especially with my toddler but there's no lighting and I can't see any safety measures, no cameras, no officials. I've been harassed before on the way home (with my toddler!)"*

# OUR WOMEN'S SAFETY PRIORITIES



## 3. ENGAGEMENT

this will involve:

- continuing to work with women and girls to design out crime and harassment
- community capacity building so communities can support and meet the needs of their communities
- working with businesses to ensure they are adopting women's safety initiatives
- developing and delivering a public campaign to change the culture
- having community male allies to lead communities and be positive role models.

*"Better community engagement - too many surveys and action plans & not enough action"*



## 4. EDUCATION

this will involve:

- training public service staff so women feel confident that issues they report will be taken seriously
- supporting and complimenting the additional requirements in the school curriculum to teach pupils about consent and healthy relationships
- educating men and boys on this topic so they are aware of the impact of their behaviour
- training for bystanders so they know how to respond to harassment

*"I think the main thing is changing rape culture and the culture of misogyny and homophobia in Redbridge through education"*

# CONCLUSION

In addition to local context, women and girls expressed the need for change that goes beyond Redbridge. This includes the criminalising of street harassment and having our National Curriculum address topics relating to violence against women and girls that are appropriate and relevant for pupils depending on their age. Although outside of the council and our partners immediate scope, there is a strong role for us to lobby and advocate for these national changes while leading as a good example in this area.



To summarise, many women and girls have shared with us that they do not feel safe when out in some parts of the borough, particularly Ilford. We heard many inexcusable experiences of street harassment that are disproportionately affecting women and girls which adds to feeling more vulnerable and exposed to risk. We identified that there is also a lack of reporting due to several factors including a lack of confidence in the police, not knowing where to report and women normalising this behaviour. Although this may seem discouraging to hear, women and girls did share that there is more that can be done by the council, police and our partners to improve safety.

The Community Crime Commission listened to the feedback from women and girls in the borough and recommended that responses from public services need to improve, we have to work closely with the community and there should be strong communications to change the culture. These recommendations went to the Council Cabinet in 2022 where local politicians supported the work and recommendations on Women's Safety and agreed to spend £1.4 million to make improvements for all five of the top crime priorities that the Commission addressed.

The council, police and our partners will focus our efforts on four key areas to improve women's safety- improving our enforcement response to those who harass and abuse residents in our public spaces, making environmental changes in our public spaces to deter crime, engaging with our communities to work together and educating our residents particularly men and boys as a preventative measure.

A strong leadership and collaborative multi-sectoral approach going forward by the council, police, partners, and the community are essential to be able to address the issues that have been found and drive forward the recommendations that have been suggested. Addressing the system failings as well as individuals' beliefs and behaviours will help in combating perceived and actual risk of crime and safety. This will ensure a safer borough for women and girls which in turn is a safer borough for everyone.



To find out more information on the current work we are doing, please visit [www.redbridge.gov.uk/crime-and-public-safety/safer-redbridge/women-and-girls-safety](http://www.redbridge.gov.uk/crime-and-public-safety/safer-redbridge/women-and-girls-safety)

If you would like to contact us, please email the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) team on [CSP@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:CSP@redbridge.gov.uk)

